

CORE PROBLEMS OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES OF ASSAM

Edited by

Bimal Kumar Hazarika

**ASSAM INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH
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CORE PROBLEMS OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES OF ASSAM, A book containing brief proceedings, recommendations and papers presented in a seminar held in Guwahati on October 5-7, 1994 edited by Shri B.K. Hazarika, Director, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati-22.

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PREFACE

The Constitution of India specifies sixteen castes as Scheduled Castes of Assam. According to 1991 Census they constitute 7.40% of the total population of the State. 86.18% of them live in rural areas as against 13.82% in urban areas. The scheduled castes villages are not located like those of the scheduled tribes but are interspersed with non-scheduled castes villages throughout the length and breadth of the State.

In India, special measures have been embodied in the Constitution for the protection and welfare of the scheduled castes who belong to the lowest stratum of the caste hierarchy of the Hindu social organisation. But satisfactory results are yet to emerge out of the provisions in uplifting this down-trodden section of the Indian society.

Various studies conducted by this Institute clearly reveal that the overall socio-economic scenario of the scheduled castes of Assam, in spite of implementation of the welfare schemes out of the Central and State Govt. funds, is not satisfactory. A three-day seminar was, therefore, organised in the Institute's auditorium from October 5, 1994 to identify the core problems of development of the S/C groups of Assam and to suggest remedial measures.

The present volume is, in fact, the collection of 21 nos. of seminar papers including brief proceedings and recommendations. It may be mentioned here that although there were altogether 23 nos. of seminar papers, we could not accommodate two papers in this volume due to lack of space. It is hoped that the publication would be useful to the planners and policy makers, administrators and

academicians, research scholars and general readers for understanding the multifarious problems confronted by the scheduled castes of Assam.

I am extremely grateful to Shri P.P. Verma, IAS, Commissioner & Secy., W.P.T. & B.C. Deptt., Govt. of Assam, Dispur for extending financial assistance towards making the seminar a grand success and bringing out this publication in time.

B. K. Hazarika

Director,

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for Tribals and Scheduled Castes
Jawaharnagar, Guwahati-22.
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SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SEMINAR ON 'CORE PROBLEMS OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES OF ASSAM'

The Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati had organised a three-day State level seminar on 'Core Problems of the Scheduled Castes of Assam' in its own auditorium from October 5-7, 1994.

The seminar was inaugurated by the Honourable Minister for W.P.T. & B.C., Govt. of Assam, Shri Gomeswar Pegu at 10 a.m. on 5-10-94. The inaugural session was presided over by Prof. M.C. Goswami, Retd. Head, Deptt. of Anthropology and at present, Professor Emeritus, Gauhati University. The Chief Guest in the session was the Adviser to the Chief Minister of Assam, Shri Jatin Hazarika, IAS, who also released the book entitled 'Socio-Economic Conditions of the Kaibartas of Assam' published by the Institute.

In the inaugural speech the Honourable Minister mentioned that the scheduled castes of Assam, an important segment of the State's population had been playing a vital role in the formation of social structure in Assam since time immemorial. The Central Govt. as well as the State Govt. had taken up a good number of welfare schemes for them after independence. But he made it clear that without scientific studies on the socio-economic and other related problems in respect of the scheduled castes of Assam, successful implementation of the schemes would be a distant reality. He hoped that the recommendations of the seminar organised by the Institute would help the State as well as the Central Govt.

in various plans and programmes meant for the scheduled castes of Assam.

There were five academic sessions in the seminar and the total number of papers presented was twenty three. Five papers were, however, accepted as presented in absence of the writers. It may be mentioned here that the seminar was participated by the eminent educationists, scholars, administrators and research scholars from the colleges, Universities of Gauhati, Dibrugarh and Arunachal, Anthropological Survey of India, Directorate of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, National Institute of Small Scale Industries, North East Council, National Institute of Rural Development and Assam State Development Corporation for Scheduled Castes Ltd. etc.

FIRST ACADEMIC SESSION

The first academic session was held under the chairmanship of Dr. B.M. Das, Emeritus Fellow, Professor Emeritus and internationally renowned anthropologist. In this session Dr. A.K. Neog, Director of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Govt. of India, Shillong presented the paper 'Problems of the Scheduled Castes of Assam and Plans for Development'. He mentioned that the marginal and small farmers of the scheduled castes has been facing acute poverty and burning unemployment problems. According to him emphasis should be given for employment of the SC people in agricultural, industrial and in tertiary sectors besides provision of government jobs. He pointed out that the Government had taken up Special Component Plan, Central Special Assistance and establishment of Scheduled Castes Development

Corporations etc. for the benefit of the SCs. Furthermore he mentioned that the National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation would approve viable schemes submitted by the SC Corporations of the States for the economic uplift of the SC people. In fine, Dr. Neog stressed upon carrying out evaluation studies of the development programmes/ schemes meant for the scheduled castes in order to bring into focus the actual picture.

Dr. B. N. Bordoloi, Retd. Director and Ex-Consultant, AIRTSC presented the second paper on 'Reservation of Appointment of Posts for Scheduled Castes : The Views of the Founding Fathers in the Constituent Assembly Debates : An Assessment'. He dwelt upon diverse views of the founding fathers in respect of Article 16(4) and Article 335 of the Constitution corresponding to Clause 10(3) and Clause 296 of the Draft Constitution respectively in the Constituent Assembly debates.

Shri Paramesh Dutta, Research Officer of the Institute was the Rapporteur in this session.

SECOND ACADEMIC SESSION

The second academic session was held after lunch and it was chaired by Professor M. C. Goswami, Professor Emeritus, Gauhati University. In this session, two papers were presented.

The first paper was presented in Assamese by Shri Khanindra Ch. Das, Chenikuthi, Guwahati. The title of his paper was 'অনুসূচিত জাতি সম্প্রদায়ৰ লোকসকলৰ পৰিচয় ভিত্তিত কৰ্মপদ্ধতিৰ উন্নয়ন আৰু আধুনিককৰণ' Shri Das mentioned that the SC population in India constituting 16.48% of the total population of the country as per 1991 Census (including

the projected figures of Jammu & Kashmir) had been an indispensable part in the population structure of the country. With regard to the deplorable economic conditions of the scheduled castes of Assam, he opined that lack of successful implementation of the welfare schemes meant for them was mainly responsible for such a sorry state of affairs. He put forward some practical suggestions considering deeply on the economic and socio-cultural development of the SC people viz. immediate steps for spread of education in the village level, removal of apathy of the high castes as well as a section of the departmental authorities towards SC people, timely implementation of the schemes relating to SC youth and students etc., simplification of the procedure of granting loans and subsidies by the Banks or other financial institutions to the weaker sections of the SC people, drastic steps for total prohibition of issuance of false Caste Certificate in the name of SC, fruitful implementation of 20 point Roster System under the Assam SC and ST (Reservation of Vacancies in Services and Posts) Act, 1978 and awarding punishment to the officials responsible for non-implementation of the constitutional measures provided for the SC people.

The second paper entitled 'A Study of Rural Development Programmes with Special Reference to IRDP and TRYSEM among the Scheduled Castes in Assam' was presented by Dr. Shankar Chatterjee, NIRD, Guwahati. Due to paucity of data on poverty level of the scheduled caste people of Assam, he had roughly estimated that in Assam 2.65 lakh families (considering a family consisting of 5 members) might be considered as poor. In such a situation, the Rural Development

Programmes like IRDP, TRYSEM etc. could play a pivotal role in uplifting the economy of the SC people to a great extent. Dr. Chatterjee pointed out that in respect of IRDP and TRYSEM, atleast 50% of the assisted families should be from SC and ST families. But Assam could not achieve the minimum quota of 50% during 1991-92 to 1993-94 as reflected in the Reports of Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India. Therefore, he suggested for covering more SC youth under IRDP and TRYSEM in order to achieve the target. Moreover, he felt the necessity of undertaking a baseline survey among the SC people in the State to understand the standard of living of the people. Finally he suggested for making efforts to equalise the level of investment per SC family to the average per family investment in Assam.

In this session Shri G. N. Das, D.R.O., Diphu acted as the Rapporteur.

THIRD ACADEMIC SESSION

The third academic session of the seminar was held in the forenoon of 6.10.94 with the eminent educationist, Dr. Amalendu Guha in the chair. In this session six papers were presented and one paper was considered to be presented in absence of the writer.

The first paper was presented by Dr. D. D. Mali, Director, National Institute of Small Scale Industries, Extension & Training, Guwahati on "Motivating SC Youth for Entrepreneurial Career : Why and How ?" He pointed out that in Assam, the SC entrepreneurs constituted 26.7% and 3.9% in 1976-77 and 1987-88 respectively out of the total entrepreneurs. According to him, the emergence of entrepreneurship would depend upon a number of factors

viz. individual, family, society, caste, religion, resources like raw materials, technology, technical manpower, transport & communication facilities and power etc. and support system such as the promotional and developmental organisations, banks and financial institutions etc. In order to remove the lack of confidence among the SC youth the main obstacle in venturing into entrepreneurial career he laid much emphasis for proper motivation of the SC youth. For this purpose he suggested for imparting motivational training by a local level agency to a group of youth including scheduled castes selected by scientific methods. Moreover, entrepreneurial education, if included in the educational system, would not only influence the youth but also the family and the society as a whole. He was in favour of carrying out an indepth study to understand the socio-psychological attitude of the SC youth for taking up entrepreneurial career. On the whole, an entrepreneur-friendly environment with the help of direct and indirect measures, short term and long term measures would be beneficial to the SC youth for taking up entrepreneurial career for self employment instead of hankering after wage employment - Dr. Mali commented.

The second paper entitled 'Identification of Existing Occupation of the Scheduled Castes People including Handicraft and Problems connected with their Improvement and Upgradation' was presented by Shri Gunahash Borah, Principal, Raha College, Nagaon. He had said that each sub-caste of the Scheduled Castes of Assam could be identified from the traditional occupation being carried out by each group. Moreover he had discussed in detail about the aboriginal SC people like the Banias and Hiras etc. and non-aboriginal SC people like

the Namasudras, Muchis, Mehtors and Sutradhars etc. inhabiting Assam. In addition, he had highlighted the distinguishing characteristics of Assamese SCs and non-Assamese SCs. Shri Borah had mentioned that due to liberal policies of the Govt. the number of educated SC persons had been increasing since independence. As such, the number of employed SC persons in Govt., Semi Govt. and individual organisations had been gradually increasing. A section of the SC people had also ventured into trade & industries. Even then the SC people had been found to be economically, socially and educationally backward and most of them had been living below the poverty level. Shri Borah had suggested for introduction of crop insurance so as to enable the people to get back the money due to damage of standing crops by floods. The SC persons should also be provided with modern methods of cultivation, high yielding varieties of seeds and double cropping system etc. Steps should be taken to divert the excess population engaged in agriculture to other avocations such as trade and business etc. Shri Borah had vehemently criticised the role of the high level officers belonging to SC community, the politicians and the middle men in taking away the beels and fisheries out of the actual fishermen by unscrupulous methods. He suggested that the Govt. should lease out the fisheries to the fishermen as a whole of a particular village. The SC people engaged in weaving, bamboo & cane works and manufacture of pottery, gold and silver ornaments etc. should be imparted training with scientific methods so that they could withstand the tough competition from outside and improve their economic conditions. Instead of distributing weaving implements to SC beneficiaries,

societies should be formed by the Govt. and the people should be asked to work in such societies against remuneration. Finally Shri Borah had suggested for total ban on the system of 'Bai-Bheta' adopted mainly by the Biharis in the rivers to catch even the smallest fish.

The third paper was presented by Shri M.P. Hazarika, Director of Information and Public Relations, NEC, Shillong. The title of his paper was 'Entrepreneurial Development in the North East'. Shri Hazarika mentioned that the north eastern region of India, although gifted with rich natural resources for development of industries in general and agro-industries in particular, could not make significant strides primarily due to lack of technically qualified entrepreneurs with sound financial background. He pointed out that the NISIET and NEITCO had implemented a good number of entrepreneurial development programmes sponsored by the NEC and IDBI during 1985-92 involving 1518 persons. He quoted a few recommendations of the Report on the study of Entrepreneurial and Managerial Needs of the North Eastern Region conducted by SIET under the aegis of NEC in 1976. One important recommendation was that an entrepreneurship development advisory cell should be established for the N.E. Region to promote entrepreneurial development. Shri Hazarika suggested that financial support and transport subsidies etc. should be organised by the Govt. to encourage the young entrepreneurs to industrial ventures in the region. He also mentioned about the areas such as development of horticulture and plantation of commercial crops including tea where the entrepreneurs could take initiative. Shri Hazarika opined that decentralization of entrepreneurial training should be

undertaken by the DICs for the benefit of the enterprising youth. Moreover, the training programmes should be trade specific so as to enable the entrepreneurs to acquire professional skills regarding few specific trades for setting up business and trades.

The fourth paper entitled 'Environmental Awareness among Scheduled Caste Population of Assam' was presented by Dr. R. C. Das, Retd. DPI, Assam. Dr. Das referred to the paramount importance of environmental awareness among the masses since ruthless destruction of the earth's biosphere and its ecological balance system would ultimately lead to extinction of human civilisation. According to him, the scheduled castes had been living as inferior and down-trodden groups within the Hindu fold for centuries together. As a result, they could not think of decent living. They adhered to traditional beliefs and practices. They had developed a sense of inferiority complex for which they would not like to interact with the members of the developed communities. In order to generate environment-consciousness among the scheduled caste people particularly living in the rural areas, awareness education should be imparted. Citing examples from a village known to him for more than two decades, Dr. Das said that the population in the village had increased three-fold during the said period. But the people had been living in the same area in the most congested manner. They were not aware of health, hygiene and sanitation etc. To accommodate the growing population they had even cut down the trees planted by their fore-fathers. As such, they were least conscious of environmental problems.

The fifth paper entitled 'Training of SC youth for

Entrepreneurship Motivation' was considered to be presented in the seminar in absence of the writer, Dr. P.N. Hazarika, Retd. Secretary, Assam Legislative Assembly Pub-Sarana, Guwahati. In his paper, Dr. Hazarika mentioned that the unemployment problem of the SC youth could be solved through entrepreneurship development to a considerable extent. The collaborative efforts of the Industries Department, DIC, University or other institutions of Management Studies etc. would help in identifying the potential entrepreneurs and in imparting entrepreneurship training. He emphasized that experienced and expert entrepreneurs should be engaged as catalytic agents for incubating entrepreneurship among the selected youth during the training period. Provision of land, finance and other infrastructural facilities should be made by the appropriate authority, corporation and the financial institutions to motivate and encourage the entrepreneurs. An institution should be set up to extend complete range of services to the entrepreneurs - Dr. Hazarika commented.

The sixth paper was presented by Shri G. C. Senapati, Srinagar, Guwahati. The topic of his paper was 'Training of Scheduled Caste Youths for Entrepreneurial Motivation'. Shri Senapati had discussed in detail about the traits to be possessed by an entrepreneur. He opined that the Govt. should play a pivotal role in creating potential entrepreneurs out of the scheduled caste youths. He urged the Govt. to introduce systematic and special syllabus for the SC youths taking into consideration their economic and socio-cultural background, in the branches of extension training and entrepreneurial motivation centres. Moreover, he pointed out that the trainer

motivators should be completely free from caste prejudices. In fine, Shri Senapati asked the SC youths to approach the NSFDC, New Delhi and ASCDC, Guwahati to remove their financial constraints and called upon them to come forward with determined spirit to become successful entrepreneurs.

The last paper in this session was presented by Shri Prafulla Kumar Sensowa, Supdt. of Police (FRA), Dibrugarh on 'Impacts of the Scheduled Castes Component Schemes among the Scheduled Caste People of Assam'. On the basis of a field study on the Special Component Plan, covering 39 nos. of SC villages in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts, Shri Sensowa had tried to show the impact of the individual beneficiary and area or community schemes. He revealed that out of 381 projects, 232 nos. (60.89%) achieved success while 149 nos. (39.11%) incurred losses in respect of individual beneficiary schemes. Again, in case of area or community schemes, out of 149 projects, 81 nos. (54.36%) were successful while 68 nos. (45.64%) were failure incurring loss of Govt. money. The drawbacks of the Special Component Plan were also discussed by him in detail. Moreover, Shri Sensowa suggested that the SCP should be undertaken on the basis of the latest SC population census, and not on the figures of 1971 Census. The officials from P & D Deptt. should physically visit the SC villages to know the actual economic problems and to assess the fund required for implementation of the schemes. He also emphasized that the procedure of granting loan by the banks to the beneficiaries should be simplified. Furthermore, he suggested that the Govt. of Assam should set up a Regional SC Finance and

Development Corporation to deal with fund allocation matters relating to the SCP schemes.

Shri Mrigen Das, District Research Officer, Kamrup, Guwahati was the Rapporteur in this session.

FOURTH ACADEMIC SESSION

The fourth academic session was held after lunch under the chairmanship of Dr. A. C. Bhagabati, Vice Chancellor, Arunachal University. Altogether four papers were presented in this session and two papers were accepted as presented in absence of the writers.

The first paper was presented by Dr. H. C. Das, Joint Director of Higher Education, Assam, Guwahati on 'Impact of the Scheduled Caste Component Schemes among the Scheduled Castes people of Assam'. According to Dr. Das, the Government had launched the Special Component Plan covering 76 nos. of schemes under 24 sectors to accelerate the pace of development among the scheduled caste people of Assam. But he opined that the physical achievement had been far from satisfactory. He had identified ten major problems of development. He had also suggested remedial measures such as adequate publicity of the development problems through various publicity media, proper training to the selected beneficiaries, co-ordination between the beneficiaries and the implementing agencies, demographic study of the particular area before implementation of the schemes, establishment of a monitoring cell to look after the SC welfare schemes and formation of a screening committee in each district to check the issue of false caste certificates with a person to be nominated by the Govt. as President, D.C. or A.D.C. as member-secretary and representatives of each SC organisation of the district as

members etc.

The second paper entitled 'Impact of Special Component Plan among the Scheduled Castes People of Assam' was accepted as presented in absence of the writer, Shri P. Hazarika, Dimow, Sibsagar. On the basis of a study in five villages in the district of Sibsagar, Shri Hazarika had opined that the SCP should be rejected since it could not bring out significant development of the scheduled castes. He also suggested for withdrawal of reservation of jobs meant for SC people under the State Govt. due to the benefit derived by the wealthy section of the SC people only. According to him, the State Govt. should take steps for the socio-economic and educational development of the SC people through the general plan. He mentioned that forward scheduled caste groups and other castes of migratory nature should be removed from the SC list. Of course he was in favour of paying more attention to the welfare of the Harijans.

The third paper entitled "Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Health in a Scheduled Caste Village" was presented by Dr. Birinchi Kr. Medhi, Reader, Deptt. of Anthropology, Gauhati University, Guwahati. Dr. Medhi had discussed in detail about 'health culture' of the Kaibartas inhabiting the village Nij Pukhuripar of Nagaon district. The entire village was inhabited by 77 nos. of Kaibarta households with a total population of 458, the males and females being 234 and 224 respectively. The people of the village had professed Vaishnavism. The main source of livelihood of the people was found to be agriculture although fishing was the traditional occupation of the Kaibartas. The people of the village according to Dr. Medhi, had constructed their dwelling houses without provision of

proper ventilation thus restricting the entry of sufficient light and air into their houses. Heaps of cow-dung placed in front of the homestead and the unclean ditches in front and back of the dwelling house had been the breeding grounds for mosquitos and flies. The people did not have any proper drainage system surrounding their homestead. Tubewells, ringwells and kaccha wells were the main sources of water for the households, under study. But the people had not adopted any scientific method of purification of drinking water. Of course, the people were generally found to maintain cleanliness. The study further revealed that the people of the village had adopted both scientific and traditional methods of treatment of diseases. They were in the habit of approaching qualified physicians. Again the villagers including the educated section had approached the village quacks to get rid of jaundice, snake-bite, barrenness of woman or certain diseases supposed to be caused by supernatural powers etc. Moreover, goddess of pox 'Ai Bhagabati' had been propitiated by the people. The people were also found to have possessed fair knowledge of medicinal herbs and plants. However, the people were not fully conscious of immunization programme of children and family planning measures - Dr. Medhi commented.

The fourth paper was to be presented by Shri N. Bania, IAS (Retd), Silpukhuri, Guwahati. The paper was considered to be presented in absence of the writer. The theme of his paper was 'Identification of Existing Occupation of S.C. People and Problems connected with their Improvement & Upgradation'. Shri Bania had discussed in the paper how the 'four classes' based on the division of labour of the Vedic Aryans were

degenerated into 'caste system' which was, in course of time, divided into high and low castes. In Assam, the Brahmins and Kalitas had been placed high in the social hierarchy while the Brittil-Banias, Kaibartas, Hiras and Namasudras in Assam Valley and the Patnis, Malis, Sutradhars and Namasudras in Surma Valley had been considered low. With regard to the Scheduled Castes Component Plan, he had mentioned that the development of the scheduled castes people would depend on the proper utilisation of the welfare schemes. According to him, those scheduled castes engaged in agriculture had been proverbially landless possessing 5 bighas per family on average. As such he advocated for cultivation of multiple crops in a plot of land in cycling order and supply of sufficient quantity of manure, fertiliser and seeds etc. by the Government. With regard to fishery, Shri Bania mentioned that the Kaibartas, Jhalo-Malos and Namasudras engaged in fishing business had been exploited by the middle men. Of course, the Govt. had set up Fishery Development Corporation, Fish Farming Development Agencies and Fishery Co-operative Societies etc. for economic development of the people. Although the Govt. had earned a huge amount of revenue by means of leasing the registered fisheries, sufficient amount was not spent for improvement of these fisheries. Shri Bania pointed out that by means of tapping the resources like rivers and tributaries, beels, swamps and low lying areas, tanks & ponds and dubis of rivers etc. and making worthy of fish rearing could be leased out. In respect of goldsmithy, he had pointed out that considering the popularity of the old pattern ornaments among the richer section of the society, dexterous planning was

essential for this aristocratic handicraft. In respect of pottery industry, Shri Bania suggested that the planning department should take help of specialities for improving the potteries made by the Assam Hiras. Moreover, steps should be taken to send the Hira boys to Hariyana to acquire sufficient knowledge of modern techniques relating to pottery industry. Shri Bania further commented that the system of carrying night-soil on head by the sweepers engaged in municipalities and town committees should be abolished. He was also in favour of enactment of law for abolishment of scavenging.

The fifth paper entitled 'A Diachronic Study of Change and Development in Three Kaibarta Villages of Assam' was presented by Dr. K. C. Mahanta, Professor, Deptt. of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh. Dr. Mahanta in his paper had mentioned that theoretically the Kaibartas should have come out as a socio-economically affluent community due to their exclusive occupational right over fishing since Vedic times. On the contrary, the socio-economic status of the Kaibartas of Assam had presented a dismal picture. On the basis of a diachronic study over a period of two decades in three Kaibarta villages, Dr. Mahanta opined that although changes had taken place in respect of the two features viz. dwelling house and drop out rate at the primary standard of education in these villages, even then the changes did not indicate significant improvement in the socio-economic life of the Kaibartas inhabiting the studied villages.

The sixth and last paper in this session was a joint paper on 'The Problems of Economic Development among the Hiras of Assam' written by Dr. R.P. Athparia and Shri

G. C. Ojah, Anthropological Survey of India, Shillong. The paper was presented by Dr. Athparia. The writers had tried to bring into focus the major constraints of economic development of the Hiras inhabiting the district of Barpeta. They had discussed about low income obtained from the traditional occupation of pottery making, lack of agricultural land, non-availability of loan from the Govt. to run business, illiteracy, poor health and sanitation, lack of infrastructural facilities like roads, electricity, drinking water, bank, post office etc. In order to improve the economic conditions of the Hiras, they had suggested that agricultural land should be allotted to the people in clusters and inputs like seeds, fertilizers and irrigation facilities etc. should be provided at nominal rate. Steps should be taken for improvement of their health and environmental conditions. Their school going children should be provided with nutritional food at the educational institutions. The writers further opined that sincere efforts from the Government and other organisations would help the people to derive substantial income from their traditional occupation of pottery making.

Shri Purnananda Bharali, District Research Officer, Dibrugarh acted as the Rapporteur in this session.

FIFTH ACADEMIC SESSION

The fifth academic session of the seminar was held in the forenoon of 7.10.94 under the chairmanship of Dr. Atul Goswami, Director, National Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati. In this session four papers were presented and two papers were accepted as presented in absence of the writers.

The first paper was presented in Assamese by Shri Milan Ch. Saikia, Retd. Deputy Director, AIRTSC,

Guwahati. 'উদ্যোক্তাৰ ভূমিকাত অৱতীৰ্ণ হবলৈ অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ যুৱক সমাজৰ বাবে
 প্রশিক্ষণৰ প্ৰয়োজন' was the theme of his paper. Shri Saikia had
 discussed about the necessity of training and mental
 preparation of the SC youths for embarking upon
 entrepreneurship. He said that the dormant talent of the
 people could be developed through training. There were
 provisions of proper utilisation of human resources
 through detailed training in the first step of
 entrepreneurship. Referring to the Benchmark Survey
 conducted by the Deptt. of Economics and Statistics,
 Assam during 1986-87 to highlight the socio-economic
 problems of the SC people of Assam, Shri Saikia had
 emphasized that the findings of such scientific studies
 should be properly studied before taking up any scheme
 for the development of the SC people since
 implementation of the scheme based on scientific studies
 only could be expected to be successful. Shri Saikia had
 mentioned about the lack of educational environment in
 the SC inhabited villages. He referred to the system of
 education as the effective instrument to widen the mental
 horizon of the people and said that a person would be a
 successful entrepreneur provided he had the intense
 desire to learn something. Moreover, he had emphasized
 that the Assam State Development Corporation for
 Scheduled Castes should shoulder the heavy
 responsibility to produce entrepreneurs from the SCs
 since most of the SC groups had lived below the poverty
 level and the question of saving base among them could
 not arise. He pleaded for providing 50% bank loan and
 25% subsidy to enable the SC youths to be entrepreneurs.
 Again, he pointed out that the ASCDC should take steps
 to provide training to the SC youths in the different

institutes of the country. According to him, the SC youths
 would be able to get themselves prepared mentally to be
 entrepreneurs if the ASCDC would provide loans on
 differential rates of interest for medium industry through
 banks. In fine, he called upon the prospective SC
 entrepreneurs to think over scientific development of the
 traditional occupations, to get themselves prepared to
 take up other occupation leaving their traditional ones and
 to get themselves well acquainted with various industrial
 products of the country. Then and then only, the
 emergence of enterprises could be expected after the end
 of the training - Shri Saikia commented.

The second paper entitled 'অনুসূচীত সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ আৰ্থিক উন্নয়নৰ
 সম্ভাৱনা' was to be presented by the writer, Shri Jatindra Kr.
 Borgohain, Editor, Natun Dainik, Guwahati. But he could
 not attend the seminar. The paper was considered to be
 presented. Shri Borgohain had mentioned in the paper
 that the extreme backwardness of the SC people of
 Assam could be attributed to various factors viz. poverty,
 illiteracy, inadequate knowledge of technology, high rate of
 birth and mortality, organisational incapability, lack of
 leadership and socio-religious stagnation etc. To
 overcome the problems he had forwarded several
 suggestions. According to him emphasis should be given
 on health care, education, training and livelihood of the
 mothers and health check up and nutritional food for the
 babies in order to reduce the rate of mortality of the
 mothers and children. He had also mentioned about the
 necessity of a new organisational base to make the SC
 people free from indebtedness. Finally Shri Borgohain
 suggested for an overall integrated scheme for the benefit
 of the SC people. The necessary fund, manpower,

technology and planning etc. should be provided by the Government. The whole scheme would be under the direct control of the Govt. but the dynamic socio-economic organisations should also be made partners.

The third paper entitled 'A Futuristic Study on the Pollution Control and Prospect of Hatchery in a Koibarta Village : A Case Study of Natun Gaon in the District of Dibrugarh, Assam' was jointly written by Shri A.K. Bora, Dr. S.C. Sarma and Dr. D. Doley, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh. Shri A. K. Bora presented the paper in the seminar. In the paper the authors had attempted to show how organic wastes available in a village setting could be converted into a source of production of bio gas for running a fish hatchery of Chinese model and for providing electricity for streetlights. Besides augmenting the economy of the people this would prevent pollution created by organic wastes. The authors had undertaken a case study in the village Natun Gaon located at Dibrugarh. The village exclusively inhabited by the Kaibartas consisted of 127 households with a total population of 2534. The land-man ratio in the village was not conducive for human habitation. Most of the households had possessed katcha latrines. The no. of households having sanitary latrines was less. Again, those without having even katcha latrines had to go to the nearest fields or forests for defecation. This had ultimately created environmental pollution. Organic wastes of the kitchen and others such as cow-dung also had created pollution problem in the village. About 1QL . of kitchen wastes was available everyday in the village. Moreover, due to non-availability of proper drainage system in the households, logged waters mixed with the garbages created major

problem. It was found by the authors that educated manpower was available in the village. All the households were engaged in some occupations. The approach road connecting the village with the National Highway was also metalled. Most of the households had electricity connections. Waves of modernity had changed the life style of the people. Pristine taboos had been slowly disappearing. The young generation of the village was found to be interested in taking up new business, occupation etc. As such, they could be considered as the vital working force for maintaining a pollution free environment in their village. The authors suggested that the Deenbandhu model of biogas plant devised by the Regional Biogas Development & Training Centre, Jorhat would be a suitable one for waste management. 1 QL. of kitchen waste would produce 6 Cu.m. biogas daily to run a generator for lifting water from shallow tubewell to an overhead tank for the Chinese model of fish hatchery. Again, the surplus gas could be utilised for street lights. The decomposed organic wastes could be used as good bio fertilizer. Thus the Chinese Fishing Hatchery would help the people in producing fish seedlings of various size. The income of the people would also enhance to a considerable extent. Over and above, Sulov souchagar in the shape of community latrines could be constructed with the help of Sulov International, Patna and the human excreta could be utilised for biogas plant to produce cooking gas or electricity for the benefit of the people - the authors commented.

The fourth paper entitled 'The Hira Pottery Industry of Assam facing difficulties in Improvement and Upgradation' was to be presented by the writer, Shri

Guneswar Das, Nalbari. The paper was considered to be presented in absence of the writer. Shri Das had mentioned in his paper that in order to improve the pottery industry, the Hira potters of Assam had been facing various problems such as unauthorised occupation of the areas having 'Hira clay' and dearth of dry woods necessary for making the products pucca etc. He had suggested for imparting training to the potters in the Pottery Training Centres located outside the State to acquire knowledge about modern technology. Training Centres at local levels should be established to train up the poor potters to produce modern utensils. He had also opined that the Government should provide permanent settlement of the Hira Reserves among the potters, permission to collect dry woods from the forests and marketing facilities for the finished products, etc.

The fifth paper entitled 'Core Problems vis-a-vis Socio-Cultural Factors of Scheduled Caste Development in Assam' was presented by Dr. G.C. Sharma Thakur, Retd. Director, AIRT&SC, Guwahati. He had discussed about the core problems of development of the SC people of Assam elaborately. According to 1991 Census, 47.22% of the SC people had to depend upon agriculture for livelihood. But their economy was not self-sufficient due to lack of adequate cultivable land. The fore-fathers of the scheduled caste people did not bother to possess sufficient amount of land since they were not originally agriculturists. Dr. Sharma Thakur had mentioned that some of the scheduled caste groups had also carried out fishing, pottery making and goldsmithy etc. Among the SCs occupational mobility had been taking place. 10.01% of them were engaged in trade & commerce as per 1991

Census. Dr. Sharma Thakur mentioned that although the Government had provided reservation of jobs for the SCs, most of the quotas had been filled in by the candidates belonging to forward SC groups. Referring to the traditional occupation of fishing he had said that the fishermen from outside the State had taken over this trade from the Kaibartas and Namasudras. The poor Kaibartas who had even maintained the fishing business had to suffer from the 60 : 40 syndrome. With regard to indebtedness he had commented that about 50% of the SC people had been subjected to this malady. Dr. Sharma Thakur was also in favour of provisions of quota for each SC group on the basis of population in respect of the family oriented income generating schemes. Moreover, the economically weaker families from a particular SC group should be taken into account under the scheme of cluster development. According to 1991 Census, the rate of literacy among the SCs of Assam was 53.94%. But such high percentage could not be applied to each of the SC groups. Therefore, Dr. Sharma Thakur had suggested for a special drive to bring the backward groups in respect of literacy to the level of advanced SC groups. Referring to the Special Component Plan (SCP) he had commented that inspite of sufficient flow of funds, the schemes could not bring significant economic development of the SC people due to unsuccessful implementation of the schemes. On the whole, he had suggested for indepth study of the problems of each SC group under the scheme of cluster development and provision of separate fund for them for family oriented income generating schemes, pre-matric and post matric schemes, implementation of the Reservation Act ensuring suitable

representation of the different caste groups, Benchmark Survey for the scheduled castes and scientific evaluation of the schemes etc.

The sixth and last paper of the seminar was to be presented by Shri Bimal Kr. Hazarika, Director of the Institute. The theme of his paper was 'An Insight into the Core Problems of the Scheduled Castes of Assam'. But he could not attend the seminar due to sudden illness. Shri Paramesh Dutta, Research Officer of the Institute presented the paper on his behalf. Shri Hazarika discussed in the paper about land-holding, education, communication, health & sanitation, drinking water and indebtedness which, according to him, had hindered the overall development of the scheduled caste population of Assam. In order to solve the problems he had suggested for cognatic mapping of all the communities inhabiting the State and proper statistics relating to vital aspects of the SCs in collaboration with scholars, Universities, Research & Development Agencies and voluntary organisations etc., scientific evaluation studies of the schemes undertaken for the benefit of the SCs, development of the educational and infrastructural facilities in the SC inhabited areas, upgradation of the traditional occupations of the SCs through modern technology, awareness campaign among the SCs to make them understand about the constitutional and welfare measures, health hazards and environmental pollution etc. and provision of safe drinking water to the people.

In this session, Shri Ananda Ch. Nath of the Institute was the Rapporteur.

SPECIAL ACADEMIC SESSION

The special academic session was held on 7.10.94 at 12-30 p.m. under the chairmanship of Dr. B.M. Das in order to arrive at a consensus of the deliberations of the

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seminar. The participant scholars offered their valuable suggestions. A sub-committee was constituted in the meeting with Dr. B.M. Das, Dr. B.N. Bordoloi, Dr. Atul Goswami and Shri Khanin Das as Members and Shri B.K. Hazarika as Member Convener. It was decided in the meeting that the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes would prepare a set of recommendations on the basis of discussion among the participant scholars and would submit the same to the sub-committee for finalization of the recommendations of the seminar.

VALEDICTORY SESSION

The valedictory session was held on 7.10.94 at 3 p.m. under the presidency of Dr. P.C. Bhattacharya, Ex-Principal, B.Barua College, Guwahati. Dr. B.M. Das graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. Dr. B.N. Bordoloi was the Guest of Honour in the session. The distinguished persons expressed satisfaction on the attempt of the Institute for organising a seminar on the core problems of development of the scheduled castes of Assam. At the outset, the summary report of the seminar was read out by Shri Paramesh Dutta, R.O. of the Institute. Shri G.N. Das, D.R.O., Diphu offered vote of thanks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The meeting of the sub-committee constituted on 7.10.94 was held on 25.1.95 at 3.30 p.m. under the chairmanship of Dr. B.M. Das in the office chamber of the Director, AIRTSC. The following members were present in the meeting -

Dr. B.M. Das
Shri Khanin Das and
Shri B.K. Hazarika

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The committee reviewed the suggestions of the seminarists and after threadbare discussion put forward the following recommendations of the seminar for consideration and implementation by the Government.

1. A base-line study with latest specific data about different aspects of the Scheduled Castes people, giving more stress on the socio-economic conditions on each of the Scheduled Castes living in Assam should be undertaken with a view to identify their core problems.

Action : AIRT&SC

2. In order to make the SC people aware about the constitutional safeguards, welfare measures, environmental degradation pollution, safe drinking water provisions etc. and also to make the procedures for providing benefits to the Scheduled Castes more simple, the Government Agencies and the Voluntary Organisations may draw up strategies by organising more and more workshops (at least twelve in a year) in the SC inhabited areas ensuring active participation of the SC people, particularly the youth to motivate them for taking up entrepreneurial career.

Action : 1) ASDC for SC Ltd.

2) AIRT&SC

3. The 20 point roster in respect of Assam SC & ST (Reservation of Vacancies in Services and Posts) Act, 1978 should be properly maintained by each and every department responsible for its implementation and a Liaison Officer, in each department should be entrusted with the responsibility to look after the proper implementation of the provisions of the Act.

Action : 1) WPT&BC Deptt., Govt. of Assam for strict implementation of the Act.

2) AIRT&SC for conducting an evaluation study on the implementation of the Act.

B. K. Hazarika,

Director,
Assam Institute of Research for
Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati

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PROBLEMS OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES OF ASSAM AND PLANS FOR DEVELOPMENT

A. K. Neog*

INTRODUCTION :

Before addressing the problems of the Scheduled Castes (SC) in Assam, it is worthwhile to know who are the scheduled castes. According to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendments) Act, 1976 there are sixteen scheduled caste communities in Assam. These are i) Bansphor ii) Bhuinmali, Mali iii) Brittil-Bania, Bania iv) Dhupi, Dhobi v) Dugla, Dholi vi) Hira vii) Jalkeot viii) Jhalo, Malo, Jhalo-Malo ix) Kaibartta, Jaliya x) Lalbegi xi) Mahara xii) Mehtar, Bhangi xiii) Muchi, Rishi xiv) Namasudra xv) Patni and xvi) Sutradhar.

According to 1971 Census, out of the total S.C. communities of Assam the two dominant sub-castes are the Namasudras and the Kaibartas, accounting respectively 32.97% and 32.31% of the total S.C. population of the state. The sub-castes viz. Maharas and Lalbegis are marginal groups.

POPULATION :

We may now ask what is the size of the SC population. According to 1991 Census there are 16,59,412 persons belonging to SC communities in Assam, accounting for 7.4% of the total population of the state. In terms of absolute number, Nagaon district has the highest concentration of SC population with 1,89,693 persons followed by Cachar with 1,78,624, Kamrup with 1,50,743 and Karimganj with 1,20,602 persons. In the plains areas of the state, Tinsukia has the lowest concentration of the SCs with 25,137 while North Cachar Hills district has 3,918 and Karbi Anglong has 27,991 SC persons. Thus the SCs are widespread both in the plains and hills. In other words, SC population is distributed all over the districts of

* Director of Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes, Govt. of India, Lower Lachumiere, Shillong-1.

Assam. Table I presents the percentage distribution of SC population to district population and to state population.

Table - I

Districtwise distribution of SC population in Assam, 1991

Sl. No.	District	Percentage to district population	Percentage to State SC population
1.	Cachar	14.70	10.76
2.	Karimganj	14.58	7.26
3.	Marigaon	13.78	5.31
4.	Hailakandi	12.05	3.26
5.	Bongaigaon	10.74	5.23
6.	Nagaon	10.02	11.43
7.	Nalbari	8.78	5.38
8.	Lakhimpur	8.01	3.63
9.	Jorhat	7.61	4.00
10.	Kamrup	7.54	9.10
11.	Barpeta	6.54	5.47
12.	Dhemaji	6.37	1.83
13.	Sonitpur	5.69	4.89
14.	Golaghat	5.59	2.79
15.	Goalpara	5.50	2.21
16.	Darrang	4.95	3.88
17.	Dhubri	4.82	3.87
18.	Karbi Anglong	4.22	1.69
19.	Dibrugarh	4.02	2.52
20.	Kokrajhar	3.76	1.81
21.	Sibsagar	3.56	1.94
22.	Tinsukia	2.61	1.51
23.	N.C Hills	2.60	0.23

Source : 1991 Census

Census data reveal that in 1991, the SC population living in urban areas of Assam was 13.82% compared to 11.10% for the state as a whole. However, majority are still living in rural areas,

S.C. 86.18% compared to 88.9% for the entire population. The census also reveals that overall literacy among the SC population in Assam is 53.94% compared to 49.16% for the Scheduled Tribes and 53.39% for the 'Others'. In fact, percentage of literacy among the SCs of Assam is higher than the all-India average of 37.41%.

LAND HOLDINGS :

Land is the basic asset with the rural people. Its ownership, size distribution and use determine the socio-economic status of the households. Hence employment, income, wealth and poverty tend to vary with the size distribution of land among the households. Size of holdings are classified into marginal (below one hectare), small (between one and two hectares), semi-medium (two to four hectares), medium (four to ten hectares) and large (ten hectares and above). As per 1985-86 agricultural census, Assam has 24,19,200 nos. of operational holdings belonging to all social groups of the people with total area under operational holding of 31,61,500 hectares. Out of the total holdings, 1,14,500 i.e. 4.73% only belong to Scheduled Caste (much below the population percentage), the percentage area operated by the SCs being 1,29,100 i.e. 4.08%. The said census also reveals that while the average size of operational holdings is 1.31 hectares for all social groups, it is only 1.13 hectares for SCs and 1.41 hectares for STs. The percentage distribution of operational holding (both numbers and areas) among the different farm categories of the scheduled castes population is as under :

TABLE - II

Percentage distribution of number and area of operational holdings for scheduled castes in 1985-86 in Assam

Category of holdings	Number of holdings (%)	Area operated (%)
Marginal	60.3	26.3
Small	24.4	30.3
Semi-Medium	12.3	28.8
Medium	2.9	13.2
Large	0.1	1.4
All categories	100.0	100.0

The table shows inequality in the distribution of land among the SCs. Most of them are marginal farmers (60.3%) operating only 26.3% of the land. Hence a significant portion of the marginal farmers has to work as agricultural labourers. The marginal and small farmers of the SCs together account 84.7% operating only 56.6% of the agricultural land. In so far as farms below two hectares are non-viable, these households suffer from poverty and unemployment problems particularly during the non-farming seasons.

POVERTY :

The communitywise break up of poverty is not available from the latest poverty estimates. However, Planning Commission's data for the year 1983-84 show that percentage of SC persons below poverty line is significantly high in the urban areas than in the rural areas.

TABLE - III

Percentage of persons below the poverty line (1983-84) in Assam

Category	Rural	Urban
Scheduled Castes	21.90	42.80
Scheduled Tribes	25.50	20.20
All population	23.76	21.56

Source : Ministry of Welfare, Report on the Working Group on Development and Welfare of STs during the Eighth Five Year Plan (1990-95), P. 185

UNEMPLOYMENT :

In the rural areas seasonal and disguised unemployment are common, particularly when there is lack of diversification of agriculture and non-farming activities. This kind of unemployment however becomes open unemployment when labourers move to urban areas in search of job. With this also

migrates rural poverty to urban areas. Open unemployment is considerably high among the scheduled castes in Assam. This is evident from the number of job seekers on the live register of Employment Exchange, with the number of SC applicants in Assam jumping from 72.7 thousand in 1991 to 74.9 thousand in 1992.

TABLE - IV

Employment Exchange statistics in respect of SC applicants for Assam in 1991 and 1992 (in 000)

Item	1991	1992
No. of Registrations	17.6	8.2
No. of placements	0.3	0.1
No. on live Register	72.7	74.9

Source : Ministry of Labour, D.G.E. & T.

There is job reservation for the scheduled caste candidates in the public sector. In spite of this and special recruitment drive, the SC job seekers are rising. Growth of population, spread of education and the limited size of the employment market are some of the causes behind the rising unemployment.

PLANS FOR DEVELOPMENT :

It may be mentioned that the problem of unemployment among the scheduled castes can not be solved only through provision of government jobs. Hence employment has to be generated in agricultural, industrial and in the tertiary sectors. Development of SCs and STs is on the priority list of the Government. The Government has been making special efforts for the development of the SCs through (a) Special Component Plan (SCP), (b) Special Central Assistance (SCA), (c) the creation of the Scheduled Castes Development Corporations and other measures.

The SCP is designed to channelise the flow of plan outlays and benefits from the general sectors in the plans of the

States and the Central Ministries for Development of SCs, at least in proportion to their population to the total population. In order to secure adequate quantum of outlays under SCP and to prevent any diversion of the same, the state governments are required to provide separate Budget Heads of Account for these funds.

The SCP of the states are supplemented with Special Central Assistance (SCA) from the Centre with a view to creating multiplier effect and help filling the gaps which the normal financial flows from the Central and State Plans are not able to provide. The SCA is a centrally sponsored scheme of the Ministry of Welfare for poverty alleviation, providing 100% grant to states as an additive to SCP.

Criteria for allocation of SCA : The SCAs are allocated on the basis of the norms approved by the Planning Commission, as given below :

- a) On the basis of SC population of the State/UT = 40%
- b) Relative backwardness of the State/UT = 10%
- c) Percentage of SC families in the state covered by composite economic development programme in the plan to enable them to cross the poverty line = 25%
- d) Percentage of SCP to the Annual State Plan as compared to the SC population percentage in the state = 10%
- e) Programmes for specially vulnerable groups among the SCs viz. sweepers, scavengers, bonded labourers = 10%
- f) On the basis of implementation of SCP during the previous year = 5%

The underlying objective behind SCA is that the SCA would be used by the states to give an additional thrust to the developmental programmes for SC people with reference to their occupational pattern and the need for raising the productivity of and income from their limited assets by taking up family oriented schemes for them.

Mechanism for Institutional Finance : The National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development

Corporation (NSFDC) is serving as the national institution since 1989 by taking up and financing viable schemes for economic development of SCs and STs throughout the country. Its role is to support the activities of State SC and ST Development Corporations. In Assam, the Assam State Development Corporation for Scheduled Castes Ltd. was established in June, 1975. Its main objective is to provide financial assistance to the SC people for their socio-economic upliftment through a number of schemes like differential rate of interest scheme, loan scheme, margin money scheme etc. In 1988-89 the said corporation has extended benefits to 3836 beneficiaries involving Rs. 217,81,372. The corporation also submitted some schemes to NSFDC in the recent years. Till January 1994, the NSFDC approved 23 different schemes under small scale industrial units, service units, agriculture and transport sector. The NSFDC however provides term loans and the working capital has to come forth from the banks. But the response from the banks to provide working capital is not upto the mark. Unless this problem is overcome entrepreneurship development among the scheduled castes would be a problem.

NEED FOR EVALUATION :

A number of development programmes like IRDP, TRYSEM, JRY, NRY, IAY, MWS etc. are in operation for the upliftment of the poor people including the SCs. Similarly, there are also the schemes of the Assam State Development Corporation for Scheduled Castes. These programmes/schemes need to be evaluated. A study titled 'Benefits Derived by Scheduled Castes under various Development Programmes' conducted in Jorhat subdivision by the Agro-Economic Research Centre, Jorhat in 1981 commented that the impact of the programmes is not very marked on the economic condition of the SC population. It found that the benefits derived by the sample SC households under various welfare schemes were

only nominal and not adequate in taking up viable enterprises. They have no capacity to invest in enterprises from their family budget. Majority of the beneficiaries were found to have utilised the grants-in-aid properly. Two of the major recommendations made in the said study are (i) enhancement of the quantum of grants to raise the viability of the enterprises and (ii) formulation of a long term perspective plan for development of the SC people. The reference period for the said study was 1978-79 and 1979-80. Since then considerable time has elapsed. It is, therefore, necessary now to evaluate the development programmes for the Scheduled Castes population.

MOTIVATING SC YOUTH FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL CAREER : WHY AND HOW ?

Dr. D. D. Mali

ABSTRACT :

It has now been generally accepted that entrepreneurs are not only born but also can be trained and developed. An entrepreneur, irrespective of his social origin possesses some characteristics which are not to be found in a non entrepreneur. Generally speaking the number of entrepreneurs emerging from the Scheduled Caste (SC) community is much less than that from the general caste. This does not, however, mean that entrepreneurial characteristics are not to be found in this community. In fact, there is no society devoid of entrepreneurial characteristics. There is urgent need to take up systematic efforts to develop entrepreneurship among the SC Youth. In this paper an Action Plan has been suggested for developing entrepreneurship among the SC Youth so that they can take up entrepreneurial career. The paper emphasises collaborative effort from the Government, promotional organisations, banks and financial institutions and the entrepreneurs themselves to achieve the desired result.

INTRODUCTION :

Entrepreneurs are born as well as can be trained and developed. This fact has now been generally accepted and systematic efforts are being made to generate mass entrepreneurship in the country. Special organisations have been set up at the national and state levels to take up entrepreneurship development in a systematic manner. There

* Director, National Institute of Small Scale Industries, Extension and Training, Guwahati.

are now even district level organisations to train prospective entrepreneurs. There are location-specific, target group-oriented, product and process specific training programmes being organised to develop entrepreneurship in specific locations or in specific fields of activities or for specific group of population. As a result there has been a great deal of awareness about entrepreneurial opportunities and the unemployed youth are gradually coming forward to take up entrepreneurial career. However, much is yet to happen to induce the youth to take up entrepreneurial career. This is more so among the SC Youth.

SC ENTREPRENEUR :

An entrepreneur is different from a non-entrepreneur. He possesses certain characteristics which are not to be found in a non-entrepreneur. This is so irrespective of sex and social origin of entrepreneur. But the supply of SC entrepreneur is much less than the supply of entrepreneurs from general caste. As on 31 March, 1988, only 7.8% of the SSI entrepreneurs in the country came from the SC community.¹ In the North East Region SC entrepreneurs accounted for 15.1% of the total entrepreneurs in 1976-77.² After 11 years, i.e. in 1987-88, the percentage of SC entrepreneurs went down to 2.6%.³ These two figures are, however, not comparable since one is based on a sample study and the other is based on census. Nevertheless, they indicate the growth of entrepreneurship among the SC community.

The social origin of entrepreneurs in N.E. Region in two points of time is given in the following table :

TABLE - I

Social Origin of Entrepreneurs in N.E. Region

SI No.	State	1976-77			1987-88		
		SC	ST	Others	SC	ST	Others
1	2 →	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	00 (0.0)	61 (100)	00 (0.0)	1 (0.3)	257 (78.8)	68 (20.9)

1	2 →	3	4	5	6	7	8
2.	Assam	775 (26.7)	30 (.03)	2098 (72.3)	171 (3.9)	115 (2.7)	4144 (93.5)
3.	Meghalaya	17 (3.2)	187 (35.0)	330 (61.8)	1 (0.2)	341 (58.1)	245 (41.7)
4.	Mizoram	00 (0.0)	177 (98.9)	2 (1.1)	6 (0.7)	631 (68.8)	280 (30.5)
5.	Manipur	00 (0.0)	235 (35.6)	425 (64.4)	11 (0.5)	544 (26.2)	1523 (73.3)
6.	Nagaland	00 (0.0)	22 (16.8)	190 (83.2)	4 (2.2)	132 (72.1)	47 (25.7)
7.	Tripura	00 (0.0)	38 (4.4)	744 (95.1)	47 (5.8)	13 (1.6)	749 (92.6)
		792 (15.1)	750 (14.2)	3708 (70.6)	241 (2.6)	2033 (21.8)	7056 (75.6)

Note : Figures in brackets refer to percentage.

Source : a) SIET Institute : Entrepreneurial and Managerial Needs of N.E. Region, 1978

b) Mali, D.D. & Bandopadhyay, R. : Small Industry Development in N.E. India, 1993.

Table-I reveals that in 1976-77, Assam had 26.7% and Meghalaya had 3.2% SC entrepreneurs. Other states of the region did not have any SC entrepreneur at all. In 1987-88, every state had some SC entrepreneurs though the overall percentage of SC entrepreneurs declined from 15.1 in 1976-77 to 2.6 in 1987-88.

FACTORS IN THE EMERGENCE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP :

There are a number of factors which helps in the emergence of entrepreneurship in any society : individual, family, society, caste, religion, resources, support system etc. An entrepreneur is also an individual in a society. For an individual to emerge as an entrepreneur he must have knowledge of the opportunities in the environment. He must also have knowledge of

enterprises and technology. In addition to knowledge, he should have skill to select a product or a process, prepare a scheme or a project report, and establish and run an enterprise. But knowledge and skill alone will not make an individual an entrepreneur. In order to make the knowledge and skill operative he must have sufficient motivation, personal efficacy and coping capability. While knowledge and skill are important, it is the motivation which is the most important factor to make an individual an entrepreneur. Motivation backed by knowledge and skill and capability to cope with stress and strain of an entrepreneurial career will induce an individual to become an entrepreneur.

The behaviour of an individual is influenced by his family and the society in which he lives. After all an individual is a part and parcel of the family and the society. Family plays a crucial role in shaping the destiny of an individual. It is in the family setting that individual's motivation to achieve is developed. Many a time interest of an individual comes in conflict with the expectation of the family. To go against the family expectation is a tough task. As a result many prospective entrepreneurs opt for wage employment instead of for an entrepreneurial career.

Besides the influence of family there is the influence of the society, the caste and the religion to which an individual belongs. Individuals are generally status seekers. An individual will obviously like to take up that kind of activity to which the society gives status. In N.E. Region, the existing situation is that a person with a Government job and assured income commands higher status in the society than a person who is self-employed even though both the individuals may have similar level of income and standard of living. This situation is not helpful for the emergence of entrepreneurship.

An individual is further influenced by the availability of resources like raw materials, technology, technical manpower, transport and communication facilities, power etc. Availability of raw materials indicates the potential industries. Likewise,

availability of technology and technical manpower gives him further confidence to go for an entrepreneurial career. The existing industries and enterprises create a climate conducive for an entrepreneurial growth.

While family, society and resource system influence an individual to go for an entrepreneurial career, the support system has an equally important role to play in the emergence of entrepreneurship. The promotional and developmental organisations, banks and financial institutions etc. can either help or hinder in the growth of entrepreneurship. The policy they adopt, the programmes they implement and the attitude they show to the prospective entrepreneurs have great bearing in the emergence of entrepreneurship. If the organisational climate is helpful, extension-oriented, emergence of entrepreneurship will be easier. It is in fact an environment in the family, in the society, in the resource system and the support system, which is crucial in the growth of entrepreneurship. Any effort for entrepreneurial development whether among the SC youth or other should be to create an environment suitable for entrepreneurship growth.

WHY TO MOTIVATE :

SC youth may have knowledge and skill. But the general tendency among them is to search for wage employment opportunities and not for self-employment. This tendency is not very much peculiar to SC youth alone, at least in N.E. Region. This tendency is further influenced due to opportunities created by the policy of reservation in the employment market. The policy of reservation will, however, not continue for ever. Besides, even assuming that the policy of reservation will continue indefinitely job opportunities will be limited and there will be severe competition among the SC youth to enter into employment market. Considering this factor, the best alternative remains is for self-employment to the larger number of SC youth.

During the post independence period many of the age-old practice of caste are not observed, at least in the urban centres. In

N.E. Region, the caste barrier is practically non-existent. Besides, a number of programmes and schemes of self-employment are coming up day-by-day and that are open to any one irrespective of one's caste. Hence, SC youth need not go for caste occupation only. However, SC youth suffer from lack of confidence. Perhaps, it is because they do not have experience of occupations other than their own caste occupations. In such a situation, the role of motivational factor is more important. Development of motivation will create confidence among them for taking up entrepreneurial career.

When a youth takes up the entrepreneurial career, he employs not only himself, but also a few others. The generation of employment opportunities leads to generation of individual income as well as national income. Generation of income gives further impetus to the growth of the economy as a whole. It is for these reasons for which SC Youth need to be motivated to take up entrepreneurial career.

HOW TO MOTIVATE :

In order to motivate the SC Youth for entrepreneurial career there may be both direct and indirect measures. Besides, there may also be short term and long term measures. The direct and indirect measures, short term and long term measures are required to influence the various systems in the environment to make them conducive for growth and development of entrepreneurship.

Motivational training is one of the important direct measures that may be adopted for the purpose. Such training may be organised by a local level agency who can guide and help the SC Youth during the post-training period and monitor their activities. While entrepreneurial quality can be found in every society, irrespective of caste and creed, sex and religion, it is also admitted that everybody can not be an entrepreneur. It is for this reason that motivation training should be given to a select group of youth having potentiality of becoming entrepreneur. They are to be

selected by using a scientific selection process. The local level agency may have experts for identification and selection of potential entrepreneur from a group of SC youth. To create an interest for entrepreneurial career information about the entrepreneurial opportunities are to be made available to the potential entrepreneurs. This should be done through planned publicity and in a systematic manner involving all the organisations engaged in the promotion and development of entrepreneurship. All these measures are both direct and also short term measure to influence the individual alone.

It is, however, not the individual alone who is to be influenced for motivation development. Family atmosphere is also to be changed. Since family is only a part of society, it is ultimately the society which requires to be entrepreneur--friendly. Society would attach importance and give status to the person who takes up entrepreneurial career. Creation of status for entrepreneur - at least for the small entrepreneur-in the society will be gradual and not sudden because of the existing situation. This can be done through entrepreneurial education. Entrepreneurial education should form a part and parcel of the educational system. This will partly influence the youth and partly the family and the society at large.

There are large number of organisation in our country who are directly responsible for the growth of entrepreneurship. Some of the organisations are involved in regulatory activities, some provide finance and some provide help and guidance. Their attitude and action may help or hinder in the growth of entrepreneurship. They need to be achievement-oriented. Attitudinal change in the organisations is possible through training. Policy of the Government has also a very important role. While the Government may go on following the policy of reservation in the job market for SC youth, it may also encourage self-employment by creating required facilities. The type of facilities to be created may vary from place to place depending on the level of

development. There is also a need for making indepth study to understand the socio-psychological attitude of the SC youth for entrepreneurial career. The effort to develop motivation should be based on co-operation and collaborative approach among the Government, promotional and developmental organisations, banks and financial institutions. The SC youth will not only be the beneficiary of the collaborative efforts, but they will also be a part in the process of collaboration for motivative development.

CONCLUSION :

There is no denying the fact that SC youth should be motivated to take up entrepreneurial career. This is more so due to limited wage employment opportunities. Taking up entrepreneurial career will not only promote self-employment, but will generate employment opportunities for many more youth. To become an entrepreneur, however, is not an easy task. To motivate the youth for such a career an entrepreneur-friendly environment needs to be created. For this both direct and indirect, short term and long term measures will be required. These measures will influence the various systems to make them conducive for entrepreneurial growth and development. It is hoped that an entrepreneurial-friendly environment will be created and it will be possible for SC youth to take up entrepreneurial career.

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IDENTIFICATION OF EXISTING OCCUPATION OF S.C. PEOPLE AND PROBLEMS CONNECTED WITH THEIR IMPROVEMENT & UPGRADATION

N. Bania, IAS (Retd)*

BACKGROUND :

Before going to the schedule of castes, it is felt advisable to be acquainted with castes in general. Castes have been an enigma to the modern thinkers and intellectuals. According to the Chambers Dictionary it is a social class in India - an exclusive social class. It means that it is limited to India and to the Hindu religion only and to no other country or religion in the world. It is a hoary institution and its intricacies are very complex. Vedic Aryans have no caste system of the impact it carries to-day. They, however, divided themselves for the sake of expediency for different occupations on the basis of division of labour and according to aptitude, liking and capacity of the individual or group. Those who took to learning were called Brahmins, those who took Governance were called Kshatriyas, those who resorted to trade were termed Vaishyas and the rest were left to be branded as Sudras meant to serve the above classes.

But alongwith the lapse of time, the original principle of division of labour began showing signs of variation so much so that even a most ignorant, vile and fallen Brahmin continued to be regarded as super being whereas a man from the lower class, however high his qualifications was looked down upon as a Sudra. The result was that the original four divisions became water-tight compartments and degenerated into what is called caste system, classes became castes. The four castes became also known as 'Chaturbarna'. In course of time, this caste system became highly discriminatory, tyrannous and the very negation of the original

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meaning and purpose. This again manifested itself into different professional barriers of provinces, varying ways of customs and ways of living which broke the four divisions into a multi-caste society. It produced three thousand and odd castes, sub-castes ultimately crystallising into two broad divisions - high and low. The lower categories had been burdened with unpleasant and unclean jobs resulting in subjection to social disabilities. This was, in fact, a sub-human standard, ultimately branded as "UNTOUCHABLES". Social traditions, social conventions and customs etc. had been so adopted as to leave little scope for their emancipation or a change to the better.

DEPRESSED CLASSES :

Castes in Assam had begun to be recognised in official records since 1872. Even prior to that, we find names of some castes in histories, chronicles and descriptive accounts of castes in Hindu Society such as Assam Buranji (Kashinath Tamuli Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua), Gait's History of Assam, Descriptive Accounts of Castes in Assam by Robinson, Mills, District Gazetteer of Kamrup and the like.

While the Brahmins and the Kalitas in Assam have been kept high in the hierarchy, those below have inherited some sort of stigma. The difference is only in degree. The following castes were considered low - 1) Brittial Bania 2) Kaibartta (3) Hira 4) Namasudra in the Assam Valley and 5) Patni 6) Mali (Malakar) 7) Sutradhar and Namasudra in the Surma (now Barak) Valley. They were allotted certain specific profession (occupation ?) for the benefit of the rich high caste Hindus. The upper caste or high caste Hindus feel extremely comforting in the sense that all the menial jobs of life have never to be done by them but by a set of ordained people. On the other hand, the cunning Brahmins indulged in the propaganda that the Hinduism was an organic-whole and these low caste people were only inseparable components of this organic-whole. Interestingly, Mr. C.S. Mullan, the then Census Superintendent of Assam called these castes as

'Hindu Exterior Castes', a new coinage of word.

SCHEDULED CASTES :

This horrendous situation continued till the Indian Political Reforms came on the Indian scene carrying several political and social reforms which swept off many of the stigmas. India gained Independence in 1947 and an Indian Constitution was adopted which greatly improved the political and social positions particularly of those down-trodden castes who were designated as 'Scheduled Castes' taking them out from the general rein of the communities alongwith the tribals who were also scheduled as Scheduled Tribes. Other Backward Classes came late.

Thus in Asam 16 Scheduled Castes were created. They are (alphabetically) 1. Bansphor 2. Bhuimali 3. Brittial-Bania or Bania 4. Dhobi or Dhupi 5. Dugla or Dholi 6. Hira 7. Jal-Keot 8. Jhalo, Malo or Jhalo-Malo 9. Kaibartta or Jalia 10. Lalbegi 11. Mahara 12. Mehtor or Bhanghi 13. Muchi or Rishi 14. Namasudra 15. Patni 16. Sutradhar 17. Unclassed Sweeper according to the occupation they adopted.

Scheduled Castes people are ordinarily not found in large compact areas like the Scheduled Tribes, which make it difficult for the planners to think of integrated sub-plan in the post Independent Development Planning. So separate quantification of funds meant for Development Planning and accordingly separate allocation from general plan budgets (Five Year Plans) had to be made. Funds are accordingly provided in the 'Component Plans'. But it has been found from the all-India Report of the Welfare of Scheduled Castes Commission that desired results have not been achieved. It is due to absence of honest implementation and sincerity of the implementing agencies. However, efforts of the Government for improvement of the turdy situation have been on. The various District and Sub-divisional Development Boards are being geared up for the purpose. And encouraging reports are said to be received. The burden of this lee-way in progress may be attributed to the half-hearted interest taken by the implementing

agencies and busy political engagements in the States and the India level. It is very sad indeed that the Government finds sometimes no time to discuss the Annual Report of the Commission and the State Authorities are not much interested in giving report of action taken on the recommendation of the Commission. State Political Parliamentary leaders are also not so strong as to make the Authorities hear the report.

IDENTIFICATION OF OCCUPATION :

Now coming to the core problems of the Scheduled Castes occupations including handicrafts adopted on traditionally followed by them arising in connection with their improvement and upgradation for discussion in the present seminar.

The scheduled castes population is not found in large compact blocks like the Scheduled Tribes but are interspersed in small population clusters of villages/hamlets in some areas. This uneven distribution of population renders it difficult to take up any worth while area development schemes or projects, not to speak of any integrated Sub-Plan. This has obviously been illuding the visible economic impact on the scheduled castes people in any piece-meal projects. They have therefore no alternative except to hurl their lots with the general population unlike the tribals. So it has been devised to provide for separate quantification of funds in the General Plans known as the Scheduled Castes Component Plans.

But what is more important than the quantifications of funds is its honest and proper utilisation of the schemes for their welfare. It is here that the snag lies. Any way it has to be followed in line with the All-India Policy of Planning for development of the country as a whole keeping an eye on the well-being of each and every community fitting in the professions traditionally followed by their fore-fathers. In this respect, it is seen that 16 Scheduled Castes of Assam categorised by the Constitution of India as early as in 1950 only 10 Castes practise caste avocations. Of the 16 Scheduled Castes again, all of them do not belong to Assam such as

Bansphor, Jhalo-Malo, Lalbegi, Mahar, Mehtor or Bhangi, Muchi or Richi. Rest of the castes such as Brittial-Bania, Kaibartta, Hira, Namasudra, Patni, Sutradhar, Mali/Bhuimali, Dhoba, Jalkeot mostly live permanently in Assam following their traditional occupations.

AGRICULTURE :

Now to the core problem. India is an agricultural country and Assam is no exception, though small in size and poor in economy. Agriculture is the first and foremost occupation of the Scheduled Castes. But it appears that not more than 10 of the 16 Scheduled Castes are engaged in agriculture. They are Brittial-Bania, Dhopi or Dhoba, Dhuli or Dugla, Hira, Jalkeot, Kaibartta or Jalia, Namasudra, Patni and Sutradhar. They engage themselves in cultivation during the cultivation season keeping other months in other business. But they are proverbially landless. Some of them do not have even land for a residence. It is on record that the Govt. of Assam decided and promised to give some 40 bighas of land for residential sites in the heart of the city of Guwahati and informed the allottees to take possession of the land on a prescribed date. But alas ! the poor scheduled caste people found the land under encroachment and the Government was helpless on political ground to evict the encroachers and put the allottees in possession. This was the fate of the scheduled castes. I was then a Revenue Officer. Production of 5 bighas of cultivable land is not at all sufficient for maintenance of a family. So many of them take to 'Marakia' system of cultivation on half to half harvest share. But this system is also gradually disappearing as the land holders are themselves cultivating their land with the help of seeds, fertiliser, loan for plough etc. from the Agricultural Department. Minimum Needs Programme also help them. Improvement and upgradation depends on the resource of the Scheduled Castes.

The rest may be called non-agriculturists. They are not indigenous to Assam and as such have no scope of acquiring any land for agriculture, even if they wish to convert to agriculture.

They are Bansphor, Lalbegi, Mahara, Mehtor or Bhangi. They are not from Assam but from Bihar, Madras, Andhra or Orissa and are non-agriculturists. They are generally under the employ of Municipal Bodies and small towns. Muchis or Rishis have however taken to their traditional occupation of leather-made things such as shoes and shoe repairing. They generally move from place to place and do their daily business fixing themselves at certain convenient place and return to their hired residence in the evening.

About those in pursuit of agriculture professionally and traditionally, they are limited to the rural areas mostly. Kaibarttas, Banias, Jalkeots, Namasudras, Patnis and Sutradhars are the main cultivators. They can all be identified as agriculturists in a group. Their problems are also similar.

Many of these people are landless - their holdings are limited to 5 bighas per family - the production of which is not sufficient for maintenance of a family. They are also financially extremely weak. They subsidise their maintenance expenditure out of petty fish business. They have no capacity of purchasing agricultural lands which are at the same time very scarce and are not available for purchase. Of the two problems land and ploughing implements, land problem is almost insurmountable. Under advice and co-operation of agricultural experts, some attempts like experimenting on the same piece of land multiple crops in cycling order as may be possible for different seasons for different crops, such as Ahu after harvest of Sali, then Ravi crops, potato, sugarcane, different kinds of cereals etc. But for all these, State help in form of supply of manure, fertiliser, seeds etc. must be available in sufficient quantity. The State Govt. is, of course, offering such help to the genuine cultivators through different Five Year Plans and grow more food campaign by the department. But that can hardly assuage the perennial poverty from which these unfortunate people with uneconomic holding live. Even then, we must be grateful for what the authorities are doing for them. With a spirit of genuine co-operative mentality and sympathetic

experienced officer we may expect many things. The beneficiaries can claim many things in their favour. With a stronger sense of duty and humanism on the part of those at the helm of affairs free of corruption we must have efficient officer at the helm of policy making and implementation. Otherwise nothing more can be expected.

FISHERY :

Next to agriculture comes fishery as an important occupation of the Scheduled Castes in Assam. It is, however, confined amongst the Kaibarttas (Jalias) and Namasudras. Fishery is a traditional occupation of the Kaibarttas, Jhalo-Malos and Namasudras. For Barak Valley Namasudras it is almost a must. Fishery has since been upgraded by the authority by declaring it as an Industry (Small) and this has removed the stigma of a profession of so-called lower order and it has now been favoured by the Caste Hindus as well.

Fishery is being looked after by the Govt. of India also rather in a large scale. Since it is a staple food for a major population of Indians barring some orthodox areas of North India, Govt. of India and the various other States of West Bengal, other North East states and also in some of the western coastal states like Andhra, Maharashtra etc. here fish business is run in a big way. Assam is a deficit state in respect of fish inspite of good potential production and at present Assam is fed by imported fish from the Western India.

Fishermen are to a great extent exploited by the middlemen (Dalals). Government have since taken up a number of schemes for improving their economic conditions and have set up Fishery Development Corporation, Fish Farming Development Agencies and a number of Fishery Co-operative Societies with patronage of the Government. All these welfare institutions are yielding good results. In the direction of welfare efforts towards upgradation of the occupation Government has taken a number of steps. Towards upgradation and improvement of the profession/

occupation Government has established a Fishery College also at Raha in the district of Nowgong (Assam) in order to attract the unemployed fishermen and enthusiastic young boys of other castes to the lucrative profession and business. It will take sometime to produce good results as it is a new venture in the line. 'বাণিজ্যে বসতে লক্ষী'. There is no caste in business. We have seen Brahmin boys selling dried fish in the hostels. Fish is always fish - whether it is served in curry or as fry. It is hoped that our unemployed young boys will come forward ungrudgingly.

Government earns a good deal of revenue by leasing the registered fisheries. No amount appears to have been spent for improvement of these fisheries.

It has been estimated that fishery production resources in Assam are plenty. They are : 1) Rivers and Tributaries - 4500 km. 2) Beel Fisheries - 1 lac hectares 3) Swamps and low lying areas - 20000 hectares 4) Tank and Ponds - 4000 hectares 5) Forest Fisheries - 5000 hectares 6) Small Beels - 1000 hectares 7) Dubis of rivers - 1000 hectares. By tapping these resources and also by excavating the dry big ponds making them worthy of rearing fish can be leased out. There is a saying that 'Fish follows water and Fishermen follow fish'. So by tapping rivulets etc. connected with beels, a good quantity of fish can be collected. But these very valuable suggestions seem to carry no or little attention to the authorities.

There are ample other opportunities to improve fish production provided there is will on the part of Government. This only brings to the fore inaction or neglect for an opportunity to do good to a backward fisherman who can earn his living by such small fishery. Small fishes are sold at Uzan Bazar market at Rs.80/- per kg. Most fishermen have no future.

GOLDSMITHY :

Third in the list of identification comes Goldsmithy. It is such an honourable job I fail to understand why the followers of the profession dealing with most valued metals like gold and silver are

looked down upon by the people. Unlike other professions, this is followed by the Caste Hindus also. The Goldsmiths of Tarajan, a suburb of the city of Jorhat and the Goldsmiths of Hajo in Kamrup, a small town are all Caste Hindus. But why the Brittil-Banias carrying this profession with same materials and same equipment by the same procedure and technique are discriminated ? It is on record that this profession was encouraged even by the Ahom Kings and the Brittil-Bania, Duti Ram Hazarika, a reputed goldsmith and a Bania Historian, author of 'Padya-Buranji' in 1875 was allowed access to the inner apartment of the Ahom Kings and the Queens.

It is a very respectable occupation adopted by the Caste Hindus alike. From time immemorial, goldsmithy remains the chief occupation. It means and denotes making ornaments from Gold and Silver which were very favourite even for the Ahom Queens. The Banias are experts as Silversmiths also. The "Thuria" (ear-pendant), "Loka-paro" (লোকাপার) - Pigeon shaped, 'Barmani' (Golden Beads), filigrees (a kind of ornamental lace work of gold), Minakora ornaments were special quality of high class workmanship. But now alongwith enforcement of Gold Control Act, the Minakora, gold filigrees works and silver-plating industries are on their last legs and requires patronage and encouragement. At one time these old pattern ornaments were not favoured by the richer section of people being obsessed by ultra modernism artificial things. But now things have changed, people are now showing renewed interest in those old pattern things and they have now become very popular, though not to the reach of men of ordinary economy.

Some adroit plannings, this aristocratic handicraft provides enough scope of improvement and upgradation.

POTTERY :

Then comes pottery industry. Taking advantage of the chronic poverty, want of education amongst the Hira youths this pottery business is not making much headway. The industry has

been badly neglected, may be due to political reasons. I mean to say thereby that there are rich and very influential people behind any scheme of improvement of this industry. We see a lot of money is being swept away by big business of Bengal and elsewhere. It is a roaring industry. The Assam Hiras can never cope with non-Assamese industrialists in this respect. It is an urgent case for consideration. It is, therefore, suggested that planning department should immediately take up the matter and steps be taken for inviting expert advice from the specialists in pottery making to make their wares harder than what they are now and also scientific advice in the selection of the clay. It is learnt that the State of Haryana has made considerable progress in the matter and so young and enthusiastic Hira boys may be sent to Haryana to make themselves acquainted with the technique they adopt in pottery industry.

Of the different castes, a good number are related to definite professions. The professional castes are Kaibartta, Hira, Bania and Namasudra. A few castes have, however, given up their traditional occupation and resorted to agricultural and business or contracts. The profession of the Hiras - potteries - is exclusively handicraft. They do not make the pots with the help of the wheel like the Kumars. Only the womenfolk keep themselves busy with the profession, the males carry them to the market and sell them. So it is necessary that big steps are necessary to pick them up from the present stupor and awaken them to realities of life.

We have come almost to the end of identification of profession by some of the scheduled castes people. The professions of the major castes have been identified on the foregoing notes and paragraphs. Unimportant occupations have been left out.

What remains to be identified is 'scavenging', if it can at all be identified and is worth identification. Chambers Dictionary does not define 'scavenger' as one who carries night-soil on the head load. It is exactly meant in practice by this and it is admitted as such in all matters of administrative affairs. I also can not say

definitely that it is a handicraft - an occupation conducted by hand. There is no machine to do this but it is actually so done by hands. Night-soils I find the word 'scavenger' in a book compiled by Shri Bhakta Das, erstwhile Director, Welfare of Plains Tribes and Backward Classes in Assam which is attributed to three scheduled castes Bhangi, Bansphor and Lalbegi none of whom is from Assam but from outside.

These scheduled castes people are employed generally by the Municipalities and big towns for the purpose of carrying night-soil. They do this in trolleys resembling a costermonger's cart drawn by means of machine. But in case of Municipalities which can not afford machine run trolleys, the sweepers have to do the job in their head-loads early in the morning evading notice of the public. This is really a very sad state of affairs and is a standing monument of disgrace for the administration. The profession the Bhangis, Lalbegis and others who are engaged in the most unclean job of carrying night-soil on the head, the most sacred part of the body, hounds the brain, the life of the body itself. It should be the first item in any scheme of development, particularly in respect of the classes erroneously branded as Harijans.

It is, however, heartening that the Central Govt. under the dynamic spirit of the present Prime Minister, Sri Narasimha Rao, a Central Law in the line of Citizens Rights Protection Act to do away with untouchables. The implementation of this Act had done something, though it has a long way to go. Similarly law should be enacted to abolish scavenging. It is understood that Municipalities of Assam are striving to do away with service latrine which is at the rock-bottom of the evils. Once this is implemented with the necessary force, I think, it will be not long to see the problem solved. What is necessary is the determined will on the part of the authorities. The plea of want of finance is not the thing but want of sincerity.

I also suggest that the epithet 'HARIJAN' attached to a certain section of scheduled castes doing unclean job should be done away with. It is a misnomer.

Any way, scavenging is an occupation of the scheduled castes (though for a section only) and in view of the above discussion, I refrain from identifying this occupation which is, at any rate, not a handicraft.

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AMONG SCHEDULED CASTE POPULATION OF ASSAM

Dr. R. C. Das*

Environmental awareness is a global concern to-day. Environment-problem on this Biosphere is now considered as one of the deciding factors in relation to 'existence' or 'extinction' of the modern human civilisation on earth. Because of its great importance, environment-consciousness has been recognised as an essential modern 'Value' to be inculcated in the personality of each and every citizen of to-day's modern world society.

The term 'environment' under the present context, has much wider connotation compared to its literal meaning. It has, now, global implications and covers all elements constituting earth's 'Biosphere'. Now, the thinkers and the conscientious citizens of the world society consider the 'unwise and irrational' destruction of earth's Biosphere and its eco-balance system as one of the major and catastrophic human-created hazard that may lead to annihilation of human civilisation on this globe in this 'last age of man'.

The techno-scientific adventures carried on by men, the 'wise and rational beings', on the natural situations of earth's surface resulting in devastating mutilations on earth's crust; in search of minerals and energy resources; destruction of geo-natural settings of the land and water masses for satisfaction of ever-increasing greed of man; unwanted surgery of the hills and plains in the name of scientific experimentation; inhuman denudation of the forest resources which helped regulation of climate, provided shelter-materials and also acted as a depollution agent; unrestrained destruction of innumerable species of animals and birds of nature; reckless pollution of air,

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land, water and food-crops by man, machinery and chemicals etc. and all other destructive activities of modern man, have not only jeopardised the position of our planet Earth but have also endangered the survival of all living species by poisoning the Biosphere and destroying the ecological balance.

To add to the above, there is another more perilous problem of the man-made epidemic of 'population explosion'. The problem of population explosion is directly related to environmental hazards. This problem is more serious and more acute among the under-developed, illiterate and socio-economically and culturally backward population groups. Rapid population growth creates problems in many other spheres of human activities; apart from creating economic and socio-political problems, it creates problems of provision of land and accommodation; provision for education and other social welfare measures including health and hygiene aspects; increase in environmental pollution; increase in consumption of natural resources including energy sources as well as industrial products and provision of drinking water etc. Further, the growing population also seriously disturb the natural eco-system thereby adversely affecting the animal and plant kingdom. The thinkers of the world believe that this man-created suicidal act alone can become the sole cause of annihilation of the modern human civilisation on earth.

The problem of environmental hazard is not only the problem of national and international concern but also, it affects the community and small group population anywhere on the surface of earth. Now, the problem of environmental hazard including the pollution of air, water and soil, etc. are matters of 'appreciation and realisation' of their fatal consequences for humanity. And understanding, appreciation and realisation are mental activities. The idea has got to be infused and permeated in the socio-cultural environment for inculcation of the value of environment-consciousness among the people.

Now, as regards the extent and gravity of the problem

among the people of the scheduled caste communities, it would, naturally warrant a study of the existing socio-cultural milieu within these communities. As an exploited, neglected, deprived, debased and under-privileged community for thousands of years within the wider Hindu society, the scheduled caste people, in general, got used to living as an inferior and down-trodden groups with all the uncongenial and unhealthy socio-cultural norms and traditions, ungraceful behaviour patterns, tabooed customs, age-old superstitions, and innumerable bad habits and beliefs etc. Such situations have, with their ignorance of many things, led them to accept the way of life they were living. They remained ignorant of whatever goes on in the outside world. The stagnancy consequently led them to maintain a sickly attitude of mind keeping themselves satisfied with the petty affairs of everyday life, old beliefs, traditions and practices etc. within the group, for generations after generations. The scheduled caste people got used to living in isolation from the mainstream of the wider society. As such, the broader and the brighter world remained outside their horizon. The life pattern and the mental attitudes of the people of the community living as a faithfully adhered traditional society, became so moulded as to prevent infusion of broader ideas, modern way of living and thinking, decent and cultured behaviour, scientific temperament, hygienic living or anything good that could make them realise the values of better living, better thinking and better acting. Such a state of affairs, can obviously, never be conducive for development of appreciative attitude towards modern value system like being cognisant of environmental hazards, etc.

The scheduled caste people, at large, remained so bogged down in the quagmire of the prevailing unhealthy socio-cultural environment that they felt satisfied with where they were and never bothered to desire for anything developmental, progressive, scientific, brighter, better and wider. The overall situations under which they lived and moved, naturally had a languid effect on their minds and ultimately led to develop a

sense of inferiority complex. In fact, this social master sentiment of 'inferiority complex' generated as a consequence of long socio-economic and cultural deprivations, has had greater side effects on the minds of the scheduled caste people. It shaped their attitudinal inclinations to remain blind to the brightness outside their community-world. It had not only closed the door for communications with the people of the other developed communities in the wider society but also discouraged development of the sense courage, independence, enterprise, excellence or adventure etc., the qualities so essential for progress and to realise the value of modern living. As we know, modern society persists on understanding and reason. Both these faculties deplorably lack among S/C population.

Under such a situation, it would naturally be a folly to expect among the scheduled caste people, inculcation of such modern values like environmental consciousness, hygienic and pollution-free living, maintenance of eco-balance, preservation of natural resources, population limitation etc. Usually, in Assam, the scheduled caste population live in clusters centred around a 'Namghar' or prayer house. They are sincerely religious-minded and highly God-fearing people. They are emotionally and instinctively devoted to the Vaishnavite faith, the Namghar and the Sankarite culture. As usual, the principles of the faith they follow, demand observance of certain old and traditional personal and social norms which culminate into some unavoidable set of individual and social habits and customs. Many of such outmoded and inherited norms have not only become out of use, unfit and obsolete for the current age but also go contrary to many of the values of the modern scientific world.

As already mentioned, realisation and appreciation of the value of environmental awareness warrant congenial mental make-up of the population which they lack and that has got to be developed among the people of scheduled castes, specially in the rural areas, through proper awareness education for generating environment-consciousness. The people of

scheduled castes of this State, appears to have learnt to accept and live with the environmental hazards and even now the situation continues in majority of rural habitations. Visit to any of the rural scheduled caste habitations in this State will vouch for my above statement. To cite an instance of a suburban scheduled caste habitation that I know for more than twenty years, where I observed the population to have increased more than three times the original strength during the period. Obviously, the same area would be inadequate for the expanded population from the point of view of space, accommodation and environmental health and sanitation. But it was seen that all the people with the added population continued to live in the same habitation campus without any expansion of its geographical contours. Each primary family reared and accommodated the expanding families in the same plot of land comprising of all the married sons with families and even the married grandsons and families as well as the widowed daughters, if any, by either partitioning the original house into different compartments or by erecting additional huts around the original house within the same plot of land. One could easily imagine the condition of health, hygiene and sanitation of the habitation. No additional toilets or drains or sewage disposal system are thought of. They use the little open space available in the foreyard or backyard as bathrooms. There is no space for growing any kitchen garden and any trees that might have been planted by the original nuclear family, is cut down to make space for additional accommodation. Nobody bothers about environmental problems.

The brief dialogue above is only an introductory or prefatory remarks on the existing position of S/C people with regard to the environmental problems. It is only 'Symptomatic' description; suggestions for 'Ameliorative' efforts or 'Remedial Measure' to this effect would warrant an 'a-priori' treatment on the 'Diagnosis of Causes' which are both extrinsic as well as intrinsic. And that will constitute a different topic of discussion.

A DIACHRONIC STUDY OF CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THREE KAIBARTA VILLAGES OF ASSAM

Dr. K. C. Mahanta*

It was in the Vedic times in India that functional specialization came to be treated as a means of organising the caste-system. One such caste namely, Kaibartta has since ancient Vedic times remained the exclusive monopoly of a group of people who go by the name of the caste itself. Practice of caste-ordained occupation, namely, fishing by any non-Kaibartta group of people is barred by tradition. It is the people of the Kaibartta caste alone who could practise fishing for sale as a profession. Exclusive professional right since time immemorial exercised by a select group of people of the society at large over a natural product like fish could naturally lead to creation of vested interest with regard to the professionals, namely, the Kaibarttas. The mass non-Kaibartta people of Assam also practise fishing, but only for domestic consumption and not as an occupational enterprise. Empirical evidence establishes beyond doubt that only a very small section of the total fish consumers of Assam practises fishing for domestic consumption. Further fishing is an occupation needing very little investment for improving the fish breed or promoting the trade. What is most needed is manual painstaking labour and perseverance and ingenuity. Fishes are exclusively natural product requiring no feeding or nourishment or any other treatment whatsoever. Obviously, considering the large number of non-self-producing fish-consumers, occupational fishing in Assam is a roaring business that is confined in the Kaibarttas as a community exclusively. The non-chalant occupational practice in fishing ever

since Vedic times could have had created an outstanding community in this specific occupational field. In other words, the Kaibarttas on account of enjoying exclusive unchallenged occupational right over fishing in the society ought to have come out as a socio-culturally prominent, dominant and economically sound and affluent community. This is a theoretical perspective anticipating a high degree of socio-economic prominence of the Kaibarttas in the society at large. Against this very reasonable expectation in the real perspective we visualize a very dismal pathetic socio-economic status of the fishermen as a whole. The plight of the Kaibarttas in almost all regions of Assam beggars description. Age-old economic backwardness has crippled the life of the Kaibarttas. Living from hand to mouth is a community feature among the Kaibarttas of Assam as a whole. Compared to the life-pattern of most non-Kaibartta caste communities of Assam, one could well have a vivid picture of miseries and wretchedness in the living standard of the Kaibarttas. The overall dismal picture of the people's life could well be gauged from a systematic study of the Kaibarttas' dwelling houses. In fact the prevailing living house-type could well be taken as a yard-stick for understanding the economic status of the Kaibarttas of three Kaibartta villages under the purview of the present paper. Another outstanding social aspect, viz, the drop out rate at the primary level of schooling can serve as another yard-stick of the socio-economic life of the Kaibarttas. An increase in the family economic growth rate is inversely related to the rate of drop out. In fact the study of house type and the rate of drop out in the Kaibartta villages taken as a part of the ethnographic study of the three Kaibartta villages indicate changes. The villages studied were (1) Monpur of South Kamrup district (2) Chakamara Kaibartta Gaon of Dhemaji district and (3) Kumarikata of Lakhimpur district. A diachronic or re-study over a time-span of two decades or so could well indicate the changes, signifying either little development or stability-cum-retrogression. Changes have occurred in respect of the two above mentioned features, viz. house type and rate of drop out. The study has revealed that the changes are hardly significant, that is to say, that the changes indicate very little improvement in the economic status of the

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people.

The three villages named above are basically Kaibartta villages. The ethnographer studied these villages intensively in 1973 and 1974. The population recorded was as follows :

Monpur in 1974	386
Chakamara Kaibartta Gaon in 1973	472
Kumarikata in 1976	

The ethnographer also noted, among many other village features, the house type and the rates of drop out as given below :

TABLE - I

Showing house categories in 1973-74 and 1993-94

House Categories	Monpur		Chakamara Kaibartta Gaon		Kumarikata	
	73-74	93-94	73-74	93-94	1976	1994
1. Thatch-bamboo	73 (82.02)	61 (60.39)	59 (83.09)	46 (64.79)	105 (73.94)	86 (63.24)
2. Bamboo-C.I. sheet	5 (5.61)	12 (11.88)	2 (2.81)	7 (9.85)	9 (6.33)	16 (11.76)
3. Wooden post-Thatch	8 (8.99)	13 (12.87)	7 (9.85)	3 (4.22)	2 (1.41)	5 (3.67)
4. Wooden post C.I. sheet	3 (3.37)	5 (4.95)	3 (4.22)	8 (11.26)	12 (8.45)	8 (5.88)
5. Thatch-bamboo house with cement floor	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	3 (2.11)	5 (3.67)
6. Partly R.C.C.	Nil	6 (5.94)	Nil	3 (4.22)	5 (3.52)	7 (5.15)
7. Modern wooden post with C.I. sheet roofing and cement floor	Nil	4 (3.96)	Nil	4 (5.63)	6 (4.23)	9 (6.61)
Total	89	101	71	71	142	136

(Figures in the bracket indicate percentage of house categories)

TABLE - II

Showing drop out rates in 1973-74 and 1993-94

	Monpur	Chakamara Kaibartta Gaon	Kumarikata
Enrolment in 1968-69	326	272	285
Drop out in 1973-74	286 (87.73%)	192 (70.58%)	218 (76.49%)
Enrolment in 1988-89	856	656	634
Drop out in 1993-94	464 (54.20%)	388 (59.15%)	412 (64.98%)

(Figures in the bracket indicate percentage of drop out)

We may note marginal improvement in the dwelling house type category at all the three villages. We may still note, over a period of two decades since 1973-74, larger number of 'thatch' and 'bamboo' houses than other categories of house type in each of the villages.

Similarly, the factor of drop out also does not present any brightening picture. The frequency of drop out in all the three villages under study in 1993-94 is quite substantially high, though the figures in each case indicate a slight improvement over the last two decades or so.

SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF HEALTH IN A SCHEDULED CASTE VILLAGE

Dr. Birinchi Kr. Medhi*

ABSTRACT :

Different methods to cure diseases have been evolved through intuitive and observational experiences. Each culture has its notion of health and has various methods to cope with the diseases which often referred to as 'health culture'. This paper is a modest appraisal of 'health culture' of a scheduled caste community, viz. the Kaibartas of Nij Pukhuripar village of Nagaon district, Assam. Data have been collected on various aspects like causes of disease--earthly agencies or supernatural powers, symptoms, intensity, effected area or organ of human body, role of qualified physicians and village quacks, etc.

INTRODUCTION :

Health is one of the principal asset of every human being. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as 'A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity'. In different parts of the world man devises numerous mechanisms for ensuring health and eliminating disease. The modern medical science which developed in the West did not create any obstacle in socio-cultural dimensions of the health because it is developed as a social science. Allopathic medicine became popular in the later part of the nineteenth century and from then it started causing flaccidity in the interest of socio-cultural importance of health. However, in recent years it has become a focal point of study by both medical and social scientists.

Health and disease are indispensibly related to bio-cultural spectrum of a community in a particular environment. Both in

simple and traditional societies these traits are deeply rooted in socio-cultural matrix. Medical history of man can only be understood through an indepth study of the different socio-cultural systems of human beings. The concepts of disease and health are basically biological. But as these are closely connected with socio-cultural circumstances, often these are culturally comprehended. Each and every culture has their own concept of health and coping with diseases which are often referred to as 'health culture'. In the pristine societies the people believe that evil spirits, black magic, breach of the taboos, witchcraft, sorcery, etc. might lead a person to illness. Therefore, the pattern of behaviour and belief of the people relating to the health and disease to be accounted for the study of the health.

THE LOCALE :

In the light of the above an attempt has been made to examine the 'health culture' of a Kaibarta village of Assam. The village Nij Pukhuripar is situated in the Barapujia mauza in the Nagaon district of Assam. It is a homogeneous village inhabited by 77 households of Kaibarta people. The Kaibarta is a scheduled caste of Assam; their traditional occupation is fishing. The total population of the village is 458 of which 234 are male and 224 are female. The percentage of the literate persons in the village is very low. The villagers profess the Vaishnavism preached by the great Assamese saint Srimanta Sankardeva. All the villagers are divided into three *khels*. A *khel* is social division of rural Assam the members of which can eat and drink together and have the obligation to help a fellow member in his crises. The names of the *khels* are Barkhel, Sarukhel and Kachulikhel composed of 53, 13 and 11 households respectively. The three *khels* have three *namghars* (community prayer house) for their everyday and occasional worship. It is interesting to note that although the people are traditionally fishermen, the villagers fish only for their own consumption; agriculture is the mainstay of their economy.

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THE DWELLING :

The village Nij Pukhuripar is thickly populated. A typical Kaibarta residential unit comprises a cluster of huts. Different huts are used for different purposes. The huts are simple rectangular structures. Most of the huts are *Kachha* made of wood, bamboo, thatch, cane, reed, mud, etc. The huts 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. There are usually two doors and two windows in a dwelling house. There are also a few Assam type houses in the village. The courtyard is an integral part of the dwelling unit. Most of the mundane activities are carried out on the courtyard.

One homestead is separated from the other by a ditch or a dam surrounding which a fence of split bamboo is constructed. Generally the homesteads are surrounded by bamboo groves, plantain clumps, areca nuts and other plants. Almost all the houses have one or more ditch both in front and back of the dwelling house. Usually these ditches are dug to raise the plinth of the houses. The ditches are used to throw out household and horticultural debris. During rainy season these ditches become full with deep green water spreading stinking odour and serve as breeding ground for mosquitoes.

FOOD AND DRINK :

Boiled rice is the staple food of the people. They are non-vegetarian and take curries of fish, meat and egg along with rice. Drinking tea is an integral part of the Assamese food habit. The Kaibartas of Nij Pukhuripar also take tea regularly at least four times a day. Tea is generally taken along with homemade cakes, or biscuits purchased from the nearby markets. Betel-nut is taken by almost all the villagers irrespective of age and sex. Betel-nut is taken with betelvine leaf with a pinch of lime and with or without a bit of tobacco. Some of the villagers *chew* tobacco regularly. Smoking of bidi or cigarette is very common among the adult

males. Only a few males drink country liquor regularly in the nearby tribal villages and that they do secretly.

The villagers are not aware of the fact that protein mineral, fat, carbohydrate, etc. which are necessary for the growth of the human body can be acquired from the locally available common edibles if these are cooked scientifically. However, they know that an ailing person has to take special food to regain his or her health. They offer special food to a parturient mother or to a woman after the birth of a child. Curries of plantain flower, arum stems cooked with black pepper, leaves of *bhedailata* (*Herpestis monnieri*), etc. are given to a woman in post-natal period. They believe if the curry of bottle gourd is given to a woman in this period flow and amount of her breast milk becomes sufficient. There are also a few food taboos in pre and post-natal periods for a woman. A man suffering from pox has to refrain from non-vegetarian diet. Spicy food is not given to a patient of dysentery. Such patient is given loosely cooked rice along with a curry of papaya, *kanch kal* (*Musa sanguinea*), Indian pennywort, etc. During the summer season bitter dishes are prepared from the flower of *bakha* (*Adhatada vasica*) or night jasmine (*Nyctanthes orboristis*), leaves of *neem* (*Media azadirachta*) or *doron* (*Lucus linifolia*), bitter gourd, seedlings or dry leaves of jute, etc. to get rid of worms. Occasional fasting is part and parcel of the villagers' life. In certain auspicious and ritual day the adult members of the village abstain from taking rice. According to them occasional fasting provides extra strength and stamina to the human body.

HYGIENE AND SANITATION :

Individual hygiene and methods of sanitation play a key role in the health status of a society. Due to the minimum numbers of doors and windows a Kaibarta house is devoid of sufficient light and air. The surrounding trees make the houses dark and damp. Cow-dung is invariably deposited in front of the homestead for the facility to carry it from there to the agricultural

field. During monsoon stinking odour emits all over the homestead from the heap of cow-dung. Most of the families 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. There is no proper drainage in the village. House sullage water is accumulated adjacent to the houses wherefrom offensive smell generates. The domesticated duck ply over such water and they move freely in the homestead and sometimes even enter into the dwelling house and kitchen. The Government has provided two tubewells and four ringwells to the villagers. Some of the families have their own tubewells. The poorer section of the villagers generally fetch water for household use from their own *kachha wells*. The villagers in general do not use any purant to purify the well water.

The Kaibartas of Nij Pukhuripar have general concept of personal cleanliness. All the villagers take bath at least once a day regularly. The garbs of the villagers can be said as clean. Some of them do not trim their nails regularly. The utensils used by the villagers are very clean but in some of the households the clothes used in bed are not washed regularly.

BELIEFS AND PROPITIATION :

The villagers believe that man, evil spirits and deities can cast disease to human beings. For avoiding such situations they strictly observe some pristine taboos. If a person is smitten with pox, the villagers never seek the help of a physician. Instead they propitiate the goddess Ai Bhagabati, more commonly known as Ai, who is believed to be the goddess of pox. They also believe in evil eye. A baby under the influence of evil eye may be cured by uttering spells or by washing with the ritually sanctified water given by the village quack. During pre and post-natal periods if a woman suffers from severe headache, vomiting, stomach pain, etc. they take the help of the village quack. Barrenness is thought to be the fault of a woman. They believe that a woman becomes barren if she resorts to premarital sex, particularly incestuous relation. A quack expert in treating barrenness assumes to cure

such woman uttering spells or providing dol-phohati (knotted thread charged with magical power) and herbal medicine.

The villagers believe in witchcraft and sorcery. According to them an enemy can cause harm to person with the help of a village quack. To refrain the enemy from doing so some people, especially the babies are made to tie the amulets or *dol-phohatiar* around the necks or arms. The people have a firm belief that if a person commits a serious guilt without the knowledge of the fellow villagers, if he or she suffers from a prolonged struggling in the death bed and only after confessing the guilt he or she can die peacefully.

DISEASE AND TREATMENT :

The common ailments of the people of Nij Pukhuripar are dysentery, fever, headache, itches, malaria, pain in different parts of the body, piles, pox, ringworms, scabies, tooth ache, troubles from round and thread worm, vomiting, etc. Most of the villagers know nothing about the diseases like AIDS, colour blindness, hypertension, gonorrhoea, spondylytes, syphilis, tetanus and tape worms. For the treatment of disease they parallelly depend on physicians as well as on archaic medicinal practices. If a man suffers from cold and cough, headache, piles, pox, skin disease, stomach disorder, tooth ache, troubles of worms, vomiting, etc. they do not approach a qualified physician. Some traditionally known herbal medicines are used to cure such diseases. In case of pox, goddess Ai Bhagabati is appeased to get rid of the ailment.

The villagers have firm belief that some of the diseases including jaundice can be well treated by a village quack. The quack puts a garland made of coctain plant around the head of the person suffering from jaundice. Inspite of repeated request of this investigator the quack did not disclose the identity of the plant. He believes that if he discloses the name of the plant, the magical power to cure jaundice will be vanished from him. The present investigator had observed curiously that the garland, which at initial stage was just about the girth of the head,

increases in circumference and gradually slips down from the head to the feet through the body. It is believed that as soon as the garland is thrown out, the patient is fully recovered from jaundice. Snake bite is also treated by a quack. The village quack uses various vegetative and other objects to cure different diseases. It should be noted here that the educated section of the villagers also take occasional help from a quack in case of the diseases which are believed to be caused by supernatural powers.

Usually a child birth takes place in the dwelling house attended by experienced village women. If the situation becomes critical only then they seek the help of a doctor. According to them a deformed baby is the result of the breach of the pristine taboos by the parents. The umbilical chord is invariably cut by a split bamboo blade. Most of the villagers are not aware of the immunization programme of the children.

Small cuts, minor burnings, stings by honey bee, black bee, wasp, etc. are treated at home. In case of sprain, hot turmeric paste is applied over the affected part. Fractures of bone resulting from accidents and cases of poisoning is immediately referred to qualified physicians. In the diseases like malaria, typhoid, etc., also they seek the help of doctor. During the recent past the villagers had not experienced any epidemic.

Only a few people of the village have adopted the measures of family planning. A very small number of the village males use condoms. Use of Copper-T, loop or oral pills have not resorted by any woman. There is also no case of either vasectomy or tubectomy in the village.

HERBAL MEDICINE :

The villagers have an elaborate knowledge of the medicinal plants and their uses to cure various ailments. This has been continuing in their society from the remote past. From the Ayurvedic point of view also their knowledge on medicinal values of different plants can be said as adequate (Sarma : 1978).

Rather than giving an exhaustive list of medicinal plants used by the villagers, let us consider a few of them and some of their interesting sidelines :

1. Leaves of guava and pineapple to cure worms of the babies.
2. Leaves, stems and roots of *sengeri tenga* (*Oxalis cornicalata*) in blood dysentery and prolapse of rectum.
3. Powder of *amlakhi* (*Phyllanthus emblica*), *bhomora* (*Terminalia belerica*) and *silikha* (*Terminalia citrina*) in constipation.
4. Leaves of *neem* (*Media azadirachta*) in skin diseases.
5. Baked unripe pomegranate in diarrhoea.
6. Leaves of sweet basil (*Ocimum sanctum*) in cough, malaria and pneumonia.
7. Leaves of *doron* (*Lucus linifolia*) in malaria and dropsy.
8. Leaves of lemon (*Citrus medica-var*) in constipation, vomiting and round worm.
9. Leaves of *pachatia* (*Vitex nequnde*) in muscle pain.
10. *Titaphul* or *bahka* (*Justicia adhatoda*) leaves in cold and cough, flowers in worms.
11. Wood apple (*Aegele marmelos*) : ripe fruit in constipation and baked unripe fruit in dysentery.
12. *bhedailata* (*Echiles frutescene*) leaves in dysentery.
13. Indian penny wort (*Hydrocotyle asiatica*) the whole plant including the roots in dysentery.
14. Leaves and flowers of night jasmine (*Nyctanthes arborescens*) in worms.
15. Leaves of *siju* (*Euphorbia*) in cough and piles.
16. Turmeric rhizome : hot paste in sprain, juice in worms.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION :

The Kaibartas of the village Nij Pukhuripar parallelly depend on pristine as well as modern systems of treatment to cure the ailments. In the case of a disease believed to be caused by a supernatural power, they seek the help of a village quack.

All the villagers invariably take the help of a quack in such situations. The educated section of the villagers are also not able to wane up the dependence on quack on such situations. Some of the ailments like cold and cough, minor cuts and burns, dysentery, ring worms, etc. are at first treated at home with the help of traditional medicine. However, in some diseases like malaria, typhoid, etc. they immediately take physician's help. The village quack is the integral part of the 'health culture' of the Kaibartas of the village. He provides herbal medicines, amulets, etc. and utters spells to cure some of the diseases. Especially if a person suffers from snake bite or evil eye he or she invariably depends on the quack.

The villagers believe that pox can be cured through the propitiation of the goddess Ai Bhagawati, i.e. the goddess of pox. Occasional household and community rituals are arranged by the people to appease the God to get rid of the various ailments. They also believe in black magic, witchcraft and sorcery.

The villagers in general can be said as clean. However, due to the lack of proper drainage they may suffer from different diseases. During the rainy season most of the villagers suffer from cold and cough, dysentery, malaria, typhoid etc. The habit of defecating in the nearby jungles or in the fields is also responsible for spreading various diseases. Due to the lack of proper knowledge about the life cycle of the worms the villagers become the victims of various worms. They know that a good number of diseases are spread by house flies and mosquitoes. They generally cover their food and use mosquito curtains to avoid the menace of the flies and mosquitoes. But the heaps of cow-dung and debris and the filthy ditches in front and back of the dwellings offer luxuriant breeding grounds to the flies and mosquitoes.

The villagers are aware of the fact that dirty water is one of the major causes of various diseases. Yet some of the villagers, especially the poorer section, use the water from *kachha* wells which may cause many ailments. The villagers never use any

purant to purify their well water. They have in dearth of the knowledge of food value and scientific processing of the food. However, they know that special food should be given to a patient, especially to a woman in pre and post-natal periods to recover his or her strength. They have an adequate idea of herbal medicine but are ignorant about the course of an allopathic medicine. According to the advice of a physician an ailing villager may start to take medicine, but after taking two or three doses if he feels better then he stops taking the rest of the medicine.

Irregular menstruation is not considered as a serious disorder by a village woman. In such case a woman takes rest for a day or two and does not seek advice of a doctor. Abortion is not common among them. If a woman becomes pregnant when she is nourishing another baby, only then she may think for an abortion. In such situation the quack is called into meet the crisis. The quack uses herbal medicine for abortion. There are some instances of death of the parturient mother during the process of abortion by the quack. The women in general hide their gynecological diseases.

Only a few males of the village accepted condoms for family planning. The other devices of family planning are not popular among the villagers. They are also not aware of the immunization programme of the children. Surprisingly there are not a single instance of polio or hooping cough among the children of the village.

The Kaibartas of Nij Pukhuripar have their own concept of health, disease and curative measures. Some of these are inherited from their fore-fathers while the others are gained through different agencies like education, weekly market, health organisation, mass media, etc.

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A FUTURISTIC STUDY ON THE POLLUTION CONTROL AND PROSPECT OF HATCHERY IN A KOIBARTA VILLAGE : A CASE STUDY OF NATUN GAON IN THE DISTRICT OF DIBRUGARH, ASSAM

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Dr. D. Doley***

INTRODUCTION :

Under the broad fold of Scheduled Castes of Assam the Koibartas are also included and percentage wise they constituted 35.30% of the total population of the Scheduled Castes of the State of Assam as per 1971 Census (Dev & Lahiri, c 1975). The Koibartas as a caste was in all probability carved out a place in the caste scenario of Assam well back in the early part of the 12th century A.D. and racially they belong to Dravidian stock (Majumdar, 1989). Though it may be polemic yet it can be stated that the first Jati formation started with these Koibartas in this land of diverse races, cultures, jatis and that is Assam, (Majumdar, 1989). Occupation wise the Koibartas of Assam - whose population are distributed all over Assam and more particularly from Dhubri to Sadiya of the Brahmaputra valley of the State of Assam - over the centuries were mainly resorted to fishing and bartered the same for other goods like foodstuffs and other household goods and with the emergence of money economy they started selling the fish and thus earned their livelihood. Time passed by and the exogenous factors like modernization affected the lifestyles of the Koibartas and the reflections of the same could be visible in the various facets of their life more prominently in the field of education. As per 1971 Census the literacy

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percentage of the Koibartas was 30.38% (Das, 1986 : 27). Presently also the Koibartas of Assam, are treading the path of modernity but their pace is becoming slow as the land man ratio of their village settings is posing as a great obstacle and the concomitant problems like pollution by organic wastes, absence of proper planning of landscape management of their village settings all over Assam and more particularly non-availability of high lands for spatial distribution of the households are cropping up. In most of the Koibarta villages of Assam congested households due to the non-availability of more lands are seen and this scenario is posing as a great threat to them more specially from the pollution point of view. In this paper an attempt is made how pollution caused by the organic wastes in a village setting exclusively inhabited by the Koibartas could be prevented and how these wastes could be used as a prime source for producing biogas which in turn could be used to run a diesel pump-cum-generator for running a fish hatchery (Chinese model of fish hatchery) and to provide electric powers to lighten the street lights and pumping out the waters from water-logging areas of the households of the village setting - Natun Gaon of the district of Dibrugarh.

To describe the problems of pollution and their effective management a prognostic model is followed as under :

Present scenario of the village setting

Crisis of the present scenario

Advantages of the present scenario

Future scenario

PRESENT SCENARIO OF THE VILLAGE SETTING

The village Natun Gaon is inhabited exclusively by the people of Koibarta caste and is situated at a distance of 4 kms. away from Dibrugarh City on the southern side. The very word Natun which is an Assamese word refers new and it was stated by the village elders during the time of conducting the field surveys by the present authors of this paper that well back in the year 1954, 25 Nos. of Koibarta families of Mohanaghat area (now the place is

outside the embankment of the river Brahmaputra and the place of the habitation of these families is criss crossed by the turbulent creeks of the river) were effected by the heavy erosion and hence the district administration rehabilitated these 25 Nos. of families in the present site. Thenceforth the village came to be known as Natun Gaon. The village is situated on the government land and uptil now (as the villagers reported) no villager is having any Myadi patta or Aksona patta of his/her own despite the repeated request made by the villagers as a whole to the district administration. The village is bounded on the east by Chiring Gaon, west by National High Way No.37, north by Laluka Gaon and south by Kumaranichiga Gaon. There are 127 Nos. of households at present in the village and the total population upto 19.9.94 was 2534 Nos. By seeing the population numbers vis-a-vis the availability of the households in the setting one can easily imagine the gravity of the land man ratio from the human habitation point of view. The village is situated in a west easterly prolonged way and the total length of the village is half kilometre while the breadth is 300 metres. There are more female population in the village and as reported the sex ratio is 2 : 3 i.e. two males against three females. There are 1175 Nos. of population of both the sexes in the village who are within the active age group i.e. 20-55 years. Regarding the availability of the degree holders of the formal education it has been found that presently in the studied village setting there is only one person who holds M.A. degree in Political Science and also in Assamese. No other M.A., M.Sc. and M.Com. degree holders are found available in the setting. There are 20 Nos. of B.A. degree holders-however all belonging to male group - found in the setting. Similarly, there are 2 Nos. of B.Com. degree holders - both are belonging to male group - found in this village setting. It is found that no degree holders of the science stream are available in the setting.

Regarding the availability of the students who are continuing formal education at different levels, it has been found that there are 21 Nos. of students studying at the Degree level

(Arts stream) and out of which 5 Nos. are female students. At Higher Secondary level there are 59 Nos. of students studying in the Arts stream and out of which 38 Nos. of boys and 21 Nos. of girls are found available. At High School level 176 Nos. of students are found studying at the various levels of high school classes and out of which 86 Nos. of girls are found studying in the various classes. There are 140 Nos. primary school going students and out of which there are 79 Nos. of students belonging to male group and rest are of female group. Apart from the availability of the different students in the village setting studying at various levels of formal education, it has also been found that there are 20 Nos. of male students studying in the English Medium schools available in the City. All the students except the primary level students are the daily commuters to the City and studying in various educational institutions like colleges, schools, etc.

In this village setting from the occupational point of view it has been found that there are number of people engaged in different occupations which include salaried occupations of state govt., central govt. and autonomous bodies etc. There is only one person (male) who is an officer in the University of Dibrugarh. In the clerical category 11 Nos. of persons (10 Nos. of male and 1 No. of female) found available in this village setting who are working in the state govt., central govt. departments, autonomous bodies.

Regarding the availability of the persons engaged in vocational trade, it has been found that there are 55 Nos. of persons (all males) who are working in the vehicle repairing garages, fabrication workshops in Dibrugarh City and they are the daily commuters. These persons are in the active age group of 20 - 55 years. Even in the village there are 3 Nos. of vehicle repairing garages facing towards N.H. 37 and the owners are from the village itself. Interestingly it has also been found during the time of field survey that not a single person of the active age group as stated above are not remaining unemployed and all are earning income by working in various capacities and also in various

organizations as mentioned above. There are 10 Nos. of grocery shop owners in the village out of which 9 Nos. are males and 1 No. female and they are running well the same as observed by the authors during the field survey. There are 55 Nos. of male persons who are engaging themselves as retail seller of the fishes coming from outside Assam.

CRISIS OF THE PRESENT SCENARIO

During the survey, it has been found that the village is having number of problems. However, as this paper is concentrating only on pollution management and as such attention was focussed only on the pollution problems faced by the village community.

First, there are a few sanitary latrines in the village owned by a few households and the rest are having katcha latrines and some are not even having the katcha latrines and going to nearby forests to attend their natural call. Non availability of the sanitary latrines and availability of katcha latrines in a congested environment of the village as depicted above is posing as a major crisis in the village setting. Because the disease causing pathogens are finding suitable sources for increasing their numbers in the katcha latrines and also in open places like forests etc. where human excreta are found.

Secondly, disposal of organic wastes of the kitchen and others like cow-dung here in this village setting only 41 Nos. of cattle heads are found and all the people are not the cultivators and except a few others are earning their livelihood by engaging themselves in different occupations is posing as a major problem in the village. Filthy smells from the garbage dumps - which are scatteredly found - are experiencing, rather inhaling by the villagers of the rotten garbages. As reported by the villagers that in the village setting the people are suffering from dysentery, diarrhoea, fever, infections etc. and by seeing the atmosphere (physical) the authors are of the opinion that environment pollution is posing as a great threat to the community life of the village. It

has also been estimated that almost one quintal of kitchen wastes is becoming available every day in the village setting. So one can imagine how serious problem causing by the garbages in the village community life which is purely of physical in nature.

Thirdly, in the village setting it has been found that there is no proper drainage facilities or in other words it can categorically be stated here that there is no drainage facility to drain out the logged water of the compounds of the households even after a light shower; not to speak of heavy down-pour. The authors notice in the time of the field survey that waters are logging in the courtyards of the many households and these are mixing with the garbage dumps. As such this is also becoming a major environment pollution problem.

ADVANTAGES OF THE PRESENT SCENARIO

The village is a rurbanized one. It has infrastructural facilities like the availability of metalled road (approach road) having half kilometer length connecting the village with the National Highway No.37. The village is electrified and it has been noticed except few, other households are electrified. The village is having a good group of educated manpower - formal as well vocational (vocational in the sense that the persons gathered the same through experience accumulated in different industrial premises) - and most importantly it has been noticed by the authors that wave of modernity is sweeping over the village setting and effecting the villagers. They are trying to come out from the mooring of the traditional lives and in the discourse it could be observed that quite a large number of people are trying to venture into new areas if opportunity could be provided to them. Various social taboos are gradually disappearing as observed by the authors during the discourse with the number of villagers during the field survey and more specially the young generation of the people who are becoming educated are trying to hold a new view of life and trying to embark on the new fields of occupations, business etc. As such it has been stated earlier no person remaining unemployed of the active age group in this village and

earning something in cash in one way or the other. This is one of the most vantage point for channelising the working force into the frontier areas of business and engage themselves in maintaining a pollution free environment in the village setting as the authors of the present paper contended, and these are discussed in the posterior paragraphs under the heading Future Scenario.

FUTURE SCENARIO

In the final section of the paper it is proposed to discuss how the crisis of the community being faced at present could be turned into profitable and reward giving sources in the immediate future and near future. As such the present authors are drawing immediate future plans to use the garbages as the source materials for running a biogas plant which in turn produce methane gas for running a water pump for using in the fishing hatchery and providing electricity to lighten the village street lights.

The organic wastes which are causing pollution in the village at present - collection of one quintal of garbage mainly kitchen wastes - could be effectively utilised as the source material for running a biogas plant of 6 Cu. m. capacity or 2 Nos. of biogas plants having 3 Cu. m. capacity each. In this connection it is suggested here that Deenbandhu model of biogas plant modified by Dr. D. Konwar and Shri D. Deka of Regional Biogas Development and Training Centre for North Eastern States based at A.A.U., Jorhat could be the suitable one for immediate waste management (Konwar 1992, 1994). The one quintal of organic wastes producing daily in the village could in turn produce 6 Cu. m. of biogas daily and which is sufficient to run a 5 H.P. diesel engine driven pumpset-cum-generator of 3 K.V.A. capacity daily for 6 hours and this would be sufficient for lifting water to an overhead tank of required capacity from shallow tubewell having water level not below 18 ft. of the ground level needed for a Chinese model of fishing hatchery (Lahkar, 1994). Over and above this if surplus gas would still be available then through coupling a 3 K.V.A. generator in that 5 H.P. diesel engine street lights of the village could be fitted in various places and powered

by it. Furthermore this biogas driven generator could be a source of power in the village community hall like Namghar during loadshedding hours and might be the source of various useful uses. With 50 days retention time the organic wastes would completely be decomposed and turn into good organic manures with high humus content in other words a very good bio fertilizer.

The Chinese Fishing Hatchery would be of immediate income giving source to the village community as fish seedlings of required sizes could be produced here and sold at different places for rearing them or for fish cultivation in the fisheries, tanks of the people in general. The Chinese Fishing Hatchery consists of the following things (Lahkar, 1994) :

1. Shallow tubewell
2. Pumpset
3. Overhead tank No.1 (for lifting first the water from shallow tubewell)
4. Sand bed filter (for removal of soluble iron)
5. Overhead tank No. 2 (for storing filtered water)
6. Breeding tank with stop cock at the bottom
7. Hatching tank with tangential flow of water
8. Nursing tank
9. Rearing tank
10. Stocking tank
11. Selling tank

Necessary expertises are available with the fishing departments of the state for making fishing hatchery of the Chinese model and in this case since the basic source of water would be lifted by a diesel engine pump run on biogas the cost of rearing the seedlings would be very negligible. If it could be taken upon experimental basis in the village two problems would be solved viz. the organic wastes would be managed properly and these in turn would be the source for immediate economic gains of the villagers.

Within the next span of 5 years from now - leaving aside the immediate future agencies like Sulov International based at Patna, Bihar could be contacted for getting necessary expertise to

construct sulov souchagar in the form of community latrines and all the excreta of human could be put to a biogas plant for producing gas for cooking as well as producing electricity to connect with ASEB lines distributed in the village to provide powers during load shedding hours, specially in the night hours of load shedding. This process would greatly benefit the community again in two ways viz., proper human excreta management which is the main source of pathogens harmful to human health, and cheap electric power with no running costs at all.

CONCLUSION

In fine the authors of the present paper are of the opinion that in this ruralized village with the educated manpower available, it would not be of any difficulty to take up beneficial programmes from the state government agencies like Scheduled Caste Development Agency, District Rural Development Agency, Dibrugarh, Fishery Department of the Govt. of Assam dovetailed with the expertises available with the Regional Biogas Development and Training Centre for North Eastern States, Assam Science, Technology and Environment Departments, Assam Science, Technology and Environment Council such as mentioned above. Further the agencies like Sulov International should be contacted from the state level or from the Scheduled Caste Development Corporation level to provide necessary expertise and funding for constructing Sulov Souchagar not only in the studied village setting but also in other Koibarta village settings for proper management of human excreta and to run biogas to produce much needed electric power.

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IMPACT OF THE SCHEDULED CASTE COMPONENT SCHEMES AMONG THE SCHEDULED CASTES PEOPLE OF ASSAM

Dr. H. C. Das*

OBJECTIVES :

The objectives of the paper are to discuss the following points :

- Introduction on the topic
- Problems on the positive impact of the adopted schemes
- Remedies suggested for proper implementation of the schemes

INTRODUCTION :

Before going through the topic, it needs a description about the demographic picture of the S.C. people in the State.

The total population of the Scheduled Caste people in Assam as per 1991 census was 16,59,412 which is 7.40% of the total population of Assam i.e. 2,24,14,322 in number. Out of the total S.C. people in the State 13.82% of people reside in the urban area and the rest 86.18% reside in the rural area.

The districtwise and subdivisionwise population of the S.C. people in the State has been found as follows (only those above the State P.C. i.e. 7.40 P.C. has been noted)

- Districts : Bongaigaon (10.74%), Nalbari (8.78%)
Kamrup (7.54%) Lakhimpur (8.01%)
Jorhat (7.61%) Nagaon (10.02%)
Marigaon (13.78%) Cachar (14.70%)
Hailakandi (12.78%) Karimganj (14.58%) Total 10 districts out of 23.
- Subdivisions : Bongaigaon (10.04%) Bijni (10.08%)

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North Salmara (Abhayapuri) (12.20%)
 Nalbari (8.78%) Guwahati (8.10%)
 Pragjyotishpur (19.15%) North
 Lakhimpur (8.36%) Dhemaji (7.74%)
 Majuli (14.24%) Bokakhat (8.05%)
 Nowgong (9.07%) Kaliabor (11.45%)
 Hojai (11.04%) Morigaon (13.78%)
 Silchar (16.06%) Hailakandi (12.05%)
 Karimganj (14.58%)

Total 17 subdivisions out of 48

The literacy percentage for the S.C. community people in Assam is found to be 53.94 whereas the literacy percentage for total population is 52.89 as per 1991 Census which has been increased now to 53.42.

By occupation it has been observed that 47.22% of S.C. people workers are engaged in cultivation in rural area, whereas for Livestock, Forestry, Fishing etc., only 5.24% of these workers are engaged.

In other occupations it has been observed as 13.44% in Agriculture labours, 10.01% in Trade and Commerce and 10.35% in other services (Govt., Semi-Govt. and Private Services).

It is interesting that 50.90% of the total Cultivators in the State belongs to S.C. community. Again, it is seen that 12.09%, 10.51% and 11.11% of the total population in the State are engaged in Agriculture Labours, Livestock, Forestry, Fishing etc. and in other services respectively which belong to S.C. community.

Now let us explain the aims and objectives of the schemes adopted by the Government.

Scheduled Caste people in the State are normally facing the lack of Economical, Educational and Social aspects of life which compels a major portion of the people to live in a sub-standard condition which can be classified as a very Backward Class in the society.

Hence, to accelerate the all round development of the S.C.

people the Special Component Plan has been introduced by the Government and it has initiated the various programmes and schemes which reflect in,

- a) Economic development, through Family Oriented Programmes to promote self-employment.
- b) Poverty Alleviation Programme
- c) Infrastructure Programmes in the S.C. predominant areas
- d) Literacy promotion
- e) Other basic needs of S.C. people

The programmes and schemes adopted for this purpose touch the sectors; Agriculture, Inland Fishing and allied sectors, Primary Health care, drinking water supply, dwelling houses and education etc. Road communication, Minor Irrigation, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Diary, Sericulture, Weaving, Cottage Industry, Co-operation, Rural Development are also the sectors, involved by these schemes.

Besides adopting 76 nos. of schemes under 24 sectors by the State Government (Annexure-I) there are some more Family Oriented income generating schemes which are funded by the State Plan, Special Central Assistance and Institutional Finance of the Banks. Under 7th Five Year Plan (1985-90), point 11 (a) of 20 point Programme covers these schemes which are being implemented through the Development Departments viz. 1) Agriculture 2) Animal Husbandry & Veterinary 3) Diary Development 4) Fisheries 5) Industries 6) Sericulture 7) Handloom and Textiles 8) Rural Development (IRDP) and 9) Backward Classes Sector through Assam State Development Corporation for S.C. Ltd. But it is a matter of disappointment that after adopting so many schemes, programmes etc. under different sectors funded by the State Govt. & Central Govt. (Annexure-II) no remarkable achievement has been observed in the practical field, although the statistical data provide satisfaction in the table discussion.

After conversation with the involved persons in the practical

field, i.e. with that of the involved departments, beneficiaries, implementing authorities etc., it is felt that a thorough scrutiny over the system is necessary. As such, the problem in the system must be identified and the remedies against those must be suggested.

After thorough study over the system the following problems can be identified.

PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED :

1. Lack of publicity about the schemes and problems among the people of the concerned area.
2. Lack of proper knowledge of the schemes among the beneficiaries.
3. Lack of adequate co-ordination between the implementing authorities and the beneficiaries.
4. Lack of selection of the need-based schemes of all according to the suitability of the demographic structure of the area involved. The improper selection of the beneficiaries also provokes the negative impact.
5. Lack of interest and sincerity of some of the implementing authorities.
6. Lack of vigilance by the different scheduled caste organisations.
7. Sharing of the facilities and provisions due for the S.C. people by the people belonging to other community than Scheduled Caste, who somehow manage to procure the false S.C. Certificates.
8. Lack of regularity to release the Govt. sanction for implementation of the schemes.
9. Lack of involvement of the S.C. organisations in selection of schemes and beneficiaries.
10. Lack of proper monitoring in the implementation.

To overcome the problems, mentioned above, some remedial measures can be suggested as follows :

REMEDIAL MEASURES SUGGESTED :

1. There should be proper publicity about the schemes and

programmes to be adopted through different medias such as Radio, T.V., Postering and distributing leaflets and play cards. Holding of public meeting to explain the positive result of the schemes in different selected area can also be expected to be most fruitful.

2. The beneficiaries, selected should be trained properly through adequate training.
3. Adequate co-ordination should have been developed between the implementing authorities and the beneficiaries in implementing the schemes. There should be joint study on the infrastructural situation on the implementation of the schemes.
4. Before accepting the schemes there should be a demographic study of the area concerned. All schemes may not be suitable for all subdivisions or districts. So, after distributing the allocation to the subdivision proportionally, only the need-based schemes should have been selected for the concerned area. No personal, political and vested interest should be encouraged in selecting the beneficiaries.
5. Some provision for incentive should be initiated to develop the interest and sincerity of the persons involved as implementing authority.
6. Some incentive should be provided to S.C. Organisations for serving as proper vigilant in implementation of the schemes.
7. Sharing of the facilities by the Non-Scheduled caste people by procuring the false S.C. Certificates is a burning problem for all round development of the genuine S.C. community people. It needs a proper check up of the Caste Certificates, which has been suggested in the last part of this paper.
8. Regular release of fund is to be ascertained at any cost.
9. All S.C. Organisations should be involved in the Advisory Committees/Boards etc. constituted for the welfare of the

S.C. people.

10. A Monitoring Cell with efficient persons is to be framed immediately by the schemes as for constant monitoring on the implementation of the schemes as well as the other instructions of the Government in connection with the welfare of the S.C. people.

In addition to the suggestions stated above, a concrete suggestion to check the issue of false Certificates has been placed here for removal of a burning problem faced by the genuine S.C. people in the society.

A new policy for issuing the Scheduled Caste Certificate may be adopted as follows :

A Screening Committee may be constituted in each district comprising with the following members :

- a) President : Official or Non-Official to be nominated by the Government.
- b) Member-Secretary : D. C. or A.D.C. of the district concerned.
- c) Members : Representatives from each S.C. organisation of the district.

The Screening Committee shall sit once at the interval of 2-3 months to scrutinise the applications praying for the Caste Certificates and to recommend for issue.

The applications will be received by the Member-Secretary in D.C. office. After recommendation of Screening Committee the D.C. will issue the Certificates and list of the name of Certificate holder is to be published in the Notice Board and a copy of which may be endorsed to each member of the Committee.

For urgent need of a Caste Certificate for any person, there may be the provision of issuing provisional Certificates to be issued by the D.C. with the recommendation from any member of the Screening Committee and that provisional Certificate is to be regularised in the next sitting of the Screening Committee.

The impact of S.C. component schemes among the S.C. people depends at a high percentage upon the interest and

sincerity of the persons entangled in selection and implementation of the schemes. A person engaged for this purpose can not devote his mind in action with full spirit if he occupies the post reserved for S.C. people by producing false caste certificate. A non-scheduled caste person may not be able to feel the actual needs of the S.C. people.

Hence, the Advisory Board or committees for the welfare of the S.C. people should be constituted with the S.C. people only whether they may be government servant or else. One member from each S.C. organisation should be included in such Boards or Committees. This Advisory Board should have a control upon all the matters concerning welfare for the S.C. people in the State. The Monitoring Cell proposed to be constituted, should be authorised with highest power for imposing penalty or other disciplinary action to the persons involved in any fault or negligence of duty. The Cell should be headed by a Government officer of Chief Secretary rank.

Otherwise all the schemes, programmes etc. adopted by the Government for the welfare of the S.C. people in the State will move like a ship without radder.

Annexure - I

S.C.P. Schemes sponsored by State Govt. Fund

1. Agriculture :
 - i) Input distribution in flood prone area
 - ii) Farmers Institute (Promotion of technology)
 - iii) Agriculture Marketing
 - iv) Integrated Horticultural Development
 - v) Integrated Agril. Engg. Dev.
 - vi) Multiple Cropping.
2. Soil Conservation :
 - i) Land Development ii) Protection of Revenue land
3. Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department :

- i) Granting of subsidy/seed money to the educated unemployed youth trained in various centres.
- ii) Scheme for training of farmers in Cattle, Piggery, Poultry etc.
- iii) Special employment generating programme for S.C.
- iv) Distribution of Cattle
- v) Distribution of Duck
- vi) Distribution of Goat
- vii) Distribution of Pig
4. Diary Development :
 - i) Distribution of milch cows
5. Fishery :
 - i) Assistance to Pisciculturists
 - ii) Fish Farmer training
 - iii) Development of beel fisheries through World Food Programme
 - iv) Reclamation of Derelict Water Bodies
6. Rural Development
 - i) Integrated Rural Development
 - ii) Jawahar Rozgar Yojana
7. Social Forestry :
 - i) Plantation
8. Panchayat & R.D. :
 - i) Village link Road
 - ii) Minor Irrigation (Dongs)
9. Sericulture :
 - i) Eri Silk Industry
 - a) Production of Eri Cut Cocoon
 - b) No. of family benefitted
 - ii) Muga Silk Industry
 - a) Production of Muga Raw Silk
 - b) No. of family benefitted
 - iii) Mulberry Silk Industry
 - a) Production of Mulberry Raw Silk
 - b) No. of family benefitted

10. Handloom & Textile :
 - i) Production of Handloom Fabrics (ii) Employment
11. Co-operation :
 - i) Multipurpose Rural Co-operatives
 - ii) Other co-operatives
 - a) Fisherman Co-operatives (b) Other co-operatives
12. Minor Irrigation :
 - i) Area irrigated through Government
13. Rural Electrification :
 - i) Electrification of new villages
14. Village & Small Industries :
 - i) Training programme ii) Loan to S.S.I. Unit
 - iii) Loan to Handicrafts Artisans
 - iv) Supply of Improved tools
15. Roads & Bridges :
 - i) R.M.N.P. ii) O.R.M.N.P. iii) Surfaced
16. Education :
 - A) Elementary
 - ii) Opening/ Taking over of Primary School
 - ii) Appointment of addl. teacher in L.P. School for coverage of addl. children
 - B) Middle School
 - i) Opening/Taking over of Middle School
 - ii) Appointment of additional teacher in Middle School for opening of additional school
 - iii) Appointment of science teacher in Middle School
 - iv) Maintenance of school under grant-in-aid
 - v) Text Book
 - a) Supply of free text book
 - vi) Equipment and Building :
 - a) Construction of Elementary School building
 - b) Providing furniture grant in Elementary School
 - c) Award of Attendance Scholarship to S.C.

- students @ Rs.60/- p.m.
- d) Award of special scholarship to S.C. girl students @ Rs. 240/-
- C) Secondary Education
- N. R. building grants to High School
 - N. R. grants for girls common room
 - N. R. grants for sanitation
- D) Higher Education
- Assistance to non-Govt. colleges and institutions
- E) Adult Education
- Library in S.C.P. areas
 - Financial assistance to village libraries
17. Health and Family Welfare :
- Primary Health Centre
 - Community Health Centre
 - Sub-centres
18. Rural Water Supply :
- Pipe water supply scheme
 - Tube-well/Mark II
 - Sanitary well
19. Housing Board :
- Janata Housing Scheme for E.W.S. for S.C.
 - E.W.S. housing including upgradation of existing stock
20. Rural House Sites :
- M.N.P. rural house sites schemes
21. Backward Classes (SC) :
- Pre-Matric scholarship
 - Post-Matric scholarship
 - Financial incentive to inter caste marriage
 - Girls Hostel for S.C.
 - Boys Hostel for S.C.
 - National Scheme for rehabilitation of sweepers and scavengers.

22. Social Welfare :

- Scholarship to physically handicapped students
- Stipend to physically handicapped students for vocational training.,
- Grants-in-aid to voluntary organisation

23. Nutrition Sector :

- Special nutrition programme in I.C.D.S. projects.

Annexure II

Yearwise Allocation for S.C. Component Plan by the State Govt. and Central Govt.

(Rs. in crores)

Year	State Govt. allocation			Central Govt. allocation	Total Allocation
	Total Allocation of general	Percentage to general	Allocation for S.C.P.		
1990-91	627.10	6.72	42.12	2.02	44.14
1991-92	744.00	6.49	48.21	1.96	50.17
1992-93	892.80	6.48	57.85	1.47	59.32
1993-94	956.16	6.86	63.84	1.47	65.31
1994-95	978.83	7.49	73.33	(upto June'93)	
					(proposed)

THE PROBLEMS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AMONG THE HIRAS OF ASSAM

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G. C. Ojah**

INTRODUCTION :

The Hiras are traditionally an occupational caste who make pottery by means of hand. They are a major Scheduled Caste of Assam. In the caste hierarchy, they occupy a very low position which is even lower than that of the Kumars who manufacture pottery by means of the wheel. Their social position is also low in the society so that the Brahmins do not perform the religious rites and rituals for them. They have, therefore, to perform the religious rites with the help of the priests of their own community. The high caste people like the Brahmin, Kalita, Keot and others do not accept food and drink from them but the pottery made by them is used in all socio-religious and socio-economic ceremonies. Another important aspect of their socio-cultural aspect is that they have a matrimonial relationship with the Namasudras. The Namasudras of Barpeta have a close affinal link with the Hiras.

From time immemorial, the Hiras of Barpeta used to supply earthen pots to the Barpeta Satra, a Vaishnavite organisation set up by the great Vaishnavite Saint Sri Sri Madhav Dev, a great disciple of Srimanta Sankar Dev in 15th Century.

According to 1971 Census, the total population of the Hiras in Assam was 32,624. The Census due in 1981 could not be carried out because of Assam agitation. Hence, no recent dependable data are available after 1971. The Census data of 1991 have not yet been published.

The main concentration of the Hiras is Barpeta. However,

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they are also distributed in Nalbari, Kamrup, Goalpara, Dhubri and Nagaon districts.

For making the pottery, the Hiras collect clay from the Marnoi river of Goalpara during the month of *pousa* (December-January) to *Chaitra* (March-April). Normally, they use beasts for collecting and transporting clay to their respective places. As this type of clay collection is laborious and time consuming, some have preferred to transport the clay in trucks to their places. The clay is collected by removing the upper muddy layer and then the clay is stored in pits near their residential plots. In the process of pot making, the clay is mixed with sand in equal proportion and then water is added to it to mix up thoroughly by kneading. The lump is then placed on a piece of stone and then beaten with the help of a wooden stick. They usually manufacture the potteries as per the demand of the locality. The common products are *jhonga* (pitcher), *kalah*, *tekeli*, *ghati* (round bottomed water vessels of different sizes), *charu* (wide mouth bowl), *mota* (small round and wide vessel used for eating food), *gilas* (drinking water vessel) and different kinds of lids and stands. A coloured clay paste mixed up with haemalite material is applied to a finished vessel for making the surface of the vessel slippery and decorated with geometrical designs by incising lines while it is soft. Small roll of clay as applique is added to the surface for decoration.

In Assam, the study of the socio-economic problems of the Scheduled Caste people is very rare. However, there are few stray references on the occupational mobility among the Scheduled Castes of Assam. That is why, an attempt has been made here to highlight the constraints of economic development of the Hiras of Barpeta district of Assam.

REVIEW WORK :

Many scholars have tried to devise an occupational scale to study the occupational mobility among the societies. North and Halt (1961) have formulated some basic aspects like income, education, training or the combination of all these three for studying the occupational mobility of a community. They have

found that the rating of an occupation depends on public opinion. It is difficult to judge the public opinion of an occupation in time and space. Moreover, the status of occupation may also change from time to time. Therefore, the authors opinion about the occupation mobility does not hold good in our present study. Huges (1958) calls it group mobility. He has shown how the transfer of dirty work to lesser dirty occupation has caused an upward mobility of an occupation. Miller and Form (1964) stated that the change over of an occupational group to another depends on the market demand. Davidson and Anderson (1937) have studied occupational mobility of an American community. They found that in the United States, there was less occupational mobility among the communities. Saraswati and Behura (1966) have studied some of the potter castes in India. They found the social status of the potters is not uniform all over India. They further referred that the diversity in the social hierarchy occurs not only in different linguistic areas but difference occurs in the same linguistic zone. Majumdar and Datta Ray (1984) have studied the occupational mobility among the Khasis, the Garos and the Jaintias of Meghalaya. All these three tribal groups are matrilineal and trace their descent through the female line. The inheritance is also followed in the female line. But in the occupational structure, females occupy a less important position. Further, the authors have pinpointed that in all the three major towns (Shillong, Jowai and Tura) of Meghalaya there is a scramble of the moderately educated people for the office jobs. While studying the occupational change among the Scheduled Castes of Assam, Sharma Thakur (1985) opines that the Kaibarttas, a major Scheduled Caste of Assam, are basically fishermen, but at present, they have switched over to agriculture.

We feel that judging from our empirical experience the above works alongwith their defined characteristics can not be applied as fixed model to our study. However, the above works help us to understand the socio-economic problems of different communities. It is to be noted here that unlike the Kaibarttas the

Hiras have not taken up agriculture as a prime mode of occupation. However, alongwith the pottery making they have also taken up some petty jobs like selling of vegetables, rickshaw plying, thela pulling etc. and labour jobs in the locality due to poor economic condition.

ITS PROBLEM AND PERSPECTIVE :

Traditionally the primary occupation of the Hiras was pottery making. This occupation is still in vogue among them. Their fore-fathers did not think much to possess agricultural land. Due to this, to-day they have no agricultural land. Moreover, the income from the pottery is gradually diminishing in the society due to widely use of aluminium and plastic products. Now, they have realised that income from the pottery making is insufficient to maintain the families. It is reported that at one time, the Government of Assam had allotted 2 bighas of agricultural land to each family at Barpeta. But they have sold it away due to poor economic condition. As such, they have now come under the category of landless community of Assam. Their residential plots are rent free. It was allotted to them by the Satra committee on the condition that they are required to supply the necessary potteries to the Satra every year for socio-religious ceremonies. This practice is still prevailing in the society. As the residential plots are owned by the Satra committee, they can not dispose the land.

Besides the Satra, they have no other liabilities or contract with other caste groups in and around Barpeta. Earlier, they used to sell their pots to their neighbouring communities on barter system. Now, this practice has completely vanished from the society. The Marnoi Hiras have a market link with the Garos, the Bodos, the Mechs, the Bhutias and the Muslims of Goalpara and the villagers of the Garo hills. The olderfolk have reported to the researcher that they had a good link with the people of the erstwhile East Bengal in pre-Independence era. After Independence, this market link has greatly affected their economy.

As the Hiras are not expertise in agricultural field they are

not involved in share-cropping with other communities. In non-agricultural sector also they are not getting any Governmental help. Very few of them are in Govt. and Semi-Govt. jobs. They are not getting any loan from the Government to set up business. There is no co-operative system among the Hiras to improve their traditional occupation. Right from the collection of raw materials to the finished work, it is the duty of the individual family to carry out its own means.

Due to the lack of transport facility in the locality most of them sell their products at the site itself while some sell it at Barpeta, Guwahati and neighbouring places. It is said that the income of the latter group is higher although selling at the market and other places is a difficult task.

It is observed that the children below 12 years are required to perform some outdoor duties. The poor families are compelled to send their children to serve as helper in the house of rich families at Guwahati, Barpeta, Nalbari, Nagaon, Raha etc. Many grown up boys and girls are forced to stop their education due to poor economic condition and help their parents in some manual works. Thus the child labourer is found among them. To eradicate this problem, the Government has to take active step to advocate vocational training to these economically handicapped children so that they can stand on their own feet in future.

There are many Hira families living in Barpeta are not willing to continue their traditional occupation. They now prefer for other jobs. It is difficult to ascertain here whether this preference is due to the poor economic condition, raising the caste status or due to the Govt. new policy of self-employment. It is a fact that the pottery making is no longer a lucrative job to maintain a family with the basic necessities of life.

Another important aspect of the Hiras is that the womenfolk in majority can not devote much time in their household activities due to active part in pottery making. It is reported that the womenfolk are mostly busy in the whole scenario of pot making. As such the mothers can not properly nourish and nurture their

children. Weaving is totally absent among them.

The infrastructural facilities like road communication, electricity and drinking water are inadequate in their habitats. Sanitary latrines are rare in their villages. Most of the houses have no boundary fencing. Houses are mostly Katcha with thatched roof. The plinth is made of mud and cow-dung. The height of the plinth is very low. It is unhygienic and damp. Over and above, their occupation on pottery and poor diet have made them unhealthy. It is observed that most of them are suffering from malnutrition and some chronic diseases like tuberculosis and asthma etc.

Banking and postal facilities are inadequate in their areas. They have to come to Barpeta town for banking and other official works. Due to the lack of financial institutions, the villagers are forced to take loan from the local *Mahajans* (money-lenders) after mortgaging some valuable items like gold ornaments, metal and aluminium utensils.

Educationally, the Hiras are very poor. As per 1971 Census, the percentage of literacy among them was 27.4. The percentage of literacy among the males and the females was 38.74 and 15.32 respectively. It is reported that due to poor economic condition the parents are not sending their children to the schools.

CONCLUSION :

Numerically, the Hiras occupy the fifth position among the Scheduled Castes of Assam. Economically and socially they are lowest of all the Scheduled Castes of Barpeta. The traditional occupation of pottery making is no longer a profitable one so that they are now facing a lot of economic hardship. Due to poor literacy, they can not hope for jobs in Govt. and Semi-Govt. departments. The agricultural land is out of question for them. Their fore-fathers had declined to possess the agricultural land as they were happy with their own profession. In fact, they are now under the poverty line.

This poor economic condition can be improved if the Govt. takes some steps for agriculture. At the same time, inputs like

seeds, fertilizers, irrigation facilities should be made available to them at the cheaper price. In this context, the allotment of land should be made in clusters so that the people can take advantage of many of the common facilities.

Another important aspect is that their occupation is an unorganized one so that it has caused many problems like loan facility, market and transport. Moreover, they are suffering from many serious diseases like tuberculosis, asthma and malnutrition. Therefore, efforts should be made to improve their health and environmental condition so that they will not suffer from such diseases.

Education is another constraint for economic development. In this respect, Govt. may give some compensation to the parents of the school going boys and girls. They should be given proper nutritional food at schools so that they will be attracted. The people should be made realise that education is the only way to equip oneself for socio-economic development.

Over and above, the economic backwardness of the Hiras can be attributed to their low income occupation of pottery making. Its remedy requires a systematic effort from the Government and non-Governmental organisations.

CONCLUSION :

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THE HIRA POTTERY INDUSTRY OF ASSAM FACING DIFFICULTIES IN IMPROVEMENT AND UPGRADATION

Shri Guneswar Das*

Pottery Industry is the most significant cottage industry. It is an ancient culture over the world and a specified village industry in India under the provisions of the KVIC ACT 1956. In India it is estimated that over 13 lakh persons are engaged in activities connected with the pottery industry. Out of this total number of potters, 70,000 persons belong to the Hira community (inhabitants of Assam). This Hira community which is recognised as a Scheduled Caste category is engaged in the pottery industry in the state of Assam and a vital role has been being played since the pre-historical era. This class of people utilizes a special clay found in Assam and identified as 'Hira Clay' as the principal raw material in the pottery industry. And therefore, this group of potters is distinguished as the Hira Potters or Hira Jati in Assam. They produce various kinds of earthen pots and utensils for households in the best quality.

The Hira potters have been carrying on this occupation and maintaining their livelihood since the past. No alternative way of income source was obtained by them. They got a good earning from the pottery industry. In the ancient time the potters produced some particular pots for cooking and other use for the common people which have now been replaced by modern metallic utensils and equipments found in the modern market. But in collaboration with experts and modern trained up designers, modification of the earthen pots in varieties has brought its heavy demand for each family.

In the past the Hira potters obtained as many domestic things for food and others as they required for daily life in

exchange of their products in the barter system. As they could collect sufficient foods and goods, they did not feel for any different occupation other than the pottery industry. Really the Hira Pottery Industry is a beneficial source of income for the people if it is properly and technically performed. Generally the Hira potters were not engaged in other activities like cultivation and its associates in the past. And since then this class of the Scheduled Caste people has neither cultivable lands nor another base for engagement. Only a negligible percent of this class has been absorbed in Government services according to educational qualifications. On the whole, the only basic existing occupation of the Hira community is the Hira Pottery Industry.

As per 1971 Census in Assam, the total number of Hira people was 32,624. The latest position of the population of the said class would be near about 70,000 as demanded by the organisation 'The All Assam Hira Sanmilani' constituted among the Hira people. The said organisation of the society has taken some arrangements to find out the actual data of the potters by rendering from village to village so that the pottery industry alongwith the society and cultural status can be uplifted. There are totally 254 villages of Hira potters in Assam scattering in various districts. The potters of all the districts have been facing some difficulties due to which the pottery industry is in obstruction in connection with upgradation or improvement.

i) 'Hira Clay' the principal raw material of the pottery industry is found in the undernoted areas of the districts in Assam :

Goalpara (undivided) : Bahati, Balijana, Singimari Beel, Garomari Beel, Topolakhowa Beel, Dwaraka, Jinjiram, Lakhipur Dham's Beel, Ghilaguri, Tamranga Beel, River bank of Jinari and Soutara Beel.

Kamrup (undivided) : Dighali Beel, Molong Jan, Ketkijhar, Tetelia, Hiragata, Gauripur, Southern bank of the river Brahmaputra and a nearest area of the village Hatiyana.

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Darrang (undivided) : Maharia Bathan Beel, Khalihoi, Selidol, Kuarijan, Hiragata, Kanidalgaoon, Bank of Texia river, Tukurasola, Medadol, Hussain Suburi and Sokormukh.

Nowgong (undivided) : River banks of the Kapili, the Kolong and the Sonai, Alisinga Beel and Hariyapar.

The layers of the Hira clay are laying in the abovementioned areas overlapped with muds, other soil and weeds etc. These areas were purely Government lands and some of the areas were sometimes permitted and also allotted by the district administrators to the Hira potters of Assam to utilize the clay in the pottery industry. Under the British Administration also, the then Deputy Commissioner D.C. Humphray of the Kamrup district issued some orders in 1941 so that the Hira potters could collect their raw material from the Dighali Beel and the Molongjan areas. In the other districts also, potters could collect Hira clay from the clay fields or Bathans at free of cost without any obstruction. But since 15 to 20 years back, there has been a serious problem to the Hira people when they go to the Bathans to collect the clay. It is seen that most of the above mentioned clay areas have been occupied by some neighbours who obstruct the potters at the time of collection of the clay. Such unauthorised people or occupants on the clay areas have been great bar in front of the potters. At the time of digging up the Hira clay, the potters are unnecessarily harassed and sometimes threatened by the unauthorised occupants. As a result, due to non availability of the material, the pottery industry has been badly effected. In this regard, the Hira people have been communicating with the Government of Assam for a permanent settlement of the said clay areas for the pottery industry. "The All Assam Hira Sanmilani" also communicated with the Union Ministry of Industry so that necessary measures could be taken to facilitate the potters. In response to the Sanmilani's approach on behalf of the Hira people, the Central Minister of

Industry Narayan Dutt Tiwari wrote a letter to the then Chief Minister of Assam Hiteswar Saikia on 25.5.83. In his letter he wrote : "..... in the past village potters used to obtain clay and firewood free of cost, they are now finding increasing difficulty in obtaining these items in many places. Even though some State Governments have permitted potters to obtain clay from Government land, they face difficulties of the local level in getting this facility. Similarly the cost of fire-wood or other fuel Keeping in mind the employment potential of this programme and its widely dispersed coverage, I request that you may issue suitable directions to the departments of the State Government concerned to assure that :

1) Clay is made available freely to potters free of cost or at nominal rates. It is essential that these instructions are observed both in letter and spirit at the local level and

2) Potters can obtain fire-wood from local depot of the state forest departments at concessional reasonable rates."

The above part of the Tiwari's letter reveals the keen attitude to the pottery industry. But it is misfortune to the potters that no permanent solution of the raw materials has been seen upto now.

ii) Dry woods are very essential for making the products pucca with the help of fire. But it is not sufficient in quantity within the Hira villages or neighbouring Government wood lands are also not permitted by the department concerned. So the potters fulfil this material with dry cow-dung as a substitute in absence of fire-wood.

iii) In addition to the abovementioned material some other easily and locally available materials like sand, husk and paddy straw are required for the pottery industry.

The most vital point is that how the crisis of the main materials for the cottage industry can be settled up.

iv) For upgradation and improvement of the pottery industry, modern technical methods are to be applied for acquirement of knowledge so that productivity and attraction of the products can

be increased. To modify the designs of the finished products, the potters should be well trained up in the Pottery Training Centres outside Assam. In Karnataka, there is a Central Village Pottery Institute at Khanapur in the district Belgaum under the KVIC. In Maharashtra also, such pottery institutes are found.

Hira potters of Assam should have training centres at local levels so that the poor potters also can be trained up to produce modern utensils and equipments. They should be encouraged by the State Government. On the whole, modern techniques for modification of the old handicrafts will bring heavy demand in the market and will make alive the pottery industry. Otherwise the Hira Cottage industry will be vanished in a short time and most of the Hira people belonging to the Scheduled Caste will be unemployed. It is hoped that attention of the Government of Assam will be drawn by the Department of Industry. For upliftment of the said cottage industry, the Government of Assam will have to take immediate and necessary steps in connection with a) permanent settlement of the Hira Reserves as mentioned above to allot them to the potters b) permission to collect the waste dry woods of the forest areas for utilization in the pottery industry c) creation of a good market for the products and d) training facility to each and every potter who is engaged in the industry. The KVIC which department is in favour of the pottery industry may sympathetically advise the Government for the improvement of the industry.

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A STUDY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO IRDP AND TRYSEM AMONG THE SCHEDULED CASTES IN ASSAM

Dr. Shankar Chatterjee *

INTRODUCTION :

As per 1991 Census, the Scheduled Caste population comprises about 7.40% of total population of Assam. Out of total population of 22414327, the number of S.C. population was 1659412 in the State.¹ A slight increase in S.C. population is observed from 1971 to 1991 in the State as in 1971, the percentage of S.C. population was 6.24 against 7.40 in 1991. The Scheduled Caste population in the State consist of 16 sub castes. The name of the sub castes alongwith their occupation is highlighted in the following few lines.

A glimpse of the sub castes of S.C. people alongwith their traditional occupation :

- i) Kaivarta : The traditional occupation of the Kaivartas is fishing and cultivation.
- ii) Namasudra : Their main occupation is boating and cultivation.
- iii) Bania : The primary occupation of the Banias is making gold ornaments and jewellery.
- iv) Hira : They are potter by occupation.
- v) Patni : The present occupation of the Patnis is cultivation and fishing is their secondary occupation.

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- vi) Sutradhar : Their main occupation is carpentry.
- vii) Malo : Boating and fishing are the main occupation of the Malos.
- viii) Dhobi or Dhoba : They are washermen by profession.
- ix) Mahara : Their traditional occupation is 'palki' (Palanquin) bearing.
- x) Dholi : They are drummers by occupation.
- xi) Muchi : Cobbling is the traditional occupation of the Muchis.
- xii) Bhuimali or Mali : The main occupation of the people is flower gardening and cultivation.
- xiii) Jal Keot or Jalla Keot : Selling of fish is the traditional occupation of this caste.
- xiv) Bhangil/Bansfor/Lalbegi : They are scavengers by occupation.

In this study, occupation of the sub castes has been highlighted with the objective of understanding the economic condition of these people. Though there is no specific data available on poverty level of S.C. people in Assam but a rough estimate shows that about 80% of S.C. population may be below the level of poverty in the State.² Considering this fact, an inference can be drawn like this, out of 1659412 S.C. people in the State, 1327531 number of S.C.s are living below the poverty line. That is out of 3.32 lakhs S.C. families 2.65 lakh families may be considered as poor (family has been considered as 5 members). Therefore, the Rural Development Programmes like Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) can play significant role for the economic upliftment of these people.

IRDP AND ITS OBJECTIVE :

The IRDP is introduced all over the country on 2nd October, 1980 with the objective of eradication of poverty from rural areas. The IRDP continues to be a major poverty alleviation programme

in the field of rural development. The objective of IRDP is sought to be achieved by providing productive assets and inputs to the target groups, that is, families living below the poverty line. The assets which could be in primary, secondary or in tertiary sectors are provided through financial assistance in the form of subsidy by the Government and term credit advanced by the financial institutions. The programme is implemented in all the blocks in the country as a centrally sponsored scheme funded on 50 : 50 basis by the centre and the states.

In the identified target group, at least 50% of the assisted families should be from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe families, with corresponding flow of resources to them.

TRYSEM AND ITS IMPLICATION :

The Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) is a supporting component of the IRDP. It is launched in the country on 15th August, 1979 as a centrally sponsored scheme. It aims at providing technical and entrepreneurial skills to rural youth from the families below the poverty line to enable them to take up income generating activities.

The salient features of TRYSEM are :

- i) The rural youth should be in the age group of 18-35.
- ii) Training is to be need based.
- iii) Trainees receive stipends during the time of training.
- iv) Payment is made for purchasing of raw materials.

COVERAGE OF SC/ST FAMILIES UNDER TRYSEM :

At least 50% of total youth should be from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe families.

COVERAGE OF IRDP AND TRYSEM AMONGS S.Cs.³ IN ASSAM

IRDP : As mentioned earlier, at least 50% of assisted families should be from SC and ST with corresponding flow of resources to them. In this connection it is worthwhile to mention that in the guidelines prepared by the Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India, no separate quota has been earmarked for SC

community. However, the achievement of last three years shows that Assam couldn't attain the target, that is, 50% (earmarked for SC and ST) as envisaged in the guidelines. A look into the following table clarifies the statement :

TABLE - I
Percentage of SC & ST families covered
during 1991-92 to 1993-94

Year	Assam		All India	
	Percentage of SC families assisted to total families assisted	Percentage of ST families assisted to total assisted families	Percentage of SC families assisted to total assisted families	Percentage of ST families assisted to total families assisted
1991-92	13.63	27.18	36.08	15.02
1992-93	12.51	24.77	36.73	14.69
1993-94	13.76	22.07	36.49	13.65

Source : Various Annual Reports of Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

The above table reveals that though S.C. families assisted under IRDP in Assam are relatively less than the same in All India but considering the S.C. population in the State the achievement may not be termed as bad. However, it is evident from the table that Assam couldn't achieve the minimum quota of 50%. In this connection, I would like to mention that as stated earlier about 80% Scheduled Caste families live below the poverty line so there is great need for the poverty alleviation programmes like IRDP in the State. The quota may be achieved by covering more number of Scheduled Caste families under the programme.

SIZE OF INVESTMENT UNDER IRDP :

Under IRDP, size of investment is an important factor for the beneficiaries to earn required level of income so that they can cross poverty line. The level of investment is mainly influenced by incremental capital output ratio (ICOR). ICOR helps us to determine the minimum size of investment required to cross the poverty line. However, generally the level of investment should

always be at a higher level.

The per family investment of S.C. families in Assam depicts that average size of investment (in each S.C. family) has remained comparatively low in the State for last two years. A thorough look into the following table clarifies the statement :

TABLE - II
Average Family Investment (Per Family)

Year	(In Rs.)			
	Per family investment (among scheduled castes)		Average per family investment in Assam	
	S.C. families in Assam	S.C. families in India	Old family	New family
1991-92	5482	6894	6679	6713
1992-93	6585	7667	7915	6700

Source : Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

TRYSEM :

As per the TRYSEM manual prepared by the Government of India, at least 50% youth from SC and ST should be covered under the programme. Like IRDP, here also separately SC or ST families have not been considered. The performance of this programme for last four years i.e. from 1990-91 to 1993-94 shows that Assam couldn't achieve the target as envisaged in the guidelines.

TABLE - III
Percentage of SC/ST youth covered under TRYSEM

Year	Percentage of SC/ST youth trained to total youth trained	
	Assam	All India
1990-91	13.83	41.13
1991-92	31.87	50.94
(upto Dec'91)		
1992-93	40.70	36.00
1993-94	32.60	48.80

Source : Various Annual Reports, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.

TRYSEM can play a significant role in upgradation of skills among S.C. youth in general and in the sub castes like Bania, Hira, Sutradhar, Muchi and Mali in particular as the rural people of these castes are having some traditional skills. On the other hand, TRYSEM can also help to develop technical and entrepreneurial skills of the other sub castes in new areas. From Table-III it is evident that Assam couldn't achieve the target of 50% during last three years. So my suggestion in this connection is that Government of Assam should look into the matter and steps should be taken to achieve the target by covering more S.C. youth under TRYSEM.

CONCLUSION :

As already mentioned there is no specific data about the percentage of S.C. people living below the poverty line so there is urgent need to carry out a baseline survey among the S.C. people in Assam. This survey will give a picture about their level of living.

Secondly, as IRDP and TRYSEM couldn't achieve the target meant for SC/ST in the State so steps may be taken to achieve the target by covering more S.C. families. As mentioned earlier in this paper, according to a rough estimate about 80% of total S.C. families in Assam live below the poverty line so there is scope to cover S.C. families under IRDP and TRYSEM.

Before winding up, I would like to suggest the level of investment per S.C. family should at least be equal to the average per family investment in the State. Because, if the size of investment is substantial then only we can expect good return from the scheme.

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TRAINING OF S.C. YOUTH FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP MOTIVATION

Dr. P. N. Hazarika *

Constitutional provisions regarding reservation of posts in services and admission in the Educational Institutions :

Clause (1) of Article 15 of the Constitution of India provides that "the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them." But clause (4) of Article 15 that 'nothing in this Article in clause (2) of Article 29 shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.' Since Article 335 of the Constitution has specifically provided that "the claims of the members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be taken into consideration, consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration, in the making of appointments to the services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or a State." The State of Assam enacted a law known as "the Assam Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Reservation of Vacancies in Services and Posts) Act, 1978. Section 4 of said Act provides that there shall be reservation of seven percent for the members of the Scheduled Castes in the services and posts. It is relevant to mention that as the number of government jobs including reserved posts is limited, large number of educated boys and girls belonging to Scheduled Castes like youths of other classes are without any employment. According to 1971 Census, the total population of the Scheduled Castes in Assam was 9,12,557 and according to the provisional report of 1991,

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the Scheduled Castes population was around 14 lakhs. Since the growth rate of population is increasing every year, the number of unemployed youths will also increase with the result it would not be possible to provide jobs in the government department or in the government undertakings to the educated and semi-educated youths belonging to Scheduled Castes and this will make the unemployment problem more acute.

It may be pointed out that with a view to accelerating all round development of Scheduled Castes people, the Govt. had launched the Special Component Plan for S.C. Since one of the main objectives of the Special Component Plan for S.C. is to give more emphasis on self employment generation schemes involving also financial institutions through family oriented programmes, solution to the unemployment problem of the S.C. youths lies to a great extent in entrepreneurship development through a co-ordinated and concerted efforts of the Government in the Industries Department and other Agencies. It can not be denied that development of entrepreneurial talent is a very difficult task as our social system does not have a tradition of developing industrial entrepreneurship among the local people, who since time immemorial, accepted agricultural work as their pursuit. But time has come now to change our outlook.

In order to identify and train new entrepreneurs, Industries Department of the Government of Assam and other Agencies like District Industries Centres of different districts in the State, University or other institutions of Management Studies including Technological institutions shall have to be involved in as much as involvement of all these institutions and agencies will not only help to identify the right persons but will also help in the entrepreneurship training and development programmes. For this purpose the Department for Welfare of S.C. and S.T. of Government of Assam must come forward to reimburse a part of the cost, if not wholly, which is likely to be incurred in selecting the potential entrepreneurs and in imparting training to them. It is worthwhile to mention that one of the important criteria for the

identification of potential entrepreneur is that the entrepreneur who has been identified and finally selected should be a person who after the training is over, takes up the production work honestly and sincerely and does not go for seeking employment in other industries. The persons who have an aptitude for starting a small or medium enterprises after the completion of the training and to settle down in life should be selected as entrepreneurs for undergoing training. Therefore, stimulating and motivating entrepreneurship to undertake small scale enterprises depends largely on the proper identification of entrepreneurs.

Training and Motivation :

In order to impart useful and effective entrepreneurial training, experienced and expert entrepreneurs who are capable of acting as catalytic agents for inculcating entrepreneurship among the selected youths should be engaged, if necessary from outside the State as entrepreneurship is very crucial industrial development. Provisions should be made for giving direct training and counselling. The contents of the training should be aimed at the psychological aspects of development of entrepreneurial motivation as well as techno-economic aspects of entrepreneurship. It is important to note that according to 1971 Census Report 90.6% of Scheduled Caste people live in the rural areas and accordingly, it will be desirable to undertake a programme for identifying and motivating the enterprising youths in the rural society. The pattern of entrepreneurship training has to be so devised as to meet the requirements of different trades or enterprises.

A prospective entrepreneur may be motivated by assisting him to remould his concepts, re-orienting his thinking process, awakening his self-confidence and self reliance so that he may visualize a new way of life. Only then, he will be able to develop self-confidence, endurance, resilience etc. which are so essential nay vital to success. After the motivation, the entrepreneur should be furnished with all relevant information covering the all

stages of the enterprise he is about to set up. He should also be taught how to solve a problem that may arise in the course of functioning of the enterprise. Imparting of basic knowledge of commercial practices, management, marketing techniques including inventory control would enable the entrepreneur to run and manage his enterprise smoothly and successfully.

In order to motivate and encourage the entrepreneurs, appropriate authority, corporation, the financial institutions should provide land, finance and other infrastructure facilities. The District Industries Centres should also provide seed money or margin money to the entrepreneurs to enable them to obtain financial assistance from the financial institutions to run the enterprise. This apart, the District Industries Centres should also furnish all information about the availability of raw materials which are locally available in different parts of the State. An institution should be established to offer complete range of services required by the entrepreneurs. The staff required for training and services may be drawn on the skill available in management services of banks, Industrial Undertakings and other Corporate Organisations on a retainer basis. This institution should also render all assistance to the entrepreneurs in marketing their products as and when considered necessary.

It is all relevant to mention that in the backward districts of Maharashtra, the entrepreneurs who successfully complete their entrepreneurial training get all kinds of help and assistance from the concerned authorities in setting up their enterprises under the supervision of experienced entrepreneurs till the new entrepreneurs can take full charge of their enterprises independently. Similar arrangement in rural and backward districts of Assam, if made, will, it is hoped, encourage and motivate our young entrepreneurs to set up and run enterprises successfully.

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CORE PROBLEMS VIS-A-VIS SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS OF SCHEDULED CASTE DEVELOPMENT IN ASSAM

Dr. G.C. Sharma Thakur *

Spread over entire rural and urban areas of Assam, the sixteen groups of the scheduled castes of Assam account for 16,59,412 persons as per 1991 Census constituting 7.40% of Assam's total population of 224,14,322. The bulk of the scheduled caste population live in rural areas, the percentage being 86.18. The percentage of urban scheduled castes is 13.82 which is higher than the state's 11.10% urban population. This urban status, however, does not indicate a high socio economic standard of living. There are sizeable influx of rural scheduled caste people to towns in search of employment and small petty avocations like fish selling, thela pulling, rickshaw plying, opening panshops in street corners, doing menial jobs in hotels and in private residences etc. Besides, there are sizeable urban based scheduled castes like the Bansphors, Dhobis, Maharas, Lalbegis, Mehtars, Muchis etc. who perform all low and unclean jobs having a miserable socio economic condition.

Unlike the scheduled tribes, the scheduled castes of Assam do not have a distinct traditional material culture. However, most of them have been able to maintain much of their socio religious beliefs and practices. The living pattern of the urban scheduled castes who have migrated to the state in the nineteenth century and who live mostly in the urban areas, is different from that of the rural scheduled castes and naturally core problems of these two groups differ.

The economic base of those scheduled castes who are

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mostly concentrated in rural areas is agriculture and fishing. As per 1991 Census, 47.22% scheduled caste people are engaged in agricultural activities as against 50.90% of the state's total. The percentage of agricultural labourers is more i.e. 13.44% among the scheduled castes against 12.09% for the state's total population. Unlike most other rural agricultural people, the scheduled castes are not self sufficient with agricultural products as cultivable lands are insufficient. The scheduled castes were originally not agricultural people and the past generations of the scheduled castes people did not care to occupy land. The people were happy in those days with their limited possessions. Their needs were also limited. Due to lack of sound agricultural base, the scope of economic development has been hindered and the present generation is feeling the pinch of acute hardship.

About 50% of the scheduled caste people are in a perpetual state of indebtedness which can be attributed to the age old deficit economy accelerated recently by lack of employment opportunity and other disabilities like shyness. The Assam Indebtedness Relief Act, 1975 is still to make visible impact in this regard.

Next to agriculture, the rural scheduled caste people have had to depend upon fishing, particularly the Kaibartas, Namasudras and Jalkeots. Pottery and goldsmithy are the important occupations of the Hiras and the Banias respectively. But of late, occupational mobility has been observed among these groups as agricultural activities are at the optimum level so far land man ratio is concerned. The 1991 Census figures indicate a tilt towards trade and commerce (10.01%). But till 1971, the second position was occupied by livestock, forestry and fishing. This indicates an urban mobility under compelling circumstances thereby effecting the core of their culture. The core problem of the scheduled castes may be studied in this perspective also as the traditional occupations of non agricultural communities like the Bansphors, Muchis, Mehtars, Maharas, Lalbegis have to switch over to other professions where they have no expertise or necessary resources. They have to face stiff competition from the

non scheduled caste traders and professionals. The educated young boys and girls are searching employment and they hardly get any job because of their low efficiency. No doubt, there is provision for 7% reservation in jobs for the scheduled castes, but most of the quotas are filled up from the job seekers of well established scheduled caste groups.

In Assam, fish catching and fish selling was exclusively done by the Kaibartas and Namasudras. But to-day, it is not so. The fishermen from other states have taken over this age old trade from the Kaibartas and the local Mahajans, who are also Kaibartas, began to patronise. A study conducted by the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, reveals this disheartening situation. Even those poor Kaibartas who are clinging to this traditional business inspite of the odds, are suffering from the 60:40 syndrome i.e. a sizeable share of the catch has to be given to the Mahajans who provide the capital. The Mahajans lend money to the fishermen on condition that for small catches, the fishermen have to pay 40% to the Mahajans and for bigger catches their percentage is 60. The poor fishermen have no alternative but to agree to the terms of the Mahajans. Besides, the age old indebtedness has played a big role in this regard. The Government chalked out a plan to rescue the poor fishermen from this awkward situation by forming fishery co-operatives but vested interests did not allow these co-operatives to function smoothly. For this again, the age old indebtedness is large responsible. The fishing sources like rivers, beels etc. are not accessible to the poor fishermen as the same are auctioned to the big traders or Mahajans who generally prefer the Bihari fishermen to the local ones. Consequent upon degradation of the traditional income sources and non availability of fresh avenues, the economic backwardness has been further aggravated.

As mentioned earlier the individual scheduled caste groups have their own problems and the family oriented income generating schemes should have quota for each group of scheduled caste people based on population. Besides there are

economically most vulnerable families from a certain group in a cluster and these entire families should be brought under the scheme of cluster development. Very often, members of smaller scheduled caste communities register complaint of negligence by the Chairman of a Board who happens to belong to a particular scheduled caste community. But if definite quota and earmarked amount is there in the document, there will be no scope for dissatisfaction and equal justice will be ensured for all the groups.

Due mainly to the universalisation of elementary education there is an improvement of literacy among the scheduled castes and as per 1991 Census the percentage of literacy among the scheduled castes of Assam stands at 53.94 as against 52.89 percent for the entire state. Two decades back, the literacy percentage was 25.8 as against 28.8 for the entire state. Here again, the high percentage of literacy is not applicable for each of the scheduled caste groups. As per 1971 Census (1991 Census figures for each group are not available), the Banias with 38.95% of literacy came first, followed by the Kaibartas with 34%, Patnis 31.3%, Hiras 27.4% and Sutradhars 26%. There were groups like Bansphors which had a percentage of literacy much below the state percentage i.e. 15.16%. Similarly, the Duglas or Dhulis had 14.98%, Jhalo-Malo had 15.25%, Mehtar 14.49%, Mahar 13.62%, Muchi 12.7% of literacy. Thus these groups always remain backward as they are shadowed by the average. A special drive is necessary for bringing these sections to the level of other fellow scheduled castes as ours is an egalitarian society.

As mentioned earlier, a good number of scheduled caste groups are changing their traditional occupation under various compulsions and the literates and semi literates are seeking employment. The Scheduled Caste Component Plan offers ample opportunities for self employment. But many job seekers particularly from the groups of lower educational status, are not aware of the facilities. It is not uncommon to find roster vacancies reserved for scheduled castes unfilled for years due to non availability of suitable educated and experienced candidate. It is

observed that newspapers carrying advertisement for filling up posts by scheduled caste candidates are not easily available in the scheduled caste inhabited areas and by the time the job seekers get the information, the last date expires. Naturally, the facilities are generally enjoyed by the town dwellers who have easy access to the newspapers and who perhaps do not require special treatment. Unless the chronic socio economic backwardness is removed, the scheduled caste economy will always remain at a considerable distance from the take off point. There is no dearth of well meaning schemes for the development of the scheduled caste communities and over the years due thrust has also been given to remove the drawbacks experienced at the implementation stage of the Scheduled Caste Component Plan. Sizeable proportionate amount spread over twentyfive relevant sectors of development has been spent since 1976-77. Besides, the quantified amount of the State Plan, the Scheduled Caste Component Plan (SCP) also incorporates centrally sponsored schemes funded by the Ministry of Welfare, Government of India and the State Government. The SCP also includes Direct Benefit Schemes like Family Oriented Income Generating Schemes for promotion of self employment of the Scheduled Castes. Necessary funds for such schemes are also available through Special Central Assistance and bank loans. The flow of funds to SCP generally commensurates with the percentage of scheduled caste population of the state. The flow to SCP during 1990-91 was Rs. 42.12 crores (6.72%) out of a total allocation of Rs.627.10 crores under the State Plan general areas; Rs. 48.21 crores (6.49%) out of a total allocation of Rs.744.00 crores under the State Plan in 1991-92; Rs. 57.85 crores (6.48%) out of a total allocation of Rs.892.80 crores in general areas in 1992-93; Rs.63.84 crores (6.86%) out of a total allocation of Rs. 956.16 crores in State Plan general areas in 1993-94. During the year

1994-95, Rs.73.33 crores (7.49%) have been earmarked for SCP out of a total State Plan allocation of Rs. 978.83 crores.

The above figures amply suggest a reasonable financial situation for bringing the backward scheduled caste communities into the level of development of other communities. But main lacuna lies in the implementation of those schemes. The working group on the development of the scheduled castes constituted during Seventh Five Year Plan observed, "The Special Component Plans already prepared by the State Governments have not only to be improved quantitatively and qualitatively, but should also be implemented satisfactorily. For this purpose, it is particularly important to take note of the developmental needs of the scheduled castes in each occupational category, identify the available opportunities suitable for them, formulate appropriate developmental programmes in the light of the above and build these programmes and corresponding outlays into the Special Component Plan". (Report of the Working Group on the Development of Scheduled Castes, during the Seventh Five Year Plan, 1985-90, Chapter 2, P.2)

The Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes conducted an evaluation study on individual beneficiary schemes sponsored and executed by the Assam State Development Corporation for Scheduled Castes Ltd. in Nagaon district and the findings are disheartening. The Corporation executed two types of schemes namely Margin Money Scheme (1979) and Direct Loan Scheme (1981). There were forty five trades under the former and thirty four trades in the latter scheme. The Corporation spent 25 percent of the total involvement and the rest was provided through local banks.

In case of Margin Money Scheme, out of thirty nine beneficiaries, as many as eleven beneficiaries did not make any repayment of the loan 'intentionally'. They did so because of the alleged harassment meted out to them at the time of payment. They had to go several times to get the loan. Thirteen beneficiaries

were not in a position to repay the loan because of poor economic condition. Four beneficiaries reported that they were not approached by the authorities. There was no follow up measures from the Corporation and two beneficiaries did not repay the loan on that spacious ground. Besides, seven beneficiaries were not receiving the sanctioned loan due to procedural lacunae. It was also reported that loan was sanctioned to a student who naturally became a defaulter. Only one beneficiary repaid the loan regularly.

Similarly, out of sixty one beneficiaries of the Direct Loan Scheme, twentyeight loanees did not repay on the ground of poverty condition. Twenty beneficiaries did not repay intentionally as they had to collect the loan with much difficulty and they were reportedly harassed. Nine beneficiaries avoided repayment because they were not pressurised by the officers of the Corporation. Four beneficiaries reported that their units died before giving them any benefit, hence repayment was not made.

The above is a sample case and it is clear that much remains to be done in implementing the schemes. The core problems of the scheduled castes had already been identified and necessary measures for removing the age old backwardness have also been taken under the statutory provisions of "Protective Discrimination" in the form of a separate Sub Plan. Now, it is time to take some harsh decisions in the greater interest of the welfare of scheduled castes.

SUGGESTIONS

1. In the 'Cluster Approach' problems of individual scheduled caste groups should be studied in depth and separate funds should be earmarked for their development so far as family oriented income generating schemes and pre matric and post matric schemes are concerned.

2. Appointments under the Reservation Act should be implemented in such a manner so that representation of various caste groups is ensured.

3. The Bench Mark Survey for the scheduled castes should

be prepared without delay as the same will be a guideline for individual castewise reflection in the S.C.P. and in various Scheduled Caste Development Boards.

4. Concurrent evaluation of the schemes should be done by a team of researchers exclusively appointed for the purpose. The Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes should be the right choice.

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AN INSIGHT INTO THE CORE PROBLEMS OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES OF ASSAM

B. K. Hazarika, ACS *

Assam, the fascinating land of blue hills and red rivers, is inhabited by a number of communities belonging to various ethnic origins with diverse cultures. These communities can broadly be divided into two categories viz. tribals and non tribals and they are found spread on the hills as well as the two valleys of the State. While the hills of Assam are inhabited mostly by the tribal communities, the valleys are found to be inhabited by both tribals and non tribals. The non tribal category of inhabitants can again be sub-divided into high caste Hindus, O.B.Cs., M.O.B.Cs. and Scheduled Castes.

The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 specifies 16 Nos. of castes or sub-castes who belong to the weaker section of the society, as scheduled castes. These are : 1) Bansphor 2) Bhumali or Mali 3) Britthal Bania 4) Dhupi or Dhobi 5) Dugla or Dholi 6) Hira 7) Jalkeot 8) Jalo. Malo or Jalo-Malo 9) Kaibarta or Jalja 10) Lalbegi 11) Mahara 12) Mehtar or Bhangi 13) Muchi or Richi 14) Namasudra 15) Patni and 16) Sutradhar.

As per 1991 Census the total population of Assam is 2,24,14,322 out of which the number of S.Cs. is 16,59,112. In terms of percentage we find 7.40 of the total population belonging to the scheduled castes. Homogeneous scheduled caste villages are very few. On the other hand, most of the villages are interspersed with non-scheduled caste villages. Although much changes have occurred in respect of occupational pattern of these scheduled castes, traces of a traditional occupation are still to be

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seen among each of these scheduled communities and they, except the creamy layer, which is yet to be identified among them, still deserve social, economic as well as political support to enter into the mainstream of national life.

CORE PROBLEMS :

The scheduled castes in Assam have a number of socio-economic problems and in this paper an effort is being made to discuss about few problems which are considered to be the core problems of the scheduled castes of Assam. These are :

1. Land-holding 2. Education 3. Communication
4. Health & Sanitation 5. Drinking Water 6. Indebtedness

1. Land-holding :

Field studies conducted by this Institute reveal that majority of the households belonging to scheduled caste groups do not possess sufficient quantity of land for the purpose of cultivation. In bygone days, the scheduled caste people earned their livelihood on their respective traditional occupation. In respect of the Kaibartas and the Namasudras it is seen that their ancestors mainly depended upon fishing for sustenance. Similarly the Hiras also entirely depended on pottery making. As a consequence, the present generations are facing problems for cultivable land. Another factor is that the existing plots of land under the possession of the scheduled caste people have been fragmented due to growth of population and consequent disintegration of joint families resulting the emergence of nuclear families. It may, therefore, be said that small land holdings have retarded the economic development of the people to a great extent.

Due to the lack of sufficient amount of land the poor scheduled caste people are not in a position to mortgage their land to obtain any loan from the financial institutions to undertake viable economic projects.

2. Education :

Although education is the backbone of modern civilisation it has been seen that most of the scheduled caste people are yet to realise the paramount importance of education. Pre-primary schools for the children below 6 years of age are extremely inadequate. Of course primary schools are generally available in

the villages. But most of the school buildings are found to be in dilapidated condition. Desk, bench, blackboard and other paraphernalias are quite insufficient. The required number of teachers in some schools is also lacking. Moreover, the attendance of teachers in primary schools is not regular and inspection of schools is not done timely. The most astonishing fact is that as soon as the primary stage of education is over, the number of school drop-outs increases. The main reasons for drop-outs are lack of proper guidance, deplorable economic condition of the people, repeated failure in the examinations and marriage of girls at an early age, etc. The number of college going students is also very less in the scheduled caste inhabited villages. Female literacy is exceedingly low in comparison to male literacy.

3. Communication :

Communication facilities in and around the scheduled caste villages are far from satisfactory. Most of the motorable roads are gravelled and regular maintenance of the roads is hardly observed. Moreover, the public bus service is quite disheartening. Buses ply at a long interval of time loaded with passengers. In some villages the people use country boats during summer season for their movements due to lack of motorable roads or irregular bus service. It may also be mentioned here that the people have to suffer a lot for disposal of their products due to lack of a good communication network.

Majority of the scheduled caste inhabited villages are located at a considerable distance from the nearest District/ Subdivisional and Block Headquarters. etc. Some of the villages are still located in inaccessible areas and as such, the people do not enjoy the modern communication facilities.

4. Health & Sanitation :

The common diseases prevalent among the people are fever, pox, dysentery, diarrhoea, headache, toothache, scabies and malaria, etc. For treatment of various types of diseases the people use to visit the nearest medical institutions viz. hospitals, P.H.Cs. and subcentres, etc. Our studies reveal that the medical institutions are not adequately manned. Scientific instruments are

also lacking in the institutions. Medicines are not easily available in sufficient proportion. Surprisingly enough, the medicines supplied are of sub standard and hence quick recovery is not possible. Since purchasing capacity of the scheduled caste people is exceedingly low and modern medical facilities are not easily available, they approach the ayurvedic and homoeopathic doctors also. Moreover, the people use indigenous drugs prepared from wild herbs and roots and they also believe in the application of mantras chanted by 'ojah' to get rid of various types of ailments.

With regard to sanitation, it may be said that the people are least conscious of health hazards. Their surroundings are devoid of proper drainage system. Water accumulates during rainy season and as a result, the low-lying areas become breeding grounds of mosquitoes and flies, etc. Most of the people do not have sanitary latrines and they ease at open space. On the whole, the health and sanitation aspects of the scheduled caste people are far from satisfactory.

5. Drinking Water :

Provision of safe drinking water can not be said to be satisfactory in the scheduled caste inhabited areas. People fetch water from the ponds, wells and the nearby rivers. Tube-wells are limited in number. Sometimes the public tube-wells remain unused for a long period since the people do not repair the tube-wells at their own cost. Water supply schemes implemented by the P.H.E. Deptt. cover very few villages only. The people are not in the habit of taking any scientific measure for purification of drinking water except the traditional method of filtration. As a consequence, the scheduled caste people suffer mostly from diseases like dysentery, diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases. Due to non-availability of safe drinking water the people have to spend a considerable amount of their income for medical treatment and in this process their economic conditions deteriorate further.

6. Indebtedness :

The Scheduled Caste people are in the habit of taking loan from the village money-lenders at an exorbitant rate of interest

rather than taking loan from other sources viz. Bank, DRDA and Gaon Panchayat level Co-operative Societies, etc. which provide loan to the needy persons at a cheaper rate of interest. The main reason is that they face difficulties to follow the complicated procedures of the banks or other Govt. agencies due to their illiteracy and ignorance. Sometimes the village money-lenders come forward to provide loans to the needy persons against standing crops. Loans are normally taken by the people for maintenance of household affairs, medical treatment, petty business matters, marriage ceremonies and to perform various rites, etc. Thus it may be said that indebtedness has an adverse effect on the economic conditions of the people to a great extent.

Over and above our field studies reveal that except a small and educated and enlightened section, most of the scheduled castes people are ignorant about the safeguards, protective measures and welfare measures extended to them under the provisions of the Constitution of India as well as by the Government. This situation has encouraged various corrupt practices in the society as a whole.

Although Assam is almost free from the menace of untouchability, even then the covert forms of the evil are still practised here and there. Serious studies on this aspect may reveal many interesting facts.

SUGGESTIONS :

On the basis of our studies we would like to put forward the following suggestions with a hope that these might be able to solve some of the core problems of the Scheduled Castes of Assam to a certain extent.

1. For the development of the Scheduled Castes of Assam, who form a part of the weaker sections, a congenial mapping of all the communities living in the state as a whole and up to date statistics concerning vital aspects of the scheduled castes are essential and in this regard a corporate effort of individual scholars, Universities,

Research and Development Agencies engaged for the uplift of the weaker sections and voluntary agencies etc. may prove fruitful.

2. More number of socio-economic evaluation and comparative studies on the scheduled castes should be conducted both at Government as well as non Government levels.
3. Thrust should be given to develop the educational and infrastructural facilities in and around the scheduled caste inhabited areas.
4. A co-ordinated effort should be made to evolve scientific means to develop the traditional occupations still practised by the scheduled castes communities and also to make these economically viable.
5. Special attention should be given by all concerned to make the scheduled castes people aware about the constitutional and welfare measures meant for them.
6. Safe drinking water facilities should be provided in all scheduled castes inhabited areas as soon as possible and people's participation in maintaining the sources of safe drinking water may be sought.
7. People should be made aware of the health hazards and different kinds of pollution etc.

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IMPACTS OF THE SCHEDULED CASTES COMPONENT SCHEMES AMONG THE SCHEDULED CASTES PEOPLE OF ASSAM

Prafulla Kumar Sensowa, A.P.S. *

The impacts of the special component plan among the scheduled castes people of Assam shall have to be studied on the development departments of the Government of Assam and the Centrally sponsored departmental programmes which are entrusted specifically to deal with the various schemes and projects entrusted to them under the annual operational plans. For the purpose of implementation of these projects and schemes under Special Component Plan, these departments are allotted funds under a separate budget Head called S.C.P. exclusively for the Scheduled Castes.

In order to study the impacts of these plans and programmes upon the economic conditions of the Scheduled Castes people in Assam the need of such a plan exclusively for the Scheduled Castes people, the development sectors included under separate fund and the main objectives of the Special Plan shall have to be studied first.

SPECIAL COMPONENT PLAN :

The Special Component Plan for the development of the Scheduled Castes was introduced only in the 6th Five Year Plan (1980-85) under the S.C.P. Separate development programmes and strategies are formulated for the different development departments of the Govt. of Assam, for the all round development of the Scheduled Castes of the State and each development department is allotted separate fund for its development programme and strategies under the S.C.P.

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The development sectors under which separate funds are allotted for implementing the programmes under S.C.P. can be divided into two sectors (A) General Service Sector (B) Economic Sector. The former includes (1) Primary Health Care (2) Drinking Water Supply (3) Education and (4) Road Communication while the latter includes (1) Agriculture (2) Fishery (3) Irrigation (4) Animal Husbandry & Veterinary (5) Dairy (6) Sericulture (7) Weaving (8) Cottage Industries (9) Co-operation and (10) Rural Development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SPECIAL COMPONENT PLAN :

The Special Component Plan is the Sub-Plan approach to accelerate the development of the Scheduled Castes people of the State. The strategy of the S.C.P. has been aimed at the socio-economic including educational development and the improvement of the working and living conditions of the Scheduled Castes people.

The main objectives of the S.C.P. are (1) Economic development through beneficiary-oriented schemes in the relevant selected development sectors for raising the income of the S.C. beneficiaries (2) Infrastructural or community level developments through area-oriented schemes (3) Elimination of scavenging and (4) Educational development.

The S.C.P. for the development of the Scheduled Castes comprises of these selected sectors which have specific relevance for the S.C. communities. Since the Scheduled Castes families of Assam mostly live in rural areas, the S.C.P. prepares and implements the special development strategies only for rural Assam.

Another important unit dealing with the S.C.P. for the Scheduled Castes, playing a very important role in selecting the areas and the actual poor Scheduled Caste people, is the Scheduled Castes Development Board. The Board is constituted by the local village representatives from each village in Subdivisional level and presided over by one Chairman, who alongwith other members are appointed by the Government of

Assam by orders of the Governor. The S.C.D.B. has been entrusted with the responsibilities of holding meetings of all the members and discuss the various socio-economic problems of the Scheduled Castes. When they are informed by the Subdivisional Welfare Officer and the heads of the development departments at district and subdivisional level they shall hold meetings, distribute the funds allotted to the different development departments' schemes and select areas of Scheduled Castes villages and the deserving beneficiaries of the Scheduled Castes. The S.D.W.O. as Convener and Secretary of the Board shall convene these meetings of the development departments and the S.C.D.B. as and when necessary to select the areas and beneficiaries and approve the schemes. With this approval only the departments except, the D.R.D.A. and the Scheduled Castes Development Corporation, can receive funds and implement the scheme.

In order to assess the impact of the various schemes, area and individual level, the following factors may be studied-

- (1) LEVEL OF EDUCATION — literate and illiterate, what class of people has been receiving the benefits of S.C.P.
- (2) LEVEL OF INCOME — Low, middle and high income group of beneficiary — what group of persons is receiving the benefits.
- (3) FREQUENCY OF VISITS — Number of visits of the beneficiaries to the banks giving loan, the concerning offices granting the loan and subsidy - whether the beneficiaries are harassed or they have received the benefits without any difficulty. On this factor depends to a large extent, the success of a scheme. If the loans or subsidies are received in time and at ease by the applying beneficiary directly, he may achieve a better result from the scheme. Some schemes are of such nature that these must be implemented in a particular season such as agricultural schemes, poultry, piggery, duckery may be better managed during winter.
- (4) TOTAL MONETARY COMPONENTS — Loan, subsidy and own money - what amount of subsidy and loan component and

under what terms may be more convenient and fruitful to one S.C. beneficiary for achieving success. As it is not possible on the part of the Govt. or the bank to grant to all the applicants loans and subsidies a choice must be made from among the needy applicants, a task which is entrusted to the S.C.D. Board. Besides to cover up the maximum number of such applicants, the subsidy or loan amount shall have to be small but it must be at the same time sufficient for the scheme for its complete and full implementation. The terms of bank or Govt. departmental loans (like D.R.D.A., D.I.C.), the Banks giving the loans also shall have to relax the terms of repayment by giving a longer period and fix a small interest on the instalments which may be paid easily from the income of the schemes.

If any scheme loan needs a very high percentage of interest short term of repayment and smaller amount, the amount of subsidy also shall be smaller and as a result the beneficiary's scheme may fail completely as he may not be able to fill up the deficit by his or her own money.

(5) **POSITION OF REPAYMENT** – (a) Highly irregular (b) Irregular and (c) Regular. The position of repayment of loan of an individual beneficiary determines the asset-creating capacity of a scheme. Other factors remaining unaltered a scheme must be implemented in full amount of assessment already determined and the man-power and raw materials necessary must be supplied in full and timely. If a beneficiary is capable of making repayment of loan amount regularly out of the income of the scheme without incurring any loss and with profit, it is treated as 'regular'. If the beneficiary out of income earned from the scheme is not capable of making payment regularly it is treated as 'irregular' and if he does not repay at all it is treated as 'highly irregular', the scheme has failed completely or it has become defunct or vanished.

(6) **AMOUNT OF MONEY SPENT ON VISIT AND ASSISTANCE SOUGHT FROM OTHERS** – During field study of our research work on Special Component Plan, it was found that

most of the beneficiaries have been spending money for their journeys from their houses to the offices of the S.D.W.O., the D.C. or S.D.O., S.D.C. and the concerning loan-giving bank several times. They have also been paying speed money to the middleman of their village, the concerning dealing assistants of the offices and even in the Banks. A few beneficiaries reported us that the banks did not make payment of the entire sanctioned amount. In some cases they call the beneficiaries several days and harass asking some documents making payment of money, by remaining absent on the day of payment etc. Such harassment and misappropriation of fund creates an adverse impact upon the scheme. The beneficiary does not get the full amount and scheme fails without creating any asset.

(7) **POSITION OF ASSETS, INCREASE, DECREASE AND CONSTANT** – The change in the position of assets of an individual beneficiary can be examined in three ways accurately. To understand these conditions clearly, e.g. a beneficiary receiving one Jersey cow under Animal Husbandry and Veterinary department may have after one year two or three cows and heifers more and may get more milk than before, when he first got the cow. It is an instance of increase in assets. If the cow can not yield more milk and give birth to more cows it is constant and if the cow's milk production is reduced after one year or if it dies, the asset is decreasing or vanished resulting in the total wastage.

The other important factors which shall have to be studied to ascertain the impacts of the area and individual schemes are :

- (8) Whether the scheme has created employment
- (9) Whether the scheme has created income
- (10) Whether the schemes are distributed equally to all the poorest needy persons and not concentrated to one group of S.C. persons only
- (11) Whether the schemes are given according to the choice of the beneficiary or it is imposed against his will.
- (12) **MOTIVATION** – (a) whether the S.C. persons are motivated properly about the utilities of the schemes and about the

procedure of getting these is another important factor influencing impact. (b) the population table - male, female and children of a family receiving a loan-subsidy based scheme also has a deeper impact. A small family of 2 or 3 persons would surely be better benefitted than a large family with many non-earning members.

(13) **THE AMOUNT OF LANDED PROPERTY** - A S.C. applicant's possession of land determines the base of economic stability of a villager. A farmer receiving a scheme having a bigger plot of land shall be more benefitted than a marginal farmer.

(14) **OCCUPATION** - If a beneficiary has one established occupation, the scheme may give him an additional income.

(15) **ALTERNATIVE JOB AND DUPLICATION OF BENEFITS** - If a beneficiary has alternative job apart from the scheme or if he receives several schemes or his members of family receive the same scheme from different departments, they may be more benefitted than others who have no such alternative or received fund once only for his scheme. But the distribution of funds, Govt. subsidies, materials received in kind, free of cost, shall not be equal and a bulk of the S.C. population shall be deprived of. Taking for granted that all the S.C.P. schemes are funded sufficiently and all the poor S.C. people willing to take the schemes in their right perspective, the selection of the beneficiaries must be very careful and correct to avoid duplication, in order to cover up all or the highest number of the S.C. population. If such selection is not just and reasonable the S.C.P. for the elevation of the poor S.C. people to a minimum level of economic self-dependance, shall not be possible. The role of the Scheduled Castes Development Board in this regard is very important. The Board must find out those persons who have been receiving the benefits of the scheme from several departments and those who have not received any scheme at all and select only the second in preference.

In our intensive field study in the thirty Scheduled Castes villages of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts on the Special Component Plan with a base of years from 1990 to 1994 of all the 22 development departments the researcher has randomly

surveyed several schemes and projects. The percentage of the number of such projects of all the departments in these randomly selected sample villages is cent percent.

The following table shows the impact of the S.C.P. on the individual beneficiary and area schemes of the Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts randomly selected in the sample S.C. villages for the period from 1990-91 to 1993-94.

For a brief assessment of the impacts of all departments under S.C.P. the position of asset changing after the schemes only are tabulated.

TABLE - I
Individual Scheme

Sl. No.	Name of the Department	Total No. of Schemes/ Projects	No. of Schemes/ Projects successfully implemented increasing asset/Income	No. of projects failed with complete loss of Govt. money
1.	D.R.D.A.	72	25	47
2.	D.I.C.	5	4	1
3.	Agriculture	15	15	Nil
4.	Housing (M.N.P. and ASHB)	10	2	8
5.	Handloom & Textile	3	1	2
6.	Sericulture	4	1	3
7.	Rural Electrification	6	1	5
8.	District Social Welfare Office	54	54	Nil
9.	Fishery	11	9	2
10.	S.C.D. Corporation	25	16	9
11.	Animal Husbandry & Veterinary	18	1	17
12.	Subdivisional Welfare Office	64	9	55
13.	Mahkuma Parishad	94	94	Nil
Total		381	232	149

- Sources : 1) The District Offices of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts.
2) Field Study.

TABLE - II
Area/Community Scheme

Sl. No.	Name of the Department	Total No. of Schemes/ Projects studied	No. of Schemes/ Projects successfully implemented increasing asset/Income	No. of projects failed with complete loss of Govt. money
1.	Public Health Engineering	3	3	Nil
2.	P.W.D. (Roads)	26	16	10
3.	Education (Elementary, Adult, Higher)	46	18	18 not yet implemented. 10 failed
4.	Social Forestry	2	x	2
5.	Dairy Development	1	x	1
6.	Health	20	7	13 one established in tribal area
7.	Fishery Co-op. Society	21	19	2
8.	Weaving Co-op. Society	7	2	5
9.	Irrigation	10	8	2 one is not complete
10	Soil Conservation	13	8	5
Total		149	81	68

- Sources : 1) The District Offices of the Departments, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia
2) Field Study

Table-I shows that out of a total of 381 projects investigated in field study 149 projects failed incurring partly or full loss of government money. A total of 232 projects achieved success or earned profit to the beneficiaries. Within this category the projects

giving constant return are also included. Among these individual level schemes the Agricultural Schemes, District Social Welfare and Mahkuma Parishad, although their schemes involve a very small amount ranging from Rs.1000/- to Rs.5000/- maximum per beneficiary per project, their success is cent percent. Among others in the second successful group fall 1) D.I.C. 2) S.C.D. Corporation and 3) Fishery.

Table - II shows that the area or community schemes have a total of 149 projects investigated by the researcher in field study. Out of these 68 projects failed with total loss of government fund and 81 achieved success that is, these have yielded profit and increased assets to the beneficiaries of the areas or villages concerned. The department achieving highest success is Public Health Engineering which has the projects of Water Supply now in operation. The next successful departments are the Fishery Co-operative Society, P.W.D. (Roads) and Irrigation.

THE FOLLOWINGS ARE THE DRAWBACKS OF THE SPECIAL COMPONENT PLAN :

- 1) The S.C.P. introduced in 1980 fails to improve the quality of life of the Scheduled Castes people of rural Assam as measured by level of income, education, productivity etc.
- 2) The S.C.P. in Assam is not correctly based on the existing S.C. population of Assam. The projected population of S.C. in Assam in December 1993 is 16,76,455. The S.C. population according to 1991 Census was 16,59,412. Keeping pace with the growth rate of general population the rate of growth of S.C. between 1991 to 1993 is 17043. The S.C. population according to 1971 Census was 9,12,000 only. The development department, offices in the districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia are found keeping one 1971 Census Report of S.C. population and names of the villages and they allot and distribute the S.C.P. fund according to that Report. The Report is completely wrong and so the plans allocation of fund and selection of sites are also found wrong in many cases, in our field study.
- 3) Most of the individual level schemes are implemented

without taking the prospective beneficiaries into confidence, resulting into non-completion of the schemes.

4) The 22 development departments involved in the implementation of the S.C.P. schemes do not give any cash amount. The Agriculture Deptt., the A.H. & Veterinary, Public Health, Education, S.D.W.O., Mahkuma Parishad, D.S.W.O., Housing and Handloom & Textile grant in kind. The other departments of both individual level and area schemes grant loans with subsidy. Granting of these amounts of loan depends entirely on the concerning banks. On being granted by the bank only the Govt. Deptt. may grant subsidy. The subsidy amount is quite small with a ceiling limit of Rs. 5000/- in some departments and Rs.7500/- (in DRDA) maximum. This system of loan itself helps only the able and rich persons who are capable of financing the schemes from his own money. For example, the maintenance of a jersey cow is not possible for a poor S.C. person.

The present procedure of granting of loan with subsidy is very lengthy and difficult for the common S.C. rural people to get. As a result, a large number of the rural S.C. population can not dare to receive these funds. It should be simplified.

5) Lack of follow-up action - The development departments except a few, do not take any follow-up action. After the beneficiaries receive the loan and subsidy the implementation is entirely left to him.

6) The D.R.D.A. in its District level Governing Body has no member or Chairman of the S.C. Development Board, although it includes the Project Officer, I.T.D.P.

7) The Scheduled Castes Development Board, being a non-govt., unpaid (except an honorarium of Rs.100/- to the Chairman and Rs.40/- as T.A. to the members) agency, lack sincerity and zeal of work. Besides, the S.C.D.B. does not include in its Board, the Development Officer of S.C.D.C., who is the only District level Officer, dealing exclusively with the S.C. Schemes. But the Board includes as its member the Project Officer, I.T.D.P., whose attendance is not necessary at all, because he deals with the tribal

people only. As the D.R.D.A. and the S.C.D.C. which are very important agencies of financing in S.C.P. schemes covering the highest number of S.C. beneficiaries, are excluded from the S.C.D.B., they are left to their own discretion for selection of area and individual beneficiaries, opening thereby an avenue of delay or wrong selection.

8) The development departments do not have co-ordination among them and function independently from each other. When they receive the S.C.P. funds, they request the S.D.W.O. to hold meetings. The allotment of funds by the government is not timely. The meetings of the S.C.D.B. can not be held any time the departments want. So in most cases, the selection of site or individual beneficiary is left to the S.D.W.O. or the Chairman, S.C.D.B. only.

9) It is found that the development departments keep a list of S.C. areas and names of the S.C. beneficiaries well in advance and select from this list the areas and beneficiaries and after selection only they obtain the signature of approval of Chairman, S.C.D.B. Example : P.W.D. (Roads) Deptt. Dibrugarh. The S.C.D.B. members do not get any copy of government allotment order in advance, to discuss and select the schemes/beneficiaries. As a result, they sometimes have no alternative but to approve the projects already selected and fund allotted projectwise by the concerning department.

10) The gap between the planners of S.C.P. at Dispur and the poor S.C. villagers of the village is very wide, the planners not knowing the actual needs of the S.C. population and the problems of implementation and the S.C. people remaining completely unaware of the schemes.

11) Motivation Lacuna - The schemes of the development departments are not properly advertised and people are not motivated. Except the D.R.D.A., the development departments do not have a proper advertising media in the villages, as result of which the procedure and utility of most of the schemes are not known to the S.C. villagers.

12) Small Fund- Allocation of fund for the scheme by the Govt. is very small. 90% of the fund of the Govt. is loan-based and dependent on bank-loans. A very small amount of subsidy is given against the loan of the bank. The burden of drawal and repayment of the loan is entirely left to the individual beneficiary. The responsibility of the department, the S.C.D.B. and the S.D.W.O. ends just on receipt of the loan and subsidy by the individual beneficiary.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- 1) The S.C.P. should be made on the latest actual S.C. population 1993-94 (latest population projected). The Government should issue orders with a copy of the latest S.C. population census to all development departments to follow that village and population list and not the 1971 Census.
- 2) The planners of planning and development Deptt. should visit the S.C. villages and study their actual economic problems and assess the amount of fund actually needed for the full and successful implementation of all S.C.P. schemes, so that, there is no wrong selection of sites and beneficiary and no wrong allotment.
- 3) The bank procedure of granting loan now in practice, should be simplified to avoid harassment by bank/office employees and the group of middle-men taking advantages of the ignorance of the illiterate beneficiaries and earning speed money. The Govt. of Assam may form a Regional S.C. Finance and Development Corporation of the type of National Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (Govt. of India Enterprise) and all the fund allocation matters of S.C.P. Schemes may be exclusively entrusted to it.
- 4) The subsidy limit of fund should be increased.
- 5) The houses constructed and left incomplete by the D.R.D.A. under Indira Awas Yojana financed by Central and State Govt. (80%, 20% ratio) should cost Rs.40,000/- minimum, so that, it accommodates sufficiently a small family. The present rate of Rs.12,700/- per house is too small.

6) The Kutir Jyoti Scheme of the A.S.H.B. financed by the Central Govt. should be revived and implemented again.

7) The S.C.D.B. members should be paid salary of one L.D.A., provided with a vehicle and they should have one office for their regular sitting alongwith the existing S.D.W.O.

8) The present procedure of approval of the Subdivisional Planning and Development Council of the District and receiving administrative and financial approval/sanction of the State Head of departments, should be simplified. All the S.C.P. schemes may be approved and financed at District level at the Deputy Commissioner's office. As the S.D.P.D.C. sits only twice in a year, the S.C.P. schemes even after allotment from the State Head Offices, shall have to wait for implementation. Besides the present procedure of inclusion of the sanctioned amount in the monthly letters of credit in some of the departments like P.W.D. (Roads) (and that to without specifically mentioning S.C.P.) should be avoided and S.C.P. should always be given in separate sanctioning letters of the concerning Govt. Deptt. to avoid delay.

9) The D.R.D.A. should include in its district level governing body the Chairman of the S.C.D.B. and the S.C.D.B. also should include as its members, the Project Director, D.R.D.A. and the District Officer, S.C.D. Corporation invariably. Necessary amendments of the concerning Govt. orders should be made earliest.

10) There should be one Implementation Committee at the District/Subdivisional level with one Senior Govt. Officer, exclusively for the S.C.P. schemes for implementation and for all necessary correspondence with banks and offices. It should work as inquiry office, advertising and motivating centre also. This would take away the responsibility of the S.D.W. Officer, who at present appears to be over-burdened with many other duties, besides S.C.P. & its implementation. The Committee shall check the misuse and misappropriation of funds granted for various schemes of S.C.P. and point out these to the concerning officers as and when necessary.

TRAINING OF SCHEDULED CASTE YOUTHS FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL MOTIVATION

G. C. Senapati*

A country's economic development depends on various factors, of which natural resources, human resources, supply of capital and socio-cultural functions may be considered the pre-requisites. Many economists attribute the poverty of under-developed countries to the scarcity of natural resources, but from the empirical experience it has been proved that this is partly true. Because "resource availability is not a sufficient condition for economic change and resource scantiness is not inevitably fatal to economic progress. Some countries in Latin America, Africa and Middle East with a favourable ratio of cultivable land to population and with an endowment of significant materials have a per capita income far below that of other countries with less land and less raw materials". Nevertheless without sufficient raw materials at the command of an economically under-developed country, it is not easy for exploiting them at comparatively cheaper cost. But who will utilise the natural resources? Surely a group of people. This group of people is technically called entrepreneurs. Most of the prominent extension philosophers have marked the following characteristics with the entrepreneurs. According to Schumpeter (1961) the entrepreneur has been defined as a dynamic, innovative agent of change who introduces something new into the economy. Carroll (1969) opines that the entrepreneurship includes innovation such as method of production not yet tested, a product with which consumers are not familiar or new market hitherto unexploited. Entrepreneurship has also been conceived

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as a co-ordinating catalytic function, in bringing together various resources and transforming them increasingly into corresponding production possibilities. In fine an entrepreneur is one who is qualified venturesome, having possessed the concrete knowledge of results of his forecasting, who can skilfully organise the factors of production for economic development ready to face cut throat competition and last but not least who can take calculated risk. "Underlying various definitions of entrepreneurship is the basic idea of change or innovation-- a break with the past and familiar perception or new opportunities" (Partha Sarathi Gupta). Herbert W Butt in his essay on 'Principles and Philosophy of Extension Education' mentions that 'Change does involve risks. It is a gamble. It involves efforts always painful atleast to some extent'. Now the question is if a scheduled caste youth who is endowed with all the abovementioned traits can become an entrepreneur? Is an entrepreneur born or made up? Does he inherit an environment of trade and industry that is enjoyed by the youth of industrial magnet? These are the questions of a million dollar. The members of scheduled caste for the last two and a half millenium have been relegated to the obscurity because of religious injunction. The Manu-Smriti had further codified the caste system making each caste an endogamous unit with no commensality. The esoteric education had thrown them into nocturnal habit so much so that even until recently in a Tinnevelley district there was a class of unseeables called Purada Vannan. They were not allowed to come out during daytime because of their sight was considered to be- pollution (the Hindu, 1932) & that "its unfortunate members were compelled to follow nocturnal habits leaving their dens after dark & scuttling home at the false dawn like the badger, hyena or aardvark" (Mangalore District Gazetteer).

Although the Constitution of India has guaranteed some sorts of protection of this backward group of people from being exploited and certain measures taken to upgrade them "in absence of effective social and economic development and thereby also strengthens the forces that put inhibitions and

obstacles in the path of economic and social reforms". Most of the intellectuals and the rich Upper Caste people blow trumpet before the foreigners that caste is a passing phase and that all classes of people are now enjoying equality of opportunity. But in actual practice this is not wholly true. In his 'Caste in Modern India and other Essays', 1962, M.N. Srinivas laments : "I am not trying to be cynical but I can not help wondering how many of those who have of late stated publicly speaking in favour of a casteless classless society really mean, what they say Most of us not only our politicians but our intellectuals as well - are bamboozled into agreeing with something merely because we are afraid to be mistaken for being reactionary. Even discussion of the subject is taboo".

It is not only the Scheduled Caste people who have been harshly hamstrung by history; but a great majority of caste Hindu has become victims of vast disparity. Those who financed the Freedom Movement have been siphoning off the lion share of Freedom's fruits and as such there remains a big hiatus between the haves and the havenots. The rural people irrespective of Scheduled Caste and non Scheduled Caste are steeped in abject superstition and fetishism. Therefore, any change in their present pattern of living is resisted even if the change means better economic and social status. In our own country "the Baiga refused the use of the iron plough believing that the use of the iron plough would repay with harshness the generosity of land tearing her breast and breaking her belly" (Verrier Elwin, 1929).

It is obvious that Scheduled Caste entrepreneurs are not born; they must be made. But who will take the responsibility for making the Scheduled Caste youths entrepreneurs to take up the challenging jobs of competing with their sound and established counterparts ? Surely "Governments may have to play an important part originally in inducing innovation that will create motivation for further action, either by their own agencies or private investors" to create conditions of making Schumpeters "NEWMEN".

Government of India, no doubt, had begun the experiments in Gujarat first by establishing the institutes to produce entrepreneurs and change agents. But no systematic and special syllabus have perhaps been introduced in all branches of extension training and entrepreneurial motivation centres for the scheduled caste youths taking into account of their socio-cultural and economic background. It is learnt from the Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship located at Guwahati that the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe boys and girls alongwith the others are being trained after following the processes suggested by H. C. Ravals and C. H. Pathak (— Rationale, Tools and Technique of How to Select Potential Entrepreneurs). Although some attempts have been made in the hill states of North East Region to identify the potential entrepreneurs for training in the Entrepreneurship Development Programmes it is too early to predict how far this sort of programme would be fruitful if special protection is not provided for. The EDPs are not new in Assam. It has taken roots long years back; nevertheless have we not seen the industrial estates at Rani, Guwahati, Tinsukia to mention a few in industrial cities having been haunted by ghosts ? Have we been able to manufacture iron nails, nuts and bolts of daily consumption ? If no, why is there an Industry Department staffed with innumerable technical personnel who have already been inculcated with the extension philosophy coupled with the management and the area development courses ?

Making of entrepreneurs is not an easy task more so to get successful ones unless and until the political leaders, the top executives and the field personnel are dedicated ones. Under the cover of democratic decency nobody is accountable for the perpetual losses incurred for years together in respect of corporations. So the Scheduled Caste youth however intelligents they are would not be able to stand up and in a caste-ridden hierarchy it is doubtful whether these boys and girls would get better deal like the one called the compensatory discrimination of Marc Galanter. Ravals' prescription of qualification does not

incorporate sociology as one of the educational qualifications. So his trainer motivator may not attach the sociological aspect and as such any executive or trainer in spite of having good intentions otherwise, are feared to be time servers. In respect of the Scheduled Caste potential entrepreneurs the trainer motivators shall have to be free from caste prejudices. Even the renowned social scientists like Dr. G.S. Ghurye in his 'Caste and Race in India' displays the most pathetic conditions of the untouchables but he has left no stone unturned in Chapter 14 to vehemently condemn the protective measures like reservations in posts and services. God knows how many of the Ghuryes are still operating in pseudonym to scuttle the EDPs for making promising entrepreneurs from the Scheduled Caste youths. "We say" Nehru childed after the 1957 election "we are against communalism, casteism, provincialism and all that. Which of us I or you is completely free from this ?" In order to effectively deal with those problems against the backdrop of Indian socio-cultural scenario the training centres shall have to be reoriented. "Staffing pattern facilities available in training centres should be established in relation to the subject matter and methods appropriate to achieve the objectives. A system of priorities has to be adopted in training programme of the centres on the social aspect of rural development (where scheduled caste people live together) may have to give too much greater emphasis on its economic aspect The syllabus that outlines the curriculum of studies for the training centres has to be so framed and organised as to be related to realistic village problems" (of SC Youths) (Dr. J. C. Ramchandani).

Of what use the lofty ideals so painstakingly and sincerely set forth by the eminent scholars of entrepreneurship would be if the personnel at the top levels are not reoriented in the extension philosophy ? The Central Institute of Study and Research in Community Development conducted common study covering for officers both technical and administrative of the level of collectors and above as well as members of Parliament and State Legisla

tures. But have we seen any change of attitude in their minds ?

The training should be intensive and extensive for the policymakers as well as for the plan executants for making an indelible imprint in their minds and not piece-meal refreshing courses as have now been imparted to. If the policy makers and executants are not motivated to get them imbibed with missionary zeals to do something sparkling not only to bring about a revolutionary change in the hearts of the people in general but also in the heart of the Scheduled Caste youths in particular to take them to enterprise all the trainings will be of futile exercise. No doubt Government have opened up some corporations exclusively for scheduled castes people's development, but there the theory of physical achievement has not been interpreted in true sense of the term. As for example the Assam Scheduled Caste Development Corporation Ltd. - a noddle agency for economic development for the Scheduled Caste people is not equipped with trained personnel. The managing director being always a time server having been deputed by the Government on the basis of seniority in the cadre but with no business management training whatsoever does not get opportunity to show his leadership on the development officers at districts. It is doubtful whether DOS are trained personnel or not. Their achievement targets are based on realisation of loan money by means of arrears of land revenue to get more financial assistances from the Government of India as well as from other financial institutions and to dump the 50% of the share capital in the banks for earning interest by holding back the economic schemes of entrepreneurs and not on the repayments out of the profits of the enterprise.

With the onset of the liberalisation policy of the Government of India, the role of the entrepreneurs has assumed a new dimension. While all the big industries would be directly controlled by the private business magnets the small entrepreneurs if not protected from the onslaught of keen competition will pale into insignificance. The ancillary industries should be left out for the

survival of the small entrepreneurs. Therefore, the training institute's syllabus and priority for the potential entrepreneurs should be taken note of particularly for the vulnerable communities. Because the backward communities are always following the forward communities in the same way as in the case of developed countries being followed by the developing or underdeveloped countries that have the privilege of utilizing the applied technology. It is natural that fish follows the river; fisherman follows the fish. Taking the advantages of the feed-back acquired from various empirical tests, the Government would do well by re-orienting the entire gamut of the training programmes down to the end products.

CONCLUSION :

Since the entrepreneurial activities mainly centre on the industrial front, an aspect-- Scheduled Caste youths are not aware of due to the environment in comparison with their counterparts of advanced communities. In the past, resistance on change was due to social taboo; potential entrepreneurs were not available, but with the passage of time resistance has come from affluent groups of established entrepreneurs. Gunnar Myrdal has rightly shown the other side of the coin thus; "The upper class status of those who stepped into power disposed them to abstain from taking policy measures that would contravene the interest of the privileged groups" in the same manner as the repeated raping on the reservation schemes for the down-trodden class in a bid to stall the creation of resourceful persons for taking part in making the Nation great. One of the retarding factors of our country's advancement is overemphasis on the theme of national romanticism by not letting others to step into the industrial areas like the Greeks that had possessed until 1938, 22 agricultural institutions opened on Sundays with 45 classes and with 2 vocational schools with 11 teachers. But in Japan "The Meizi revolution was successful in romanticizing but it adopted concrete substance of western institution". In order to make rapid economic

progress, technological and other devices need to be blended in our soil.

Nevertheless, "Time" so goes the adage "is a great leveller". We may hopefully wait for the due share of national cake by creating entrepreneurs from the scheduled caste youths. "In Japan after 1868 new innovators came from a lower order of nobility". In America the idea of extension philosophy later switched on to entrepreneurship began from the days of Abraham Lincon, who said, "If we could not know where we are now and where we ought to go, we could better judge what to do and how to do it". So the Scheduled Caste youths should have patience because inspite of missionary zeals with F.L. Brayne, Sir Daniel Hamilton, Dr. Spencer Hatch, V.T. Krishnamachari could not be cent percent successful in bringing about a change but these pioneers left an indelible imprint for the success of the successors. If the Scheduled Caste youths determine to do something new, there is no room for doubt. In his book "Slavery and Freedom" Nicholas Bardyaev says "Man is a personality not by nature but by spirit". There is no doubt that the Scheduled Caste youths are prone more to financial constraints; but with the liberal institution like National Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC) New Delhi and the Assam Scheduled Caste Development Corporation, financial difficulties can be overcome. Examples galore where "entrepreneurs completely frustrated by lack of funds leave no trace and many cases may be cited of well-known industrial figures who at one time or another faced financial difficulties" (HJ Habakkuk). What is required is the spirit not the good intention alone. Joan Robinson rightly assures us "It seems to be the case that where enterprise leads finance follows".

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IMPACT OF SPECIAL COMPONENT PLAN AMONG THE SCHEDULED CASTES PEOPLE OF ASSAM

P. Hazarika*

It has been observed that upto 1979-80 the funds for development of Scheduled Castes people in Assam were made available under the plan for backward classes sector. During the 6th Five Year Plan a considerable sum was earmarked for :

1. Economic Development
2. Infrastructure building
3. Education of S/C people and
4. Elimination of sweeping practices.

It is from 90's onward the S/C elites have come to know about such a scheme for S/C development due to earnest effort of the then Director of TRI and they are expressing concern over it. Officially more than 100 schemes under 'Special Component Plan' (SCP) have been executed for development of 1005 S/C compact villages and the S/C people living in different parts of the State. The plan is seemed to be good one having high objectives for speedy development of S/C people in Assam.

But the necessity of a separate plan for S/C people depends upon the efficacy of the separate plan and to what extent the plan is good or bad. The plan may be good if it fulfils the objectives physically and as such, the impact is positive, the plan may be bad if it has not achieved the objectives physically and as such, the impact would be negative. In addition, for judging the positive and negative impacts of SCP, the necessity of considering good or bad impact of the SCP is more important.

To assess the effectiveness and the necessity of a separate

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plan for S/C people (SCP) 5 villages under the Sibsagar district have been purposefully selected and thoroughly observed. These 5 villages are known to this paper writer for more than 20 years (one being the native village) and physically visited.

The findings and observations in these 5 villages are as under :

During 1994-95, in these 5 villages more than 11,000 people are living. In all these 5 villages, 19 persons are currently holding job in government and semi-government departments in the State. Out of 19 service holders, 2 of one village got job under reservation quota for S/C. It is found alleging that more S/C youths got job in those services and departments where the reservation policy have not been maintained.

In one village, the village road was reconstructed and repaired three times. The village road was found repaired two times in a single year. Others have not shared any funds for road development within 20 years. However, it is found alleged that grants so given was utilised in other areas, misused and sometimes it is used in other purposes. Such allegation was heard in 3 out of 5 villages.

Electricity line has been found running through 3 villages out of 5 and in 2 villages some section of people are consuming this for domestic purpose only. In such area illegal connection/ consumption is rampant. The real consumers of electric power have to spend a considerable sum for having the electricity line connected and go through a long formality. Building of small and cottage industries, for recruiting/employing the jobless educated youths in S/C area has been seemed necessary. But it would impede in the assimilation of S/C people with the rest of their brethren. However, such industries can be built up in the general/ adjacent areas in which all sections of people can take part. Rural banks, post office and such other institutional infrastructures have been found totally nil in these 5 villages.

Under the effort of S/C welfare office at the district level S/C pupils of Primary Schools of these 5 villages are getting annual

scholarships under the educational head. The amount of scholarship given has been found varying from Rs.60/- to Rs.100/- annually. It is found in certain schools non S/C students are also awarded such benefits, in some others S/C students too are not given the same. Again in some schools, where there is not a single S/C teacher, employee or student, the students get S/C scholarship and the schools get S/C grants and the teachers are accordingly benefitted. Perhaps this is done, at the deprivation of the more backward and deserving section of the society. An appeal for justification in this regard has been alleged to be the crying of a bastard in wilderness. An eminent educationist and a politician once said S/C leaders are doing more harm to S/C people in Assam. This has been observed to be the reality during the visits to these villages.

All the 5 villages have a L.P. school in each but established at the zeal of the local people. One village has one M.E. standard school too, established in 1990. All the four L.P. schools have been provincialised. The remaining 1 L.P. school established in 6th Five Year Plan by the village people has not been yet provincialised.

It is found alleged that some schools in general area have been planned to be provincialised as S/C area school. Whereas, such schools in S/C area and older in respect of date of establishment have been lagging far behind. It is alleged that in respect of taking education, also S/C people are becoming the victims of politicians and hostilities of others.

It has been observed that the profession of scavenging amongst the Harijans is not getting reduced. Because, the Harijans have not been given the necessary temper (such as education, training in industry and factory and in any other profession) to diversify their profession. The Official and medical institutions are demanding the presence of such a class of people. It is alleged that the creamy layer in the S/C people demands the inclusion of Harijans in the S/C lists or inclusion of other forward S/C class viz. Bania, Kaibarta, Namasudra, Jalkeot, Jalo-Malo, Patni, Sutradhar, etc. in the list of S/C people wherein Harijans are

included. Thus it is possible that at the cost of economically far backward people of own castes and Harijans the creamy layer can get the easy benefit of reservation, SCP and such others.

The overall scenario of these 5 villages have slightly changed mainly because of forward and backward linkages and effects of general plan, and due to their personal effort. It is felt that reservation and the SCP have a marginal or no contribution at all. Because, during the last 10 to 15 years people of these villages could not have even the fringe benefits of these special schemes. Hence on the following grounds the SCP can be rejected.

1. It has not brought a remarkable change/considerable benefit to S/C people ;
2. Non deserving persons are benefitted at the deprivation of the deserving castes and persons;
3. S/C people have marched forward in some areas without being benefitted under the SCP;
4. S/C people could be served best under the general plan for Assam and this has been the responsibility of the Govt. of the State;
5. The Constitution has also directed to withdraw such a special plan for a special group of people on caste basis which hinders the growth of one nation and one caste in the country.

The study also indicates the following :

1. Scarce funds of the Government has been misused, or mismanaged. These funds could have been used for more essential purpose.
2. S/C people are bearing the blame of absorbing a considerable sum under the State Government.
3. S/C people have become more idle, and dependent on the Government and hence lagging behind.
4. S/C people (mainly the Kaibartas) are the intermix of high caste Brahmins and Tai-Ahoms. The problems of economically backward and poor high caste Brahmins and Tai people are equal to the problems of S/C people in

Assam. So they should be included in the reservation lists and deserve equal benefits and attention of the Government.

Under the above, the following suggestions may be recommended :

1. Reservation of jobs for S/C people under the State Government should be withdrawn, because it brings only a fringe benefit to a wealthy section of S/C people.
2. Development of S/C people equally with other classes/ sections of people should be brought. It should be the responsibility of the State Government to develop such people educationally, economically and socially under one plan and under the general plan for the State. As such, SCP should be withdrawn.
3. From S/C list the forward castes should be excluded. Some other castes which are of migratory nature should also be ousted from the state reservation list. However, Harijans should be given more attention and more care.
4. Under the general plan efforts should be made to improve the level of education, health and educational facilities by extending financial benefits, school buildings for education, PHC and training to youth in vocational jobs. This should be given on the basis of physical inspection by the concerned officials.*

* The views in the paper shall not represent the views of the institutions which the author has been serving.

IDENTIFICATION OF EXISTING OCCUPATION OF SCHEDULED CASTES PEOPLE INCLUDING HANDICRAFT AND PROBLEMS CONNECTED WITH THEIR IMPROVEMENT AND UPGRADATION

Gunahash Borah*

INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of India recognises sixteen sub-castes in the group of Scheduled Castes community of Assam. The population of the sub-castes constitute about 15% of population of Assam. It is important to note that each of the sub-castes falling under Scheduled Castes community of Assam practises its own occupation; it is being distinct in type, for livelihood. From the very trade and occupation, one can easily identify one sub-caste from the other. For example, the 'Mudois', an important group of the Scheduled Castes people, are traders by profession, the 'Hiras' are the potters, the 'Banias', the traditional goldsmith, the 'Barantias', the fishermen, as a whole. The other minor sub-castes also practise one or another profession.

The Scheduled Castes people inhabit in entire state of Assam, in a scattered way. In some districts it has been seen that a few villages are inhabited by a single sub-caste of the Scheduled Castes community, with its own caste practice. There are some villages where the Scheduled Castes people live side by side with other communities. These two points are important in connection with the cultural behaviour of the Scheduled Castes people.

Economic backwardness is an important aspect of entire Scheduled Castes people of Assam. As they still follow the age-old traditional profession to meet their entire economic demand,

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their backwardness in this field is noticeably prominent.

Some people believe that the Kaivarttas of Assam are fishermen. It is a misconception, since the 'Barantias', a sub-caste of the Scheduled Castes community, are the fishermen, since time immemorial. Other sub-castes do not practise this profession for the livelihood. Socially and psychologically the other Kaivarttas think themselves a step above the 'Barantias', as fishing has nothing to do with, except catching for domestic consumption.

EXISTING OCCUPATIONS OF SCHEDULED CASTES PEOPLE :

The Barantias are fishermen by caste, because, their main source of income is fishing. The term is vague to mean a group of people. But the village old men still use 'Barantia' to mean the fishermen and in this connection, it is found that these people as a whole do not follow the preachings of a single religious 'Satra', instead of that they are followers of different 'Satras' of Assam. But this does not mean that they are not followers of Assam's Vaishnavism propounded by Srimanta Sankardeva.

The 'Mudois' also known as 'Mahangias' are village traders. They were the source of supply of essential commodities to remoter parts of the state, mainly with the present Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills where there were dearth of communication facilities. They mainly traded with boats through rivers and by bullock carts, where road facilities were available. But with the improvement of road communications and introduction of automobiles, the 'Mudois' have lost their profession and the olden days of trade through road and bullock cart were lost.

The main occupation of the Scheduled Castes people is agriculture. The back-bone of Assam economy is agriculture from time immemorial and as such, Scheduled Castes people being a part and parcel of the greater Assamese community, have adopted agriculture as a main source of income. Rearing of birds and animals are also practised.

Though agriculture has been taken as source occupation of

income by all the Scheduled Castes people, there are certain occupation or trade, which are performed by a distinct sub-caste of the Scheduled Castes. The sub-castes can easily be identified from the particular profession or trade they follow.

The 'Baniyas' are by profession goldsmith and traders. But they are mostly so known because of their involvement in ornamental works of gold and silver. Before the influx of outsiders on this trade, Baniyas of Assam were the main source of supply of gold and silver ornaments to the people of Assam. They had the reputation of manufacturing artistic ornaments in the past. But at present, the people have left the profession, and their golden reputation have been lost, except a very few Baniyas who are still in the profession. Time is ripe, if nothing is done, the profession will be at the verge of extinction among the Baniyas.

The 'Hira' community which comprises a certain number of Scheduled Castes people mainly engaged themselves in the manufacture of earthen utensils required for day-to-day use by the people of Assam, in earlier times. They were the source of earthen utensils to the rural people, when metallic utensils were meant for richer section of people. But with the use of different metals and steel as a source of supply of utensils, the use of earthen utensil has fallen considerably, throwing out them from their profession.

Over and above these aboriginal Scheduled Castes people of Assam, some other people like Namahsudra, Musi (Cobbler), Mehtor (Sweeper or Harijan), Mali (Gardener), Sutradhar (Builder) who are included in the list of Scheduled Castes in Assam, can in no way be regarded, aboriginal people of the state. The Namahsudras influxed into Assam from Bengal, mostly after partition of the country, after independence, the Musis, the Mehtors, the Dhubis and the Napits mainly from Bihar during the later part of the 19th century. There is rare instance that Assamese Scheduled Castes people run these types of trade as a source of income.

The Namahsudras are fishermen, by profession living mainly in the river banks and beels. The Musi (Cobbler) engage

themselves in leather works and shoe making and repairing. The Mehtors (Sweeper) are by profession cleaners. The Dhubis (Washermen) mainly earn their income by washing cloth of others. The Malis (Gardeners) were the source of supply of flower garlands in the temple in earlier times.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTER OF ASSAMESE SCHEDULED CASTES AND NON-ASSAMESE SCHEDULED CASTES :

One distinguishing character of Assamese Scheduled Castes and non-Assamese Scheduled Castes is the language. The mother tongue of the Assamese Scheduled Castes is Assamese. In all walks of life they carry Assamese language and Assamese culture. But non-Assamese Scheduled Castes have their own mother tongue and also their own culture of their state of origin, which is quite different from Assamese culture. The Dhubis, the Harijans the Barbers speak Hindi (Bihari). The Namahsudras speak Bengali. Other distinguishing character between Assamese Scheduled Castes and non-Assamese Scheduled Castes is that just like all other Assamese women, the Assamese Scheduled Castes women are expert weavers. But the non-Assamese Scheduled castes women are quite ignorant regarding weaving.

PLACE OF HANDICRAFT AMONG THE SCHEDULED CASTES PEOPLE :

Just like all other Assamese people, Assamese Scheduled Castes people are very expert in cane and bamboo works and women are very expert in weaving. Here it is to be mentioned that these two trades are not peculiar to Scheduled Castes community alone. Still it is to be mentioned that this is source of income to them also. Over and above the domestic requirement, the excess production are sold out in the market, and these give them an additional income for livelihood. Those who have neither land nor any other source of income, the Scheduled Castes women support their family by weaving. It is to be noted, whether rich or poor, whether educated or uneducated, whether in town and city

or in village, a Scheduled Caste woman knows weaving.

THE PLACE OF SCHEDULED CASTES PEOPLE IN SERVICE AND INDUSTRY :

Before independence, the opportunities for education were very few and schools and colleges being situated in big towns, the Scheduled Castes people, being economically backward, could not avail the opportunities of education. Also these people were not allowed to take education freely as they now can avail. The life of Dr. Ambedkar, will speak for itself, how these people were deprived of education. But after independence, there was change in the outlook and Scheduled Castes people can now avail education freely. As a result, the number of educated Scheduled Castes people have been increasing day by day and are getting opportunities for employment in Govt., Semi-Govt. and individual organisation. It is to be praised that Govt. Policy towards the Scheduled Castes people, safe-guarding them for employment opportunities has given them place in Govt. service. But malpractice by other castes in the name of Scheduled Castes is said to be present in depriving them from the opportunities. Whatever may be, it is now seen that Scheduled Castes people both men and women have found a place in Government services and they have taken it as a source of livelihood.

Also the industrious Scheduled Castes people have ventured in the field of industry, whether cottage and small scale industries or in some medium scale industries. But their number is very small. Some are engaging themselves in business, big or small - according to their financial capacities. Of course, Government's preferential treatment, subsidies and institutions established solely for Scheduled Castes people have given impetus in venturing trade and industries.

REARING OF DOMESTIC ANIMALS AND BIRDS :

Just like all other Assamese people, the Assamese Scheduled Castes community also rears domestic animals like cow, goat, buffalo. These animals are also a source of income to

them as milk derived from these animals is either consumed or sold out in the market. Also birds like duck and pigeon are reared either for flesh or egg. But it is to be noted that this rearing of animals and birds is meant only to meet domestic consumption and the habit of farming has not yet developed. Mention here is to be made that certain types of animals rearing like pig, and bird like hen are still forbidden among the Scheduled Castes people.

In the past there were village women traders known as 'Puharis' who traded some goods from door to door in small quantities or in distant places either in bullock cart or by boat. In our young ages we had the opportunity to meet 'Puharis' or hear the name of famous 'Puharis'. Actually, they were women traders, just like trade run by womenfolk in a matriarchal society like the 'Khasis', the 'Jayantias' and the 'Garos', where women traders still exist. There were 'Puharis' from Kaivartta, Hira and Barantia classes of the Scheduled Castes community. But with the passing of time, the women traders vanished due to spread of education. Also it might be due to the fact that they were regarded as the most neglected people among the Scheduled Castes people. It is not correct to say that women traders are totally extinct in the present time. Still there exist some women traders among the 'Barantias', dealing with fish in the market. Of course, the old system of house to house trade has gone out of existence.

PROBLEMS CONNECTED WITH THE OCCUPATION AND THEIR IMPROVEMENT AND UPGRADATION :

Having identified the existing occupations of the Scheduled Castes people let us discuss the problems connected with the occupations and their improvement and upgradation.

The Scheduled Castes people still economically, socially and educationally are lagging far behind. Most of the Scheduled Castes people are still below the poverty level. The saddest thing is that there are some people who do not have even a house of their own. As they have no source of income, they earn their livelihood either by labouring in the fields or begging. This is due to uncertainty of agricultural production, those who are engaged in

agriculture, sub-division of land-holding due to growth of family members, lack of capital for improved systems of technique, increasing pressure of population on land, influx of other communities in trade and business once entirely meant for Scheduled Castes people like fishery and present generations' apathy towards hard and laborious works. The last point is to be taken into consideration carefully. The younger generations of Scheduled Castes people, whether they are from agricultural family or from fisherman or from other sub-caste, lack industriousness for work, and all they run after the Govt. service or Govt. help and subsidies. They rather feel shame to be an agriculturist or a fisherman or a goldsmith.

Most of the Scheduled Castes people are agriculturists. With the growth of members in the families, there are divisions and sub-divisions in land-holding and as a result, agriculture as a source of income is becoming quite unprofitable. Also as Assam is full of rivers flood occurs and reoccurs quite constantly bringing untold sufferings to the people. As such the economic conditions of the people are deteriorating day by day, the number of people below poverty level is increasing. Something is to be done in this case to avoid still fall. The system of crop insurance is to be introduced so that the people may rest assure that even if the crop is damaged by flood, they will get the money back. The pressure of population on land should be minimised, by diverting the excess population to some gainful trade and business. Improved method of cultivation is to be introduced, financial helps for introduction of improved technique are to be provided, supply of better varieties of seeds and the system of double cropping are to be introduced.

The greatest tragedy has come to the fishermen class of the Scheduled Caste community, mainly after independence. All the rivers and beels, once free for fishing are now occupied by government and given out to lease or open bidding. Here the parts of the politicians and middle men are noteworthy. Also the part played by the big officers of the Scheduled Castes community can not be neglected. As a result, the beels and fisheries are going out

of the hands of the actual fishermen bringing untold sufferings to their families. Sometimes, it is said that these fisheries are given out of lease to some fictitious persons or societies which are owned by caste other than the Scheduled Castes. Unless the Government takes an adamant view that as fishing as a profession is done by the fishermen class of Scheduled Castes community, the fisheries should be allotted to the actual fishermen only. Also instead of leasing the fisheries to individuals, it should be leased to the fishermen as a whole of a particular village. Improvement works of beel fisheries for pisciculture is to be taken in hand. The fishermen should be trained and make them acquainted with the modern method and technique, financial helps where necessary are to be provided. Middle men should be thrown out. Outsiders, who are actually not Assamese should not be given chance to enter into this trade. Then and then only, the economic conditions could be improved. The practice of granting loans and subsidies in terms of cash should be replaced by capital goods. Also individual grants be replaced by grants in groups - like societies and organisations, where possible. The system of collective farming is to be introduced mainly in case of fisheries, animals and birds rearing where the people who have no source of income may be engaged.

In case of handicrafts like weaving, works of cane and bamboo, manufacture of earthen goods - the problem arises due to lack of sufficient capital, lack of knowledge of modern methods of production, short supply of essential raw materials and tough competition from outside the state, fine finished products from big industries. As for instance, the Assamese weaver is facing a set back at the hand of cotton mills of Tamilnadu, which produces cotton goods like chadar, mekhela and gamosa, as produced by the Assamese weaver and have already captured the market through price competition. The 'Hira' class of the Scheduled Castes community has lost its business at the hand of the outsiders, mostly Biharis, who adopt the modern method of production and supply items at a very low price. The cane and

bamboo works have now faced a tough competition with plastic goods. To avoid these competitions, the people engaged in these professions should be imparted training with the modern system of production. Old system of production should be replaced by modern and scientific system, whereby the cost of production will be low. Incentive through supply of capital at a low rate of interest and subsidies are to be provided. By these means atleast we can improve the economic position of the people to some extent. In case of the 'Banias' their profession has faced a set back due to the short supply of raw materials, high price of gold and silver, influx of outsiders, mainly the 'Bengalis' into the trade, short supply of capital, non application of modern machinery are some of the causes leading to the downfall of their profession and now are leaving the profession. To bring the community to their profession something are to be done - like supply of capital and capital goods, training with the modern method of production, financial help etc. are to be provided.

CONCLUSION :

The Scheduled Castes community is socially and economically backward. Socially this community is suppressed by other castes. Not only that this social backwardness is due to certain causes of their own, which make them neglected by others. Economic backwardness is due to dependence on agriculture and natural fisheries. These two are mainly determined by nature. Heavy monsoon causes flood, damages crops, and draught leads to barren fields. Fishing also depends on water condition. Growth of population, sub-division and fragmentation of land-holding, pressure of population, tough competition from machine-made goods, change of taste, lack of technical knowledge of modern system of production, lack of capital, influx of outsiders on the trade once solely meant for Scheduled Castes, apathy on the part of the Government servants on execution the responsibilities cast on them, depriving the actual person from the plan and programmes meant for them, wrong planning, lack of technically qualified persons are some of the causes leading to

the failure of different plan and programmes taken at hand by the Government for economic uplift of the Scheduled Castes community. No doubt, the Government have many good programmes for the people. But these all will go in vain unless the Scheduled Castes people as a whole come forward to make them fit for availing these opportunities for their better and prosperous future. The Constitution of India and some of the Rule and Acts, and different institutions and organisations are there to safeguard and promote the interest of the Scheduled Castes people, but all these will be meaningless, if we are not conscious and make us fit to avail these.

In this connection, a few words are to be mentioned in case of different institutions and organisations set up under the Government. The common uneducated Scheduled Castes people are quite ignorant regarding the institutions and organisations from which they can avail the opportunities for their economic uplift. They know only the Scheduled Castes Advisory Board at district level, which functions as distributor of grants and subsidies. Malpractices have overshadowed these district boards. The beneficiaries are kiths and kins of the board's members and sometimes fictitious persons. Beels and Ghats are allotted to fake Scheduled Castes persons, depriving the actual Scheduled Castes people. The fake societies and organisations are working under the shadow of cunning officials. The most astonishing thing is that the identity as Scheduled Caste of some top Government officials and M.L.A.s are doubtful. The persons responsible for issuing certificates to Scheduled Caste should go through these cases of doubtfulness, to find out the realities. There are Scheduled Castes Board in each district of Assam, but these Boards can not boast of having the record of total number of Scheduled Castes people under them, male and female, young and old, literate and illiterate, profession, income, properties held. Without knowing anything, the grants, subsidies are distributed year after year. In case of grants and subsidies, it is seen that only those who have links with the office or officials are receiving these

and the needy ones are left out. It has been seen by the writer that weaving implements, which are distributed to the Scheduled Castes women for economic betterment are enjoyed by each and every woman member of some families, depriving vast numbers. The funniest thing in this connection is that the weaving implements are sold out as soon as they receive it. Instead of distributing the implements to individuals, societies are to be formed from Government level and people should be asked to work there and be remunerated as per his work and where necessary training is to be imparted at place of works. The same is happening in case of improved varieties of animals and birds supplied to them.

Incentives to pisciculture on scientific and organised way be given to the fishermen class. For this the practice of leasing beels for one or two years be replaced by leasing beels for long period - say for fifty years. This will encourage the fishermen to take improvement works of the beel like construction of boundary, adoption of scientific methods of pisciculture, investment of capital - whereby the production from the beels will increase and the economic condition will be better.

Mention here is to be made regarding the system of fish catching in case of river fishery mainly by the Biharis. The system of 'Bai-Bheta' which was unknown to the Assamese fishermen, is to be totally banned; as under this system even the smallest fish in the river or even the fish seeds can not escape from their hand. This system of fish catching is adopted mainly in the month of September or October, when the fish rush to the down stream for deep water.

The fish trade of the fishermen class is going out of their hands due to the influx of some non-scheduled caste people - whether Assamese or non-Assamese. These people have already captured the market of fish trading and fish rearing. Unless the fishermen class themselves come forward and enter into the trade whole-heartedly, one day, they will lose the trade totally, bringing untold sufferings to the community as a whole.

There are constitutional safeguards, government organisations and institutions, social and voluntary organisations, there are subsidies and grants, facilities for both technical and general education, which are meant for uplift or upgradation of this community as a whole. These all will go in vain unless the Scheduled Castes people come forward to better their conditions by availing these opportunities with a real motive. They must be prepared to face the hazards of life. Only hard work and toil can only uplift and upgrade them from the present position and by nothing else.

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श्रीखनीद चन्द्र दास*

ভাৰতবৰ্ষই আৰু তিনিটা বছৰ পিছতে অৰ্থাৎ ১৯৯৭ চনত স্বাধীনতা লাভৰ সোণালী বৰ্ষ হিচাবে পালন কৰিব। তথাপিও গান্ধীজীৰ সপোনৰ ভাৰতবৰ্ষ বিশ্বৰ আন আন প্ৰগতিশীল দেশৰ তুলনাত ভালেমান দিশত পিচ পৰি আছে। এতিয়াও ভাৰতৰ লাখ-লাখ জনগণে দৰিদ্ৰ সীমাৰেখাৰ তলত জীৱন নিৰ্বাহ কৰি থাকিব লগীয়া হোৱাটোত দুখ আৰু পৰিতাপৰ বিষয়। ভাৰতৰ মুঠ জনসংখ্যাৰ এক বিশাল অংশৰ জনগণৰ সামাজিক, অৰ্থনৈতিক, সাংস্কৃতিক অৱস্থা যদি বিশ্লেষণ কৰি চোৱা যায় ইয়াৰ অধিকাংশই আকৌ অনুন্নত শ্ৰেণীত পৰে। যাক ভাৰতীয় গণতন্ত্ৰৰ পবিত্ৰ সংবিধানে এই দলিত নিপীড়িত লোক সকলক অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ শ্ৰেণীভুক্ত কৰি ৰখাৰ বিধান দিছে।

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যাৰ ফলত হয়তো আটকাবলৈ পৰে। অসমত অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ তালিকাভুক্ত যি ১৬টাৰ কথা উল্লেখ কৰা হৈছে, তাৰ ভিতৰত কেইটামান জাতিহে বিশেষভাবে উল্লেখযোগ্য। যেনে কৈৱৰ্ত্ত, নমঃশূদ্ৰ, হীৰা, বণিয়া আদি ব্ৰহ্মপুত্ৰ উপত্যকাত প্ৰধান, আনহাতে বৰাক উপত্যকাত পাটনি, সূত্ৰধাৰ, নমঃশূদ্ৰ আদিয়ে প্ৰধান। বাকী উল্লেখিত জাতি সমূহৰ লোকসংখ্যা তেনেই তাকৰ। আন আন বৃত্তিধাৰী কাম কৰি জীৱিকা চলায়। কৈৱৰ্ত্ত, নমঃশূদ্ৰ শ্ৰেণীভুক্ত লোকসকল প্ৰধানত মাছমৰা আৰু বিক্ৰী কৰা ব্যৱসায়ত জড়িত, তেনেদৰে হীৰা মানুহৰ ব্যৱসায় হ'ল মাটিৰ ৰসচন বৰ্ত্তন তৈয়াৰ কৰি উপাৰ্জন কৰা বৃত্তি আৰু বণিয়া সকলে সোণ-ৰূপৰ আ-অলঙ্কাৰ তৈয়াৰ কৰি চলোৱা ব্যৱসায়। ঠিক তেনেদৰে বৰাক উপত্যকাৰ পাটনি আৰু নমঃশূদ্ৰ মানুহখিনিৰো ব্যৱসায় হ'ল মাছৰ ওপৰত। মাছৰ ব্যৱসায় যদিও যথেষ্ট লাভজনক কিন্তু প্ৰকৃত অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ লোক খিনিয়ে সেই সুবিধাৰ পৰা

বঞ্চিত হৈ আহিছে। অসমৰ প্ৰতিখন জিলাতে অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ লোক সিঁচৰতি হৈ বসবাস কৰি আছে। জনজাতি লোকসকলৰ দৰে অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ অধুষিত অঞ্চল বুলি সুকীয়াকৈ নাই। কৈবৰ্তসকলে নদীৰ পাৰতে বসবাস কৰিছিল। এইলোক সকল শিক্ষাৰ পোহৰ নোপোৱালৈকে বংশানুক্ৰমে মৎস্যজীৱী। সময় যোৱাৰ লগে লগে এই একচেটীয়া জীৱিকাৰ পথো সংকুচিত হৈ আহিছে। চৰকাৰৰ হিচাবত ৰাজ্যখনত মুঠতে ৫০০ খন পঞ্জীয়নভুক্ত মীন মহল আছে আৰু প্ৰায় ২০০০ খন পঞ্জীয়ন নোহোৱাকৈ মীন মহল আছে। পঞ্জীয়ন নোহোৱাকৈ মীনমহল সমূহ কোনোবাই দখল কৰি আছে। বেছিভাগে অনা অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ লোক। ইয়াৰ উপৰি প্ৰায় ৬০০খন পঞ্জীয়নভুক্ত মীনমহল সমবায় ভিত্তিত আছে। পঞ্জীয়নভুক্ত নোহোৱা মহল সমূহ পঞ্জীয়ন কৰি সমবায়ক দিলে বেছি লোক উপকৃত হ'ব পাৰে। অসমত কম পৰিমাণে ৭৮,০০০ হেক্টৰ জলাশয় আছে বুলি জনা যায়। এইবোৰক বৰ্তমানৰ সময় উপযোগী বৈজ্ঞানিক আৰ্হিৰে মীন পালনৰ ব্যৱস্থা ৰাজ্যখনৰ মীন বিভাগ, ফিছফেড, চৰকাৰৰ মীন উন্নয়ন নিগম আদিয়ে যদি অধিক গুৰুত্ব সহকাৰে কৰে তেন্তে উত্তৰ প্ৰদেশ, অন্ধ্ৰপ্ৰদেশ, পশ্চিমবঙ্গৰ মাছৰ লাভজনক ব্যৱসায়ক অসমৰ দুখীয়ালোকে বাধা দি নিজৰ হাততে ৰাখিব পাৰিব।

ঠিক তেনেদৰে অসমৰ অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ হীৰা সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ লোকে মৃৎশিল্পৰ বৃত্তিটোৰ জৰিয়তেই নিজৰ জীৱনধাৰণৰ পথ উলিয়াই লৈছিল। গোৱালপাৰা, কামৰূপ, বৰপেটা, দৰং, শোণিতপুৰ, নগাঁও, মৰিগাঁও অঞ্চলত এতিয়াও এই সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ লোকে হাতেৰেই মৃৎশিল্প তৈয়াৰ কৰাৰ পৰম্পৰা জীয়াই ৰাখিছে। এই শিল্পৰ উৎপাদিত সামগ্ৰীৰ ভিতৰত মাটিৰ গছা, মলাচাকি ধূপদানী, টাব, ফুলদানী, পুতলা আদি সমাজৰ সকলো শ্ৰেণীৰ লোকৰ বাবেই প্ৰয়োজনীয় বস্তু। পূজাৰ পৰা আৰম্ভ কৰি মৃতকৰ সৎকাৰ কৰালৈকে মাটিৰ বস্তুৰ প্ৰয়োজন আছে। কিন্তু ব্যৱসায়ীক মূল্য যেন দিনক দিনে কমি আহিছে। এই সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ লোক বসবাস কৰা গোৱালপাৰা জিলাৰ মৰনৈ দুৰাপাৰা গাঁও অসমৰ ভিতৰতে বৃহৎ অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ গাঁও তেনেদৰে আছে বালিজনা, লক্ষীপুৰ, যোগীঘোপা, বহতি আদি গাঁও। দৰং জিলাৰ বিজুলী বাৰী, গণেশকুৰবাৰী, শিঙিমাৰী খলিহৈ, হাতীমাৰা, নগাঁও, মেদা, কৈকৰা, বুঢ়া, দৈচমাৰা, টেঙেৰা, গোমোঠা, জেঙেৰাবাৰা, খাটোপথাৰ, পাথৰিঘাট, কলাইগাঁও, বৰকলা, জিলিকাপাৰা, বাগিচাচুবা, পুঠিমাৰী, বৰঙাবাৰী, টংলা, ওৰাং আদি অঞ্চলেই প্ৰধান। নগাঁও জিলাৰ ধৰমতুল, বৰপেটাৰ সুন্দৰীদিয়া, কেওটকুছি, মন্দিয়া, কামৰূপৰ হাজো, দিহিনা, আমিনগাঁও, চৰ্মাণ্ডি, সেহনীপাৰা তেনেদৰে নলবাৰী আৰু শোণিতপুৰ জিলাৰ চতিয়া, জামুগুৰি অঞ্চলতো হীৰা সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ লোক

আছে। এই সম্প্ৰদায় লোকৰ আৰ্থিক অৱস্থা যথেষ্ট বেয়া। তাৰ উপৰি মৃৎ শিল্পক জীয়াই ৰখাৰ বাবে চৰকাৰৰ বৈজ্ঞানিক ভিত্তিক আধুনিক আঁচনি আদিও আমি দেখা নাই। বৰ্তমান হীৰামাটিৰ অভাৱ, যাৰতীয় সামগ্ৰীৰ অত্যধিক মূল্য হোৱা হেতুকে শিল্পটি ব্যৱসায়ত তেনেদৰে লাভজনক হৈ উঠা নাই। তাৰ উপৰি “এলুমিনিয়ামৰ” সামগ্ৰীয়ে বজাৰ দখল কৰি লৈছে। চৰকাৰে বৰ্তমানৰ আধুনিক যন্ত্ৰ পাতিৰে উদ্যোগ স্থাপন কৰি এই শিল্পটিক লাভজনক ব্যৱসায় হিচাবে গঢ়ি তুলিব পাৰিলে বহুতো দুখীয়া পৰিয়াল উপকৃত হ'ব পাৰে। হীৰা সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ মহিলা সকলে এই বৃত্তিৰ জৰিয়তে নিজৰ আৰ্থিক অনাটন কিছু পৰিমাণে হলেও লাঘব কৰিব পাৰিছে। অসমত খিলঞ্জীয়া বণিয়া সম্প্ৰদায় লোক সকলৰ সোণ-ৰূপৰ সামগ্ৰী গঢ়াৰ বৃত্তিটো ক্ৰমে লোপ পাই আহিছে। এই শিল্পৰ বক্ষণাবেক্ষণৰ বাবে বৈজ্ঞানিক ভিত্তিৰ উদ্যোগ গঢ়াৰ প্ৰচেষ্টা চৰকাৰ বা স্বৈচ্ছামূলক কোনো সংগঠনে লোৱা আমি দেখা নাই। বৰ্তমান পশ্চিমবঙ্গীয় লোকেহে এই বৃত্তিটো হস্তগত কৰি লোৱা দেখা গৈছে। হীৰা, নমঃশূদ্ৰ, বণিয়া সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ শিক্ষিত লোকখিনিয়ে নিজ নিজ বৃত্তিবোৰ বাদ দি সুবিধা অনুসাৰে চাকৰি ব্যৱসায় কৰিও এতিয়া জীৱিকাৰ পথ বাচি লৈছে। তথাপি সংবিধান প্ৰদত্ত অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ জনসাধাৰণৰ ভাবে যিবোৰ সা-সুবিধা চৰকাৰে আগবঢ়াইছে সেইবোৰ নিয়মিত ভাবে কাৰ্য্যকৰী নোহোৱাৰ ফলতহে অনুসূচীত জাতি আজিও অবহেলিত ৰূপত পৰি আছে। চৰকাৰৰ উন্নয়নমূলক আঁচনিবোৰ প্ৰকৃততাত দুখীয়া শ্ৰেণীৰ লোকৰ কাষ চাপিব পৰা নাই — এই দিশত চকু দিব লাগে।

অসমৰ অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ উল্লেখিত সমস্যাৰাজিৰ উপৰিও, ৰাজ্য চৰকাৰে ভূমি সংস্কাৰ আইনৰ জৰিয়তে অনুসূচীত দুখীয়া ভূমিহীন ৰাইজক সকাহ দিয়াৰ আঁচনি লৈছে যদিও আজিলৈকে কাৰ্য্যকৰী হৈ উঠা নাই। ইয়াৰ কেৰোণ বহুতো আছে।

অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ আৰ্থিক, সামাজিক, সাংস্কৃতিক উন্নয়ন আৰু বিকাশৰ কথা আন্তৰিক আৰু গভীৰ ভাবে চিন্তা কৰি কিছুমান বাস্তৱধৰ্মী কাৰ্য্যব্যৱস্থা লবলৈ গঠনমূলক পৰামৰ্শ আগবঢ়োৱা হ'ল —

১) গ্ৰাম্য ভিত্তিত শিক্ষা বিস্তাৰ কৰাৰ তৎকালীন ব্যৱস্থা লব লাগে যাতে প্ৰতিটো পৰিয়ালতে শিক্ষিত ব্যক্তিৰ অভাৱ নহয়।

২) উচ্চ বৰ্ণৰ লোকৰ আৰু বেছি সংখ্যক বিভাগীয় কৰ্ত্তৃপক্ষৰে অনুসূচীত লোকৰ প্ৰতি থকা বিৰাগভাৱ আতৰাব লাগিব। সহনশীল মনোভাৱেৰে সমস্যাবোৰৰ গুৰুত্ব উপলব্ধি কৰি কাম কৰাৰ প্ৰয়াস থাকিব লাগিব।

৩) অনুসূচীত লোকৰ ছাত্ৰ-ছাত্ৰী, যুৱক আৰু ব্যক্তিৰ প্ৰতি চৰকাৰে অনুদান আগবঢ়ালেই নহব, সময়মতে আঁচনিবোৰ ৰূপায়ণ কৰাৰ দায়িত্বও লব

লাগিব। ছাত্র-ছাত্রীৰ বৃত্তি সময়মতে মোকলাই দিয়াৰ ব্যৱস্থা হব লাগে।

৪) অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ আৰ্থিকভাবে দুৰ্বল পৰিয়ালবৰ্গলৈ বেঞ্চৰ বা চৰকাৰী ঋণ মঞ্জুৰ কৰাৰ নীতি নিয়মবোৰ সবলীকৰণ কৰাৰ ব্যৱস্থা থাকিব লাগে যাতে দুখীয়া পৰিয়ালে ঋণ পোৱাত সহায়ক হয়।

৫) অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ “পৰিচয় পত্ৰ” জাল কৰি ভুৱা অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ লোক বুলি পৰিচয় দিয়াৰ ব্যৱস্থা প্ৰশাসনে বন্ধ কৰিব নোৱাৰিলে, জাতিটোৰ বিস্তৰ ক্ষতি হ'ব।

৬) Assam S.C. and S.T. (Reservation of vacancies in Services and Posts) Act 78 খন শিক্ষাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত একেবাৰে পালন কৰা হোৱা নাই। নিযুক্তিৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত চৰকাৰে এটা সুকীয়া চেল খুলি দিছে আৰু তত্কাৰণীয়ক হিচাবে Govt. letter No. EDG 365/88/162 dtd 21st Jan. 91 and No B (2) H 371/192/36 dtd 11/8/92 ৰ দ্বাৰা (অনুসূচীত জনজাতি) সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ এগৰাকী বিষয়াক দায়িত্ব দিয়া আছে কিন্তু ফলপ্ৰসূতাবে কাৰ্য্যকৰী হোৱা নাই। Reservation Act '78 মতে 20 Point Roster চৰকাৰৰ প্ৰতিটো বিভাগতে থাকিব লাগে কিন্তু দুই এটাৰ বাহিৰে কোনো বিভাগতে নাই। এইবোৰ আঁসোৱাহ চোৱা-চিতা কৰিবলৈ প্ৰতিটো বিভাগতে এজনকৈ Liaison Officer নিযুক্তি দিবলৈ চৰকাৰী চিঠি নং TAD/COM/93/91/22 dtd 13/2/92 and TAD/COM/93/91/35 dt 10-8-93 অনুসাবে নিৰ্দেশ আছে যদিও এতিয়ালৈকে তেনে নিযুক্তি হোৱা আমি দেখা নাই। এই ব্যৱস্থা অনতিপলমে হব লাগে।

৭) অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ উন্নয়নৰ বাবে সংবিধানত উল্লেখিত বৰ্ণনাবোৰৰ বাবে থকা ১৫, ১৬, ১৭, ৪৬, ৩৩০, ৩৩২, ৩৩৪, ৪৪৫, ৩৩৯ আৰু ৩৪১ অনুচ্ছেদৰ জৰিয়তে অনুসূচীত জাতিক গণতান্ত্ৰিক সমাজখনত সমতাৰ অধিকাৰ দান কৰাৰ লগতে অৰ্থনৈতিক অধিকাৰ, সামাজিক ন্যায়, চাকৰিত সংৰক্ষণ আৰু লোক সভাত আসনৰ সংৰক্ষণৰ ব্যৱস্থা ৰখা হৈছে। এইবোৰ কাৰ্য্যকৰী কৰিবলৈ **কেন্দ্ৰীয় চৰকাৰ আৰু অসম চৰকাৰে** ভালেকেইখন আইন প্ৰণয়ন কৰিছে কিন্তু আইনত থকা দফাবোৰ কাৰ্য্যকৰী নকৰা দায়িত্বশীল বিষয়া-কৰ্মচাৰীক শাস্তি দিয়াৰ বিধান আমি দেখা নাই। এই ব্যৱস্থাও অতি কঠোৰভাৱে **পালিত** হব লাগে।

৮) ওপৰত উল্লেখিত পৰামৰ্শৰ উপৰিও চৰকাৰে যুগুত কৰা গ্ৰাম্য বিকাশ আঁচনি, নিবনুৱা যুৱক যুৱতীৰ প্ৰশিক্ষণৰ আঁচনি, **কৰ্ম সংস্থাপন** আঁচনি, শিশু আৰু মহিলা বিকাশ আঁচনি, আৰ্থিক উন্নয়ন আঁচনি আৰু ভাষা কৃষ্টি কলা সংস্কৃতিৰ উন্নয়নৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত পৰিকল্পিত ভাবে ব্যৱস্থা ললে আৰু জাতিটোৰ প্ৰত্যেকৰে সচেতনতা বৃদ্ধি পালেহে অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ উন্নয়নৰ দিশত সফলতা অৰ্জন কৰিব পৰা যাব বুলি আমি আশা কৰোঁ।

অনুসূচীত সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ আৰ্থিক উন্নয়নৰ সম্ভাৱনা

শ্ৰীযতীন্দ্ৰকুমাৰ বৰগোহাঞি*

অনুসূচীভুক্ত সম্প্ৰদায় সমূহৰ অৰ্থনৈতিক উন্নয়নৰ বিষয়ে সুদীৰ্ঘ কাল ধৰি চিন্তা চৰ্চা কৰি অহা হৈছে যদিও বাস্তৱ ক্ষেত্ৰত এই সম্প্ৰদায় সমূহৰ আৰ্থিক অৱস্থাৰ উন্নতি এতিয়াও পৰিলক্ষিত হোৱা নাই। ইয়াৰ কাৰণসমূহ আমি যথার্থভাবে ফঁহিয়াই চোৱাৰ প্ৰয়োজন আছে।

এই কথা প্ৰথমেই স্পষ্টভাবে কোৱাৰ প্ৰয়োজনীয়তা অনুভৱ কৰিছো যে অনুসূচীভুক্ত সম্প্ৰদায় সমূহৰ পৰিচয় ৰাজনৈতিক ভাবে যিয়েই নহওঁক, অৰ্থনৈতিক ভাবে তেওঁলোক মূলতঃ কৃষিজীৱী, খেতি আৰু অন্যান্য কৃষি উপজীৱিকাই তেওঁলোকৰ মূল জীৱন নিৰ্বাহৰ পাথেয়। একাংশ বৃত্তিজীৱী। আনহাতে, এই সম্প্ৰদায়সমূহ সামগ্ৰিক বিচাৰত দৰিদ্ৰতাৰ সীমাৰেখাৰ তলত বাস কৰে। এওঁলোক প্ৰায় ‘সৰ্বহাৰা’ (Near proletariat) অৱস্থাত বাস কৰা প্ৰান্তিক কৃষক বা বৃত্তিজীৱী। গতিকে সমাজৰ অতি দুখীয়া নিম্ন শ্ৰেণীৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত যিবোৰ ব্যৱস্থা সামাজিক, অৰ্থনৈতিক, সাংস্কৃতিক ভাবে প্ৰযোজ্য, সেই ব্যৱস্থাসমূহ অনুসূচীভুক্ত সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ ক্ষেত্ৰতো প্ৰযোজ্য। তেওঁলোকৰ চৰিত্ৰ মূলতঃ ‘দৰিদ্ৰতাৰ ভয়াবহ বৃত্ত’ (vicious cycle of poverty) ৰ ভিতৰত থকা ডাল-দৰিদ্ৰ মানুহৰ চৰিত্ৰ।

কি লক্ষণ এই ভয়াবহ বৃত্তৰ?

গুৱাৰ মিৰডালৰ কথাবোৰ হয়তো সকলো সমাজতে সকলো সময়তে প্ৰযোজ্য নহয়। কিন্তু নিৰক্ষৰ, পুৰ্জি গঠন প্ৰক্ৰিয়াৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত অনাড়ুৱা, দৰিদ্ৰ শ্ৰেণীৰ লোকৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত এই কথাটো প্ৰযোজ্য হয় যে তেওঁলোক ‘দৰিদ্ৰ বাবেই দৰিদ্ৰ’ অৰ্থাৎ তেওঁলোক ইমানেই দৰিদ্ৰ যে যিখিনি আয় তেওঁলোকৰ হয়, সেইখিনিও পুনৰ পেট পূৰাওতেই নিঃশেষ হয়। এওঁলোকৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত অৰ্থনৈতিক উন্নয়নৰ বাবে যদি সাহায্য প্ৰদান কৰাও হয়, সেইখিনিও পেট পূৰ্বতাওতেই শেষ হয়।

এনে ডাল দৰিদ্ৰ শ্ৰেণীৰ বাবে সেয়ে এনে এটা ‘বৃহৎ প্ৰচেষ্টা’ৰ

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ভিত্তিত বজাৰ মুখী কৰি তুলিব পৰা নাযায়, তেন্তে এনে সম্প্ৰদায়সমূহৰ অৰ্থনৈতিক ভেটিটোও স্বাৰলম্বী কৰিব পৰা নাযাব। ঋণগ্ৰস্ততাৰ পৰা মুক্তিৰ বাবেও নতুন সাংগঠনিক ভিত্তিৰ প্ৰয়োজন।

গতিকে এওঁলোকৰ বাবে এতিয়া প্ৰধান প্ৰয়োজন অৰ্থনৈতিক বজাৰ আৰু বজাৰমুখী সংগঠন, উৎপাদনৰ বিভিন্ন লাভজনক সংগঠন সম্পৰ্কে প্ৰশিক্ষণ দিয়া। অন্যথা পৰম্পৰাগত মীন ব্যৱসায়টোও এওঁলোকে নিজ হাতত ৰাখিব নোৱাৰিব।

বৰ্তমান উদাৰ অৰ্থনীতিৰ যুগত এই সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ মানুহখিনি সৰ্বস্বাস্থ্য নোহোৱাকৈ থাকিব পাৰিব কেৱল বজাৰমুখী সাংগঠনিক ভেটিতহে। আমাৰ ধাৰণা মীন, বেচম, পশুপালন আৰু হাঁহ-কুকুৰা পালনৰ দৰে লাভজনক উপজীৱিকাৰ যদি অনুসূচীভুক্ত সম্প্ৰদায় সমূহক, নতুন বজাৰমুখী সাংগঠনিক ভেটিত ব্যাপকভাবে নিয়োজিত কৰিবৰ বাবে আঁচনি গ্ৰহণ কৰা নহয়, তেন্তে ইতিমধ্যে উপান্ত (Marginalised) হোৱা এই সম্প্ৰদায় সমূহৰ লোকসকল অদূৰ ভৱিষ্যতে সৰ্বহাৰা নিঃস্ব হৈ পৰিব।

নেতৃত্ব : আধুনিক যুগৰ উপযোগী

সামাজিক পৰিবৰ্তন (Social Change) ৰ বাবে অনুসূচীভুক্ত সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ বাবে যি নেতৃত্বৰ প্ৰয়োজন – সেই নেতৃত্ব হ'ব লাগিব আধুনিক। পুৰণি দৃষ্টি-ভংগীৰ, আধা-ধৰ্মীয়, আধা সাম্প্ৰদায়িক নেতৃত্বই অনুসূচীভুক্ত সম্প্ৰদায়ক দৰিদ্ৰতা আৰু অনগ্ৰসৰতাৰ পৰা মুক্ত কৰিব নোৱাৰে।

অনুসূচীভুক্ত সম্প্ৰদায় প্ৰধান অঞ্চলৰ সুন্দৰ স্কুল, কলেজ, প্ৰশিক্ষণ কেন্দ্ৰ স্থাপন, অৰ্থনৈতিক উন্নয়ন আৰু মানব সম্পদ উন্নয়নৰ বাবে ব্যৱস্থা গ্ৰহণ, উন্নত বজাৰমুখী উপজীৱিকা গ্ৰহণ আদিৰ ওপৰত জোৰ দিয়া বলিষ্ঠ সামাজিক সংগঠন সমূহ যদি গঢ়ি তোলা নহয়, তেন্তে অন্ধকাৰ যুগতে এই সম্প্ৰদায় সমূহ বৈ যাব। গতিকে এনে সম্প্ৰদায়সমূহৰ শিক্ষিত শ্ৰেণীয়ে মূলতঃ যুগোপযোগী সামাজিক সংগঠন গঢ়ি তোলাৰ ওপৰত জোৰ দিব লাগে।

স্বৰিৰতাৰ পৰা মুক্তি

সামাজিক আৰু ধৰ্মীয় পৰম্পৰাগত স্বৰিৰতাই বহু সময়ত নতুন বৃত্তি গ্ৰহণ, নতুন সংগঠন গঢ়ি তোলা-আনকি নতুন যি কোনো ধৰণৰ চিন্তা ধাৰা প্ৰসাৰত বাধাৰ সৃষ্টি কৰে। গতিকে সামাজিক আৰু ধৰ্মীয় কাৰণত যিবোৰ আৰ্থিক বৃত্তিগত বাধাৰ সৃষ্টি হৈছে, সেইবোৰ আমি দূৰ কৰা প্ৰয়োজন। আৰ্থিকভাবে প্ৰতিযোগিতা কৰি জীয়াই থাকিব লাগিলে, আজিৰ যুগৰ উপযোগী

চিন্তাৰে আমি পৰিচালিত হ'ব লাগিব। বিশেষকৈ আৰ্থিক বৃত্তিগত ক্ষেত্ৰত এক সৰ্বাত্মক মুক্তিৰ প্ৰয়োজন, যাতে আমাৰ ডেকা-গাভৰুৱে যিকোনো আৰ্থিক বৃত্তি গ্ৰহণ কৰি প্ৰতিযোগিতাত ভিত্তি থাকিব পাৰে। দৰিদ্ৰতাই খুলি-খুলি খোৱা মানুহখিনিৰ বাবে স্বৰিৰ চিন্তা তৎকালে বৰ্জনীয়। নতুন সামাজিক সংগঠন সমূহে এই দিশটোৰ প্ৰতিও চকু দিব লাগিব।

সমন্বিত আৰ্থিক আঁচনি :

ওপৰত উল্লেখ কৰি অহা দিশবোৰৰ প্ৰতি লক্ষ্য ৰাখি অনুসূচীভুক্ত সম্প্ৰদায় সমূহৰ বাবে এখন সামগ্ৰিক সমন্বিত আঁচনি লাগে। এনে আঁচনিৰ বাবে পুঁজি, জনশক্তি, প্ৰযুক্তি আৰু পৰিকল্পনা মূলতঃ চৰকাৰী ভাবে সৰবৰাহ কৰিব লাগিব আৰু নিয়ন্ত্ৰণো হব চৰকাৰী; কিন্তু অনুসূচীভুক্ত সম্প্ৰদায়সমূহৰ গতিশীল সামাজিক-অৰ্থনৈতিক সংগঠন সমূহক ইয়াৰ অংশীদাৰ কৰি তুলিব লাগিব। এটা 'নিগম' বা এটা 'কমিটি'ৰ জৰিয়তে এই কাম নহ'ব। এটা সম্পূৰ্ণাংগ উপ-পৰিকল্পনা দৰকাৰ হ'ব এই সম্প্ৰদায় সমূহৰ সামগ্ৰিক উন্নয়নৰ বাবে। এই উদ্দেশ্যে এটা নতুন উন্নয়নৰ আৰ্হিৰ বিষয়ে নিশ্চয় চিন্তা কৰাৰ প্ৰয়োজন আছে।

উদ্যোক্তাৰ ভূমিকাত অৱতীৰ্ণ হবলৈ অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ যুৱক সমাজৰ বাবে প্ৰশিক্ষণৰ প্ৰয়োজন

মিলন চন্দ্ৰ শইকীয়া*

অসমৰ সমূহ অনুসূচীত জাতি গোষ্ঠীক ১৯৭৬ চনৰ সংশোধনী আইন (SC & ST Amendment Act 1976) অনুসৰি ১৬টা বিভিন্ন সম্প্ৰদায়ত সন্নিবিষ্ট কৰা হৈছে। এই ১৬টা সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ ভিতৰত নমঃশূদ্ৰ সম্প্ৰদায়টো জনসংখ্যাৰ ফালৰ পৰা প্ৰথমস্থান, কৈৱৰ্ত বা জালীয়া সম্প্ৰদায়ে দ্বিতীয় স্থান আৰু পাটনী সম্প্ৰদায়ে তৃতীয় স্থান অধিকাৰ কৰিছে। একেবাৰে কম জনসংখ্যাৰে লালবেগী আৰু মহৰা সম্প্ৰদায়ক চিহ্নিত কৰা হৈছে। ভৌগোলিক ভাবে ব্ৰহ্মপুত্ৰ উপত্যকাত কৈৱৰ্ত বা জালীয়া সম্প্ৰদায় আৰু বৰাক উপত্যকাত নমঃশূদ্ৰৰ জাতিগত গৰিষ্ঠতা দেখা পোৱা যায়। মহকুমা ভিত্তিত মহকুমা, গুৱাহাটী মহকুমা, শিলচৰ মহকুমা আৰু কৰিমগঞ্জ মহকুমাতেই অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ সংখ্যাগৰিষ্ঠতা মন কৰিবলগীয়া।

আমাৰ এই আলোচনাত অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ যিবিলাক জ্বলন্ত সমস্যা আছে সেই বিলাকৰ আলোচনা অন্য আলোচকৰ বাবে এৰি আমি কেৱল অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ যুৱক সমাজৰ উদ্যোক্তাৰ ভূমিকাত নামিবলৈ মানসিক প্ৰস্তুতি আৰু প্ৰশিক্ষণৰ প্ৰয়োজনীয়তাৰ বিষয়েহে আলোচনা কৰিম।

জীৱনৰ উন্নতিৰ বাবে প্ৰতিটো খোজতে প্ৰশিক্ষণৰ প্ৰয়োজন আছে। প্ৰশিক্ষণে মানুহৰ সুপ্ত প্ৰতিভাক প্ৰস্ফুটিত কৰাৰ সুবিধা দিয়ে। সেয়েহে উদ্যোগী কৰণৰ প্ৰথম খোজতে বিশদ প্ৰশিক্ষণৰ জৰিয়তে জনসম্পদৰ সম্যক ব্যৱহাৰৰ ব্যৱস্থা আছে। অসমৰ অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ প্ৰধান আৰ্থ সামাজিক সমস্যাবলীৰ ভিত্তি উদ্ঘাটন কৰিবলৈ ১৯৮৬-৮৭ চনতে অসমৰ অৰ্থনীতি আৰু পৰিসংখ্যা বিভাগে এটা বেঞ্চ মাৰ্ক চাৰ্ভে (Bench Mark Survey) চলাইছিল। এই সমীক্ষাত অসমৰ অনুসূচীত জাতি বাস কৰা ৬৪৮০ খন গাঁও সামৰা হৈছিল। এই ৬৪৮০ খন গাঁৱৰ ভিতৰত শতকৰা ৪০ জন অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ লোক বাসকৰা গাঁও ১০০৫ খন পোৱা গৈছিল ১৯৭১ চনৰ লোক পিয়লৰ ভিত্তিত। এই ক্ষেত্ৰত আমাৰ বক্তব্য এইয়ে যে অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ কল্যাণৰ বাবে কিবা আঁচনি লোৱাৰ আগতে এই তথ্যভিত্তিক অনুসন্ধানৰ ফলাফল সমূহ অধ্যয়ন

* মিলন চন্দ্ৰ শইকীয়া অৱসৰপ্ৰাপ্ত উপসঞ্চালক, অসম জনজাতি আৰু অনুসূচীত জাতি গৱেষণা প্ৰতিষ্ঠান, জৱাহৰনগৰ, গুৱাহাটী-২২

কৰি লোৱাৰ প্ৰয়োজন অনুভূত হয়। তেতিয়া হলে প্ৰতিটো আঁচনিৰ বৈজ্ঞানিক ভিত্তি এটাৰ ওপৰত থিয় কৰাই তাৰ ৰূপায়ণৰ চেষ্টা কৰিলে সি ফলবতী হোৱাৰ আশা থাকে।

অসমৰ অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ লোক বাসকৰা গাঁও সমূহৰ প্ৰধান অন্তৰায় হৈছে শৈক্ষিক বাতাবৰণৰ। শৈক্ষিক বাতাবৰণ নাথাকিলে বা শিক্ষা গ্ৰহণৰ বাবে প্ৰাথমিক সুবিধাসমূহ (Infrastructural facilities) নাথাকিলে কেৱল গাঁওবাসীক দোষাৰোপ কৰিলেই সমস্যাৰ সমাধান নহ'ব। এইখিনিতে উল্লেখ কৰিব পাৰি যে ১৯৭৩-৭৪ চনত অসমৰ অৰ্থনীতি আৰু পৰিসংখ্যা বিভাগে অনুসূচীত জাতি আৰু অনুসূচীত জনজাতিৰ মাজত এটি উমৈহতীয়া আৰ্থ-সামাজিক সমীক্ষা চলাইছিল। উক্ত সমীক্ষাত অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ ৬ বছৰৰ পৰা ১১ বছৰৰ ল'ৰা-ছোৱালীৰ শতকৰা ৪২.২ ভাগে স্কুলৰ শিক্ষাৰ প্ৰতি কোনো আকৰ্ষণ অনুভৱ নকৰে বুলি উল্লেখ কৰিছে আৰু শতকৰা ৩৬.৫ ভাগে অৰ্থনৈতিক কাৰণত লগতে ঘৰত মাক দেউতাকৰ কামত সহায় কৰিবৰ উদ্দেশ্যে স্কুললৈ যোৱাৰ পৰা বিৰত থাকে বুলি দেখুৱাইছে। উক্ত সমীক্ষাত ইয়াকো কোৱা হৈছে যে স্কুলীয়া বাতাবৰণ আৰু সুবিধাৰ (Lack of educational facilities) বাবে শতকৰা ২১.৩ ভাগে শিক্ষাৰ পৰা নিজকে বঞ্চিত কৰে। এই পৰিসংখ্যা বিলাকে অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ শৈক্ষিক বাতাবৰণৰ ওপৰত যথেষ্ট আলোকপাত কৰিছে। শতকৰা ৪২.২ ভাগ (৬-১১ বছৰৰ) ল'ৰা-ছোৱালীয়ে শিক্ষাৰ প্ৰতি কোনো আগ্ৰহ প্ৰদৰ্শন নকৰাটো অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ লোকসকলৰ সামাজিক দায়বদ্ধতাৰ (Social Consciousness) প্ৰতি থকা অনীহাৰ কথাকৈ স্পষ্টকৈ প্ৰতিফলিত কৰি দেখুৱাইছে। সেইদৰে অৰ্থনৈতিক কাৰণত শতকৰা ৩৬.৫ ভাগে (৬-১১ বছৰ) স্কুললৈ যাব নোৱাৰাটো এই জাতি গোষ্ঠীৰ অৰ্থনৈতিক কাৰ্ঠামোৰ সোলোকে-টোলোকে অৱস্থাটোকে বেছি প্ৰকট কৰি দেখুৱাইছে। অন্যহাতে স্কুলীয়া সুবিধাৰ (educational facilities) অন্তৰায়ৰ বাবে শতকৰা ২১.৩ ভাগ ল'ৰা-ছোৱালীয়ে স্কুলীয়া শিক্ষাৰ পৰা বঞ্চিত হোৱাটোও এটা উল্লেখনীয় দিশ।

ওপৰৰ ছবিখন অৱশ্যে আজিৰ পৰা ২০ বছৰৰ আগৰ। এতিয়া এই শতকৰা হাৰৰ কিছু উন্নতি নিশ্চয় হৈছে। কিন্তু শিক্ষাৰ প্ৰতি থকা অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ স্বাভাৱিক অনীহা আজিও বৰ্তমান। এইটো কথা এতিয়া ভালদৰেই প্ৰতীয়মান হৈছে যে অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ মাজত য'ত শিক্ষাৰ ৰেঙনি অনুভূত হৈছে সেই জাতি গোষ্ঠীয়েই অৰ্থনৈতিক ভাবেও অন্যতকৈ কিছু আগবঢ়া। শিক্ষাই মানুহৰ মনৰ পৰিধিৰ বিস্তৃতি ঘটায় আৰু দেখি শুনি শিকিবলৈ আগ্ৰহ জন্মায়। এই আগ্ৰহ যি জনৰ থাকে তেওঁৰেই এজন সফল উদ্যোক্তা হ'ব পাৰে।

এজন উদ্যোক্তাৰ বাবে নিজৰ বৰীয়াকৈ কিছু মূলধনৰ প্ৰয়োজনো আছে। এই মূলধন আহিব নিজৰ সঞ্চয় ক্ষমতাৰ (Saving potentiality) ওপৰত। কিন্তু অনুসূচীত জাতি গোষ্ঠীৰ প্ৰায় খিনিয়েই দৰিদ্ৰৰ সীমাৰেখাৰ তলত সেই গতিকৈ কেতিয়াও এটা সঞ্চয়ন ভিত্তি (Saving base) গঢ় লৈ নুঠে। সেয়ে অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ মাজত এজন উদ্যোক্তাৰ ভূমিকাক গঢ় দিবলৈ অনুসূচীত জাতি উন্নয়ন নিগম (লিঃ)ৰ গধুৰ দায়িত্ব আছে। এই উন্নয়ন নিগমৰ অধীনত সৰু সৰু উদ্যোগ গঢ়িবৰ বাবে এটা উদ্যোগৰ সমস্ত খৰছৰ (Total Unit Cost) শতকৰা ২৫ ভাগ Margin money loan আৰু শতকৰা ৭৫ ভাগ বেঙ্কৰ দিয়াৰ ব্যৱস্থা আছে। কিন্তু শতকৰা ১২ ভাগৰ পৰা প্ৰায় ১৮ ভাগ সুদ বহন কৰি ৭৫ ভাগ বেঙ্কৰ ঋণ লৈ উদ্যোগ গঢ়ি তুলিবলৈ খুব কম সংখ্যক অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ যুৱক আগবাঢ়ি আহিব। যদিও শতকৰা ৭৫ ভাগ বেঙ্কৰ ঋণৰ পৰিবৰ্তে মাত্ৰ ৫০ ভাগ বেঙ্ক ঋণ কৰি বাকী ২৫ ভাগ অনুদান (Subsidy) হিচাবে আগবঢ়ালেহেঁতেন তেন্তে এই জাতি গোষ্ঠীৰ পৰা বহুতো উদ্যোক্তাই নিজ নিজ উদ্যোগ একোটা গঢ়ি তুলিবলৈ আগবাঢ়ি আহিলেহেঁতেন বুলি আমাৰ ধাৰণা হয়। বিগত বছৰ কেইটাত উন্নয়ন নিগমে মাৰ্জিন মানি লেণ্ডিং প্ৰগ্ৰাম (Margin Money Lending Programme) ৰ অধীনত কিছুমান সৰু সৰু উদ্যোগ যেনে গেলামালৰ দোকান, দৰ্জীৰ দোকান, উল গোঠা আৰু বেজীৰ কাম, মাছধৰা জাল গোঠা, চকী-মেজ বনোৱা, চাহৰ দোকান, অলঙ্কাৰপাতি বনোৱা, কিতাপৰ দোকান, ষ্টেচনাৰী দোকান, চাইকেল মেৰামতি, ঘড়ী মেৰামতি, বয়ন শিল্প, মাছপোহা উদ্যোগ, ডাইৰী, কুকুৰা পালন, গাহৰি পালন, মৃৎ শিল্প, মাছৰ ব্যৱসায় আদিৰ বাবে স্বীকৃত কৰি প্ৰতিটো উদ্যোগৰ সম্ভাৱ্য খৰচ, আৰু প্ৰতিটো উদ্যোগে সামৰিব পৰা পৰিয়ালৰ সংখ্যা থিৰাং কৰি বিত্তীয় সাহায্য আগবঢ়াইছিল। কিন্তু কি পৰিমাণে উদ্যোগ বিলাক গঢ় লৈ উঠিল আৰু কিমান অনুসূচীত জাতি পৰিয়াল উপকৃত হ'ল সেই বিষয়ে বিতং তথ্য জানিব পৰা নহ'ল। তথাপিও আমি আশা ৰাখিছো যে অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ যুৱক সমাজৰ পৰা উদ্যোক্তা গঢ়িবলৈ মানসিক প্ৰস্তুতিখিনি এই উন্নয়ন নিগমেই দিব লাগিব আৰু তাৰ বাবে দেশৰ বিভিন্ন অনুষ্ঠান প্ৰতিষ্ঠানত অনুসূচীত জাতি যুৱকৰ প্ৰশিক্ষণৰ ভাৰ এই নিগমৰে দায়িত্বত থাকিব। ইয়াৰোপৰি ক্ষুদ্ৰ উদ্যোগৰ পৰিধি চেৰাই মজলীয়া উদ্যোগৰ বাবে প্ৰয়োজনীয় 'পৃথক সুতৰ হাৰত ঋণ' (differential rates of interest) এই নিগমে বেঙ্কৰ জৰিয়তে আগবঢ়ালেহে অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ যুৱক সমাজে উদ্যোক্তাৰ ভূমিকাত অৱতীৰ্ণ হ'বলৈ মানসিক ভাবে প্ৰস্তুত হ'ব পাৰিব।

শেষত আমি কব খুজিছো যে অনুসূচীত জাতি গোষ্ঠীৰ যিবিলাকৰ

জাতিগত বৃত্তি এতিয়াও চলি আছে সেই বিলাকৰ বৈজ্ঞানিকভাবে উন্নতি সাধন অনুসূচীত জাতিৰ যুৱক সমাজৰ উদ্যোক্তা হিচাবে প্ৰথম দায়িত্ব, সেইদৰেই সেই বৃত্তি এৰি অন্য বৃত্তিৰ প্ৰতি ধাবমান হোৱাৰ বাবেও মানসিক প্ৰস্তুতি আৰু দেশৰ বিভিন্ন শিল্প সম্ভাৰৰ সৈতে চিনাকি হোৱাৰ মানসিকতা থকাৰ আৱশ্যকতা অনুভৱ কৰা হৈছে। তেতিয়াহে প্ৰশিক্ষণৰ অন্তত উদ্যোক্তাৰ সৃষ্টি হ'ব।