

# Literacy Pattern and its Variation among Scheduled Castes Population in the Brahmaputra Valley, Assam

Dr.Momita Goswami Barooah \*

\* Department of Geography, Gauhati University

**Abstract-** Literacy and educational attainment are considered to be the hallmark of modern society. The traits of modern society such as urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation are closely associated with the level of literacy and education. The scheduled caste population is socially a backward class in Indian society. In the past they were downtrodden illiterate people of the Indian fabric. Even in the middle part of twentieth century the literacy rate among them was very low. However in the later part of the twentieth century and in the current millennium due to the developmental measures implemented by the central as well as state governments of India and also due to the influence of mass media there has been a change in the pattern of literacy. The literacy rate in the Brahmaputra Valley, Assam is 56.29 percent in 2001 census against 56.09 percent for general population, which is slightly lower than the scheduled caste population in the valley. This situation is mainly due to the presence of large number of general Muslim population in the study area, majority of whom are illiterates. The study of the pattern of literacy among various social groups of scheduled castes in the study area provides an insight into the socio-economic situations. An attempt has been made in this paper to analyse the variation and pattern of literacy among the scheduled caste population in the Brahmaputra Valley, Assam.

**Index Terms-** Brahmaputra Valley, Assam, Literacy, Empirical inductive method, Schedule caste, Educational attainment

## I. INTRODUCTION

Literacy and educational attainment level are considered as significant factors influencing the socio-economic development of any society. The quality of human society can be judged through educational attainment level. Literacy and educational attainment are fundamental features of social uplift of a region. Assam is lagging behind in respect of literacy and education. So far Brahmaputra valley is concerned it is also not satisfactory.

The scheduled castes population is socially a backward class in the Indian society. In the past they were downtrodden illiterate people of the Indian fabric. Even in the middle part of the twentieth century the literacy rate among them was very low. However, in the later part of the twentieth century and in the current millennium due to the developmental measures implemented by the central as well as the state government of India and also due to the influence of mass media there has been a change in the pattern of literacy.

The constitution of India in its Article 45 of the directive principle urges the state to provide free and compulsory education for all the children, until they complete fourteen years of age. In this direction the national policy of education, 1968 was a milestone which stressed the need for vigorous effort for the early fulfilment of this aim. The amendment of the constitution in 1976 included education in the concurrent list. The national policy of education, 1986 again emphasised in the universal access and enrolment of the children upto fourteen years of age and a substantial improvement in the quality of education to enable all children to essential levels of learning. Lastly, the Sarva Siksha Abhijan is also implemented by the state government to educate all the people. It may be noted here that influence of these policies has resulted an improvement in the literacy rates among the scheduled castes people. But, the level of education attainment is not significantly improving among them.

According to 2001 census, in the Brahmaputra valley Assam 56.29 percent of scheduled castes population (excluding 0-6 years age group) are literates against 56.09 percent for general population. The male literacy rate is comparatively higher than the Corresponding female literacy rate among the scheduled castes population in the Brahmaputra valley. It is observed from the above analysis that the literacy rate is comparatively higher in case of Schedule caste population than the overall general literacy rate of the valley. This situation is mainly due to the presence of large number of general Muslim population in the study area, majority of whom are illiterates.

TABLE1

Literacy trend of scheduled castes population in the Brahmaputra valley and Assam.1961 to 2001(in percent).

YEAR	BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY			ASSAM		
	PERSON	MALE	FEMALE	PERSON	MALE	FEMALE
1961	21.73	29.74	12.53	24.55	31.75	16.09
1971	24.86	34.80	13.94	25.29	35.00	15.74

1991	42.93	51.64	33.45	42.46	51.62	34.30
2001	56.29	64.70	47.62	56.09	63.95	47.90

Source: calculated on the basis of census data, Primary census abstract 2001, primary census abstract part II- B(1991)- 1971 part (II) social and cultural tables.1961-volumeIII part II C.

**\*1981-Census survey is not done in 1981 in Assam.**

**\*1991-1991 data population figure include age (0-6)Years age groups.**

It is observed from the table I that the literacy rate among the scheduled castes is not encouraging during the period from 1961 to 2001. when both the male and female literacy rates are considered the female literacy rates are far below the male literacy in case of scheduled castes population. This is due to low status of women and negligence of female education in their society. The parents of the poor families generally have given more importance to the male child in case of education, while the female child generally helps them in the domestic work.

## II. SPATIAL PATTERN OF LITERACY

The literacy rates also vary in different districts of the Brahmaputra valley. According to 2001 census the highest percentage share of scheduled castes literates is found in Sibsagar district with 69.43 percent literacy rate while the lowest is recorded by Dhemaji district with only 46.12 percent literacy rate. The spatial variation of literacy pattern in the Brahmaputra valley is presented in the Table 2 for clear understanding of the situation.

**Table 2**  
**Literacy Rate among the Scheduled Castes Population in Different Districts of the Brahmaputra Valley, 2001**

DISTRICTS/VALLEY	LITERACY IN PERCENTAGE		
	PERSON	MALE	FEMALE
1.KOKRAJHAR	53.43	62.36	43.64
2.DHUBRI	50.42	60.21	41.09
3.GOALPARA	54.49	61.96	46.74
4.BONGAIGAON	47.57	56.99	37.37
5.BARPETA	53.00	62.60	42.65
6.KAMRUP	57.31	65.57	48.50
7.NALBARI	52.89	62.33	42.94
8.DARRANG	49.59	62.33	42.94
9.MORIGAON	50.12	58.51	41.14
10.NAGAON	60.46	67.37	53.15
11.SONITPUR	58.82	66.63	50.48
12.LAKHIMPUR	57.55	66.33	48.40
13.DHEMAJI	46.12	55.69	35.74
14.TINSUKIA	62.66	69.95	54.43
15.DIBRUGARH	63.26	70.48	55.36
16.SIBSAGAR	69.43	75.15	63.48
17.JORHAT	66.05	74.05	57.57
18.GOLAGHAT	59.74	67.30	51.75
BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY	56.29	64.70	47.62
ASSAM	56.09	63.95	47.90

**SOURCES: CENSUS OF INDIA 2001 ASSAM.**

The table 2 reveals that the literacy rates among the scheduled castes in the upper Brahmaputra valley are higher when compared to the lower Brahmaputra valley. The lowest level of literacy among scheduled castes population is however, found in Dhemaji districts in upper Assam which is an exception

due mainly to the ecological setting of the area coupled with, poverty and lack of adequate educational facilities in the district. Moreover, almost all parts of the district are chronically flood affected and the educational institution are in dilapidated

condition. Interestingly all other social groups also have lower literacy level in this part of the study area.

It is mentioned earlier that among the districts of Assam, the male literacy is higher compare to female literacy. It is due primarily to the fact that upper part of the valley except Dhemaji district which is chronically flood affected are socio-economically advanced when compared to the lower part of the valley. However Kamrup district with Guwahati city is the lower Brahmaputra valley is an exception. It is important to note that since the Ahom rule, people in the upper Brahmaputra valley have been aware of society, social life and living standards. Moreover, most of the areas in this part are accessible with high connectivity. Even during the British period with the growth of Oil and Tea industries, this part of the study area (Upper Brahmaputra Valley) was to some extent economically advanced.

**Literacy rate among different schedule caste groups in the Brahmaputra Valley.**

The study of the pattern of literacy among various social groups of scheduled castes in the study area provides an insight

into the socio-economic situation. Interestingly there exist significant disparities in the literacy rate among various scheduled castes groups.

In order to study the present condition, field survey is conducted in 2010 in different areas of the Brahmaputra valley. In this study only 12 major groups of the Brahmaputra valley having more than one percent of the total scheduled castes population are considered. It is observed that the literacy rate among them in the study area is 56.29 percent, of which male literacy is 64.70 percent and while female literacy 47.62 percent. Among the 12 major groups in the valley the highest literacy rate is recorded by Kaibartta group with 66.79% literates. Interestingly the kaibartta group has also the highest number of population in the valley. The second position is claimed by Jalkeot whose literary rate is 61.9% followed by Dhobi 61.19%. Kaibartta and Jalkeot are indigenous and they lived in both and rural and urban areas of the valley while dhobi group is immigrant and the people of this group are urban dwellers

**Table3**  
**Bahmaputravally Literacy Rate among Different Groups of Scheduled Castes Population**

GROUP	PERCENTAGE OF LITERATES		
	PERSON	MALE	FEMALE
1.BANSPHOR	51.46	66.67	36.54
2.BHUINMALI	52.77	61.68	39.73
3.BANIA	53.85	63.64	41.18
4.DHOBI	61.19	61.70	60.00
5.HIRA	51.92	59.26	44.00
6.JHALO-MALO	58.3	62.5	50.00
7.JALKEOT	61.70	66.66	52.94
8.KAIBARTTA	66.79	69.87	62.50
9.MEHTAR	57.14	64.14	64.70
10.MUCHI	44.82	50.00	36.36
11.NAMASUDRA	53.01	66.94	39.84
12.SUTRADHAR	48.90	65.38	27.11
BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY	56.16	65.25	44.58

**SOURCE: Field survey 2010**

The other Scheduled castes groups have more or less same literacy rate. The lowest literacy rate among the groups is recorded by Muchi (44.82percent) who are mostly urban dwellers. So far the male female literacy patterns are concerned, the male literacy rate is comparatively higher than the female literacy rate. It is further observed that among the groups the male literacy rate is highest among the Kaibartta group(69.78%) followed by Namasudra (66.94%). On the other hand the female literacy rate is also highest among the Kaibartta group (62.50percent) followed by Dhobi (60 %). It is interesting to note that the female literacy rates vary from minimum 27.11 percent to maximum 62.50%, indicating high disparity among various groups which, however depends on the status of women in the society.

The above analysis clearly throws light on the fact that though effort has been made by the central and the state

government to educate the people during the different five year plan periods, literacy pattern is very discouraging among the scheduled castes people in the Brahmaputra valley.

**III. EDUCATIONAL LEVEL**

The educational level of a region is better understood, when the level of educational attainment is taken into account. The educational attainment level is analyzed in the present study for Brahmaputra valley for the Year 2010 from the field study(primary data).

**TABLE 4**  
**Educational level of scheduled castes population in the Brahmaputra valley**

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	PERCENTAGE SHARE OF LITERATES		
	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
Below primary(I toIV)	37.57	36.18	40.17
Above primary upto matric(V to X)	29.68	28.99	0.96
Above matric(HSLC) below Graduate	22.66	23.37	21.33
Graduate and Technical	10.09	11.46	7.54
Illiterates	43.84	34.75	55.41
Literates(all)	56.16	65.25	44.58

Source: Field survey

It has been observed from the above table that the percentage of literacy below primary level is the highest claiming 37.57 percent of the total literates. The second position is claimed by the educational level above primary up to class x(29.68%).The H.S.L.C passed upto below graduate level claim 22.66%, while graduate and technical persons claim only 10.09%.It is observed in the field study that there are large scale school drop-outs during and after the primary stage of education among the scheduled castes in case of both male and female primarily due to financial hardships.

The study of male female educational level shows that the percentage share of female below primary level of education is very high with 40.17% of literates which is higher than the main literates (36.18%). Unlike the primary from above primary upto class X the female literacy rate (30.96%) is higher than the male counter part (28.99%). In the next group i.e. above HSLC but below graduates stage the male literacy rate is comparatively higher (26.37%) than that of female literacy (21.33%). In the higher level i.e. in the graduate and technical level also the literacy rate is comparatively higher in case of male (11.46%) than that of the female literacy (7.53%). It is mainly due to the fact that female get married at an early age before completion of the study as there is no social commitment about the continuation of their study after marriage.

The comparison of tables 1, 2, 3 reveals that there has been slight improvement in the literacy rate between 1991 and 2001. Apart from the social awaking, the facilities provided by the Government for socio-economic uplift of the schedule caste people also lead to this slight rise of literacy among them in the Brahmaputra valley. It is mentioned earlier that the indigenous schedule caste people are distributed both rural and urban areas of the study area. Due to the impact of urbanisation the indigenous schedule caste people who settled in urban areas have higher literacy rate when compared to the indigenous schedule caste people living in the rural areas.

It is further observed that the prevailing poor economic conditions among the schedule caste groups coupled with inaccessible conditions in the areas they lived to a great extent responsible for the low level of literacy among them. The recent development of Transport and communication has however added a new dimension to the process of propagation of literacy

and education in the remote areas. There has been also outmigration of the scheduled caste people from rural to urban areas to get higher education or employment which is particularly male selective, resulting in an increase of male literacy.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The scheduled castes population is mainly distributed in the rural areas of the Brahmaputra valley. The rural literacy rate among the scheduled castes on an average for the valley is 51.11percent while the urban literacy is 65.77 percent. During the period 1971-2001 there is significant development in the literacy pattern among the scheduled castes in the study area. The prevalence of rural urban differential in case of literacy is primarily due to availability of educational facilities and consciousness among the people in the urban areas. on the other hand in the rural areas the educational institutions located in the river banks are submerged under water during four months of summer. Most of scheduled castes people live below poverty lines who, therefore cannot afford to go to other place to get education, resulting in a overall low literacy rate. The level of educational attainment is found to be discouraging among the schedule caste population. Therefore, it may be concluded that increase of literacy and educational attainment level particularly in case of female are vital towards socio-economic development of schedule caste population.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Gosal, G.S (1979) - "Spatial perspective on literacy in India," population geography vol 1
- [2] Sharma Thakur G.C (1994) - "Socio-cultural dynamics of scheduled castes development." Bulletin vol-I no.IX. Department of welfare of plains tribes and backward classes, government of Assam.
- [3] Sharma. H. N (1992) - "Social profile of North East India : Spatial pattern of literacy and educational levels" in Ahmed a.(ed.), social structure and regional development : A social geography perspective, Rawat publications, Jaipur pp. 219-38

AUTHORS

**First Author** – Dr.Momita Goswami Barooah, Department of  
Geography, Gauhati University, Postal Address : C/O R.C.D

Goswami, Byelane-1, Sublane-2 (Bimola Barua Path), House  
No-4, Narikolbari, Guwahati-781024,  
mgbarooah@rediffmail.com , +91 9864012988