Demographic Features of the Scheduled Castes in Assam: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Demographic features of a region or a country portray a clear picture of the socio-economic conditions of the people living in that region or country. Similarly, the demographic features of a particular class or a caste reflect the socio-economic status of that particular class or caste. In Assam, the Scheduled Castes (SCs) occupy a major part of the total population in the state as well as total area. According to the census of 2001, 6.9 percent of the state's total populations are belonging to the Scheduled Castes. This paper is an attempt to analyze the demographic features of Scheduled Castes in Assam. The study is based upon primary and secondary data. The study found that the SCs of Assam are still very backward. However, in some extent, they are standing in a better position as compared to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) of the state.

Keywords: Demographic, Region, Scheduled Caste, Sex-Ratio

Introduction

Assam, the gateway of Northeast India is a land inhabited by different castes and communities. The 'Scheduled Caste' is one of the major communities of the state. In Assam, sixteen sub castes are included in the category of Scheduled Castes (SCs). These are- Kaibartta(Jaliya), Bania, Dhobi(Dhupi), Hira, Jhalo(Jhalo-Malo), Dugla(Dholi), Bansphor, Bhuinmali(Mali), Jalkeot, Munchi, Patni, Namasudra, Lalbegi, Mahara, Mehtar(Bhangi) and Sutradhar. Demographic features include the components like population distribution, sex ratio, literacy rate, marital status, occupational distribution, religion, population density etc. This paper makes an attempt to analyze the demographic features of the Scheduled Castes in Assam. The study is based upon primary as well as secondary data collected for the Scheduled Castes of Assam. The study found that the SCs of Assam are still very backward. However, in some cases, they are standing in a better position as compared to the other backward classes of the state [1,2].

A major part of the total population in Assam is occupied by the Scheduled Castes. According to 2001 Census, about 6.9 percent of the state's total population is belonged to the Scheduled Castes community [3,4,5,6] .

Objective of the study

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the demographic features of the Scheduled Castes in Assam.

Materials and Methods

The methodology is being used in collecting data and information about the Scheduled Castes of Assam. Most of the data used in this paper are secondary in nature. The data are collected from different Census of India and other relevant government publication of Directorate of Economics and Statistics, internet, e-journals, journals and other textbooks of Demography and Economics. The methods used in this paper are data collection, data presentation and interpretation.

Results and Discussions

Demographic features of a community or a class include the components such as population distribution, sex ratio, literacy rate, occupational distribution, marital status, religion etc. The demographic features of the Scheduled Castes of Assam are discussed below.

Population Distribution

A major part of the total population of Assam is occupied by the Scheduled Castes. According to the Census 2001, in Assam 1,825,949 persons are Scheduled Castes (SCs) which is 6.9 percent of the state's total population 26,655,528.   In case of population size, Kaibartta is the largest sub castes among the SCs in Assam. In 2001 Census, 31.8 percent of the state's total population is occupied by the Kaibartta community. Other major SCs in the state are Namasudra(30.4 percent), Patni(8.3 percent), Jhalo(4.2 percent), Mehtar(3.9 percent), Sutradhar(3.4 percent), Bhuinmali(3.2 percent), Hira(3.0 percent),

Dhupi(2.7 percent), Brittial Bania(2.6 percent) and Jalkeot(1.3 percent). On the other hand, a small size of the state's total SCs population is occupied by some other SCs like Mahara, Dugla, Lalbegi, Mehtar, Basphor etc. Population distribution among the scheduled castes of the state is presented in the Table no 1 [7,8,9].

Sex Ratio

Sex Ratio is considered as another important demographic feature of a community or a class. Sex ratio implies the numbers of female per thousand of male. According to 2001 Census, the sex ratio of the SCs in Assam is 935 which are almost equal to the national level for SCs (936). Among the SCs in Assam, Hira has the highest sex ratio with 966, followed by Kaibartta with 955, Bania with 951, Sutradhar with 938 and Bhuinmali with 937. On the contrary, Munchi has the lowest sex ratio with 916 which is much lower than the state SCs sex ratio. Other major sub castes which have much lower sex ratio than the state average are Dhupi with 920, Jhalo with 923, Jalkeot with 923, Patni with 924 and Namasudra with 924.On the other hand, the child sex ratio (0-6 years) of the SCs in Assam is 959 which is much higher than the national child sex ratio for SCs (938). Hira has the highest child sex ratio with 986, followed by Kaibartta with 977, Jalkeot with 971 and Bhuinmali with 961. On the contrary, it is lower than the state's child sex ratio among Bania, Patni, Munchi, Namasudra etc [1,2,10].

Literacy Rate

Literacy rate is an important criterion of demographic features. Literacy rate refers to the number of literate persons per hundred populations. In 2001 Census, the literacy rate of the SCs in Assam is 66.8 percent. Meanwhile, the national literacy rate for the SCs is 54.7 percent at the same time.According to Census 2001, among the major SCs in Assam Britial Bania has been recorded as the highest literate sub caste with 81.0 percent and Munchi has been recorded as the lowest literate sub caste with 47.9 percent. Among the other SCs like Dhupi(76.0 percent), Patni(75.9 percent), Hira(72.5 percent), Kaibartta(72.1 percent), Jalkeot(69.3 percent) and Sutradhar(67.2 percent) have recorded higher literacy rate than the state average(66.8 percent). On the other hand, some other SCs like Namasudra with 60.2 percent, Jhalo with 52.8 percent and Munchi with 47.9 percent have recorded lower literacy rate than the state literacy rate for SCs. Table no 2 shows the literacy rate of the scheduled castes in Assam.

Occupational Distribution

It is observed that most of the scheduled castes people in Assam are engaged in agriculture and fishing. In 2001 Census, 46.03 percent of the total work force among the SCs in Assam is engaged in primary sector, 12.6 percent in secondary sector and 41.01 percent is engaged in tertiary sector.

It is observed that scheduled castes people in Assam are engaged in different activities like agriculture, fishing, fish trade, gold smith, sweeping, gardening, shoe making, washing, bamboo works etc. The people of Kaibartta, Namasudra, Jalkeot and Jhalo-malo communities are mainly engaged in fishing and fish trade. Besides fishing and fish trade some of them are working in secondary and tertiary sector. Bania people are working as gold smith besides trade and commerce. Bhuinmali people are engaged in sweeping and gardening. On the other hand, Mehtar people are engaged in sweeping and scavenging. Maharas are peety traders and Munchis are shoe makers. Bansphor are engaged in sweeping and bamboo works and Dhobis are working as washmen. Lalbegis are scavengers and sweepers by profession. Sutradhar people are carpenters by profession and Patnis are boatmen. Dholi and Dugla people are mainly drummers and music players. Occupational distribution among the scheduled castes of Assam is presented in the Table 3.

Marital Status

As per the information provided by the Census 2001, in Assam 55.3 percent of the SCs are unmarried, 39.6 percent are currently married and 4.7 percent are widowed. On the other hand, only 0.4 percent are divorced or separated.Child marriage is rare among the SCs in Assam. Only 1.8 percent of the SC females have been registered as married under the minimum legal age (18 years) in the state. Among the SCs in Assam Kaibartta has recorded the highest 2.0 percent of their females as married under the minimum legal age. On the contrary, it is the lowest among Patni (1.2 percent).On the other hand, 1.1 percent male of the total SC populations have been registered as married under the minimum legal age (21 years). Among the major SCs in the state, Hira and Kaibartta have recorded the highest 1.4 percent in this category [4,5,6,7,8,9].

Religion

In Assam, the SC populations are distributed among the three major religions – Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikh. According to 2001 Census, among the total of 1,825,949 SC populations in Assam, 1,824,472 persons are Hindus, which is 99.9 percent of the total SC population in the state. On the other hand, 822 persons are Sikhs and only 655 persons are Buddhists.

Conclusion

The above analysis is an analytical study of the demographic features of the scheduled castes of Assam. From this analysis we may conclude that a major part of the total population in Assam is occupied by the scheduled castes. Hence, they have a great role in the socio-economic development of the state. But, the demographic features of the scheduled castes in Assam reflect a very backward picture. They are still very backward as compared to the developed classes in the state and the country as well as. However, in some extent, they are standing in a better position as compared to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) of the state.

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TABLES

Table 1: Scheduled Caste Population in Assam

Sl. No	Name	Total population	Percentage to the total SC population
1	All SCs	1,825,949	100%
2	Bansphor	14,760	0.8
3	Bhuinmali	57,974	3.2
4	Brittial Bania	47,974	2.6
5	Dhupi	49,929	2.7
6	Dugla	6,364	0.3
7	Hira	55,106	3.0
8	Jalkeot	23,511	1.3
9	Jhalo	77,533	4.2
10	Kaibartta	581,559	31.8
11	Lalbegi	552	0.05
12	Mahara	1,725	0.1
13	Mehtar	12,715	0.7
14	Munchi	70,954	3.9
15	Namasudra	555,621	30.4
16	Patni	151,992	8.3
17	Sutradhar	62,032	3.4

Source: Census of India, 2001 & Office of the Register General, India.

Table 2: Literacy Rate among the SCs in Assam

Sl. No	Name	Literacy Rate(in percentage)
1	All SCs	66.8
2	Bhuinmali	72.2
3	Brittial Bania	81.0
4	Dhupi	76.0
5	Hira	72.5
6	Jalkeot	69.3
7	Jhalo	52.8
8	Kaibartta	72.1
9	Munchi	47.9
10	Namasudra	60.2
11	Patni	75.9
12	Sutradhar	67.2

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics: Statistical Handbook, Assam, 2001.

Table 3: Occupational Distribution among the SCs in Assam

Sl. No	Castes	Traditional Occupation
1	Bansphor	Bamboo work and sweeping
2	Bhuinmali	Sweeping, gardening
3	Brittial Bania	Gold smith, Trade and commerce
4	Dhobi or Dhupi	Cloth washing
5	Dugla	Drummers and music player
6	Hira	Pottery
7	Jalkeot	Fishing
8	Jhalo-Malo	Fishing
9	Kaibartta	Fishing
10	Lalbegi	Scavenger, sweeping and cleaning
11	Mahara	Palki bearing
12	Mehtar	Sweeping and cleaning
13	Munchi	Leather work
14	Namasudra	Fishing
15	Patni	Boatman
16	Sutradhar	Lumbering and carpentering

Source: Directorate of Scheduled Caste, Assam.