

A Study on Socio-Economic Conditions of a Schedule Caste Village in Lakhimpur District, Assam, India

Golok Chandra Dutta

Department of Education, North Lakhimpur College, North Lakhimpur, Assam, 787 031, India
dutta.goloknlp@gmail.com

Abstract: This work has been carried out to study the socio-economic activities of the SC population of Bachagaon village of Lakhimpur district, Assam. This study will attempt to explore the unexplored uniqueness of the SC society through extensive surveys as no such studies on kaivarta people is available in Assam so far. During our survey, a multidisciplinary approach by adopting Rapid Appraisal Technique was used in collecting information. The researcher feels that in order to improve the life style of this community and eradicating poverty and unemployment from their area, it is now very much essential that the government departments, NGOs, local populace be involved in rural development work and suitable technology for development of rural area infrastructure be made. The key recommendations of this study are to take a more strategic approach to the socio-economic issues in the study area at project, regional and national levels.

[Golok Chandra Dutta. A Study on Socio-Economic Conditions of a Schedule Caste Village in Lakhimpur District, Assam, India. World Rural Observations 2011;3(4):85-89]. ISSN: 1944-6543 (print); ISSN: 1944-6551 (online).
<http://www.sciencepub.net/rural>

Key words: schedule caste; survey, income, household

1. Introduction

Lakhimpur district of Assam in India is not only geographically isolated but also economically and educationally backward due to frequent flood and devastating earthquake of 1950. On the other hand, this region, inhabited by diverse people, is full of natural resources with rich stock of biodiversity. The geographical features, environmental conditions of the state have influence on the growth and development of the social and economic life of the people. Socio-economic development of this region has always remained a top priority in State Government Agenda. In every society, the socio-economic behaviors are transmitted unsurprisingly from one generation to another generation. The Government of India has also decided to conduct a Socio Economic and Caste Survey of the national population in the year 2011. Education is another important input in determining the socio-economics development of a region. It is disheartening to notice that the scheduled caste population in India are particularly lagging behind in the field of literacy. Without having proper education people cannot engage themselves in the productive work and as a result they are deprived of all the beneficial programmes undertaken by the government. Consequently, although the Government of India has taken various programmes for the development of SC people in various plans, yet the result are not satisfactory. Clearly, there is a need to study their diverse traditional socio-economic activities, which may explore many opportunities for the all round development in the area. During the past few decades, many studies have been done on SC peoples in India. Before independent, no remarkable

literature was available on SC people in India. After independence, various provisions have been undertaken for the solution and development of the problems of this particular caste in Indian society. The govt. was pursuing the policies of protection, integration and development in this regard. The most important problem affecting the SC is exploitation, land alienation, untouchability etc. Many researchers particularly Sociologists, Social Anthropologist have made several studies of SC problem and analyzed implementation of development programmes for these peoples. But the position and status of SC people is not remarkable change in their past position. In the population pattern in 2001 census, there are 18,25,949 SC people out of 2,66,55,528 population in Assam. It is about 6.9% of total population of the state. There are many communities recognized as SC in India, like Munch, Dhupi, Jhalo, Jalkest, Patni, Kaivarta, Namusudra, Brittrial Bania, Sutradhar, Bhuminmali etc. This work has been carried out to study the socio-economic activities of the SC population of Bachagaon village of Lakhimpur district, Assam. This study will attempt to explore the unexplored uniqueness of the SC society through extensive surveys. No fact- findings of study on study on kaivarta people is available in Assam so far. Neither the official agencies nor independent research workers have seriously addressed themselves towards filling up the gap. So our humble attempt to identify the problems of the SC people of the kaivarta village along with some possible suggestions to solve these problems.

2. Materials and Methodology

The survey is a non-experimental, descriptive research method. During our survey, a multidisciplinary approach will be adopted in collecting information since social issues cut across disciplinary boundaries. Cross-sectional survey will also be used to gather information on socio-economic conditions at a single point in time. Rapid Appraisal has been defined as a systematic but semi-structured activity carried out in the field by a multidisciplinary team and designed to acquire quickly new information on rural life. We will adopt this method for the study. Each aspect will be investigated in a number of ways including the following techniques, emphasizing on mutual learning with room for flexibility and innovation, used in the fields:

- 1) Interview and question-design techniques for individual, household, and key informant interviews.
- 2) Methods of cross-checking information from different sources,
- 3) Sampling techniques that can be adapted to a particular objective,
- 4) Methods of obtaining quantitative data in a short time frame.
- 5) Group interview techniques, including focus-group interviewing.
- 6) Methods of direct observation at site level, and
- 7) Use of secondary data sources.

By the Random Sampling Method, the respondents will be selected following the statistical procedures like Lottery method and the use of Random Number Tables. Since populations are quite large, researchers directly question only a sample (i.e. a small proportion) of the population. The filled up questions were collected and then grouped for interpretation by doing extensive literature survey

Study Area:

The study area Lakhimpur district is situated in the remote corner of north east India. Geographically, the district is situated between $26^{\circ}48'$ and $27^{\circ}53'$ northern latitude and $93^{\circ}42'$ and $94^{\circ}20'$ eastern longitude and covers an area of $2,977 \text{ km}^2$, out of which $2,957 \text{ km}^2$ is rural and 20 km^2 is urban. The study area selected is Bachagaon, which is about 13 kilometers away from the district head quarter (Figure 1). All the people in surveyed village Bachagaon are kaivarta (an SC community). The population of the village is 3727 as per 2001 general census. Out of the total population 1931 are male and 1796 are female.

3. Results

The experimental data are presented in Tabular and Graphical form. Table 1 presents the brief details of the village.

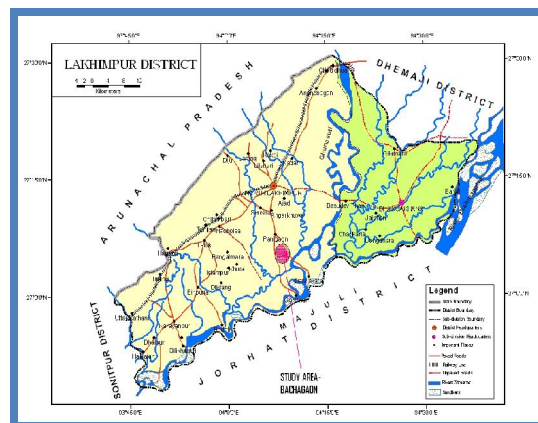


Figure. 1 Map of Lakhimpur district showing the study area.

Table 1: Details of the surveyed village

Parameter	Numbers
Total Nos of families	929
Total population	3727
Male	1931
Female	1796
Total surveyed families	300
Male	824
Female	711
Total population surveyed	1535
Male family Head	285
Female family Head	15
Institution in the village	10
Lower Primary School	02
Middle English School	01
High School	01
Higher Secondary School	01
Community hall	01
Anganbadhi Centre	03
Health Sub- centre	01

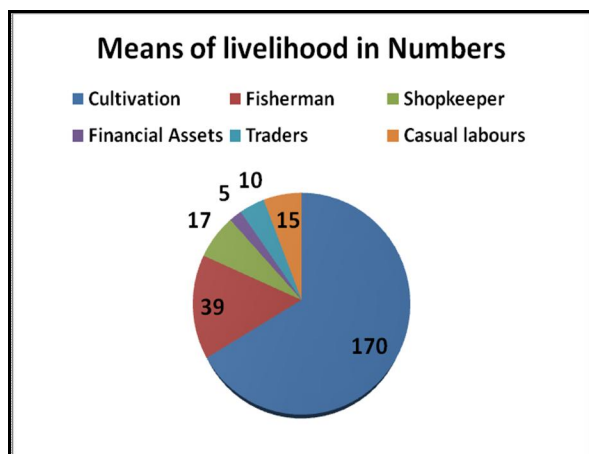
4. Discussions

We have done our field works to attain our objectives of the research in the study area. During the period of study, we gained ample co-operation from the villagers. They tried to give answers of all the questions asked to them. Although the people of the entire village are quite co-operative, yet during our investigation we faced some difficulties in collecting data. When the investigator initially visited the village, the villagers were reluctant to help. Only after knowing the purpose of visit, the respondents agreed to extend their co-operation and supplied all the data that the investigator wanted.

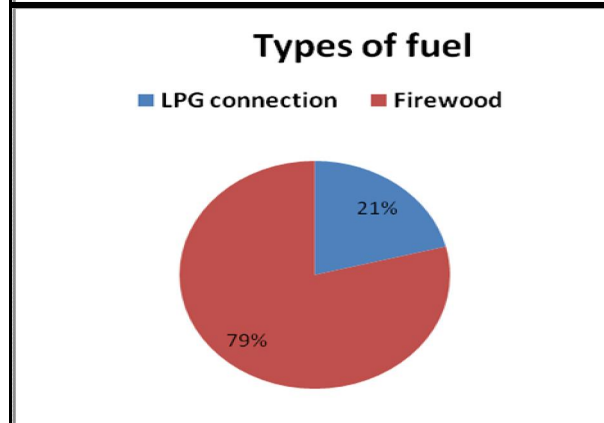
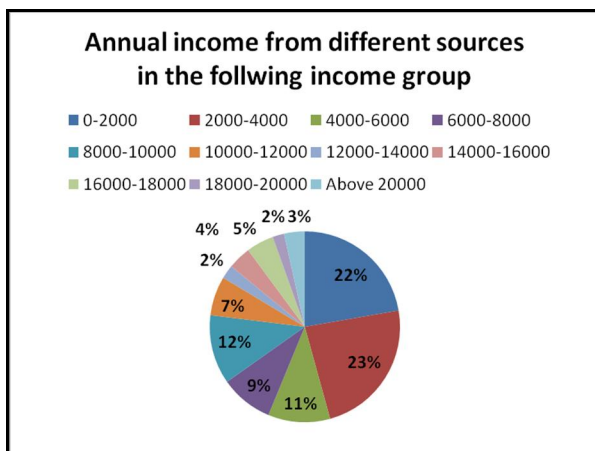
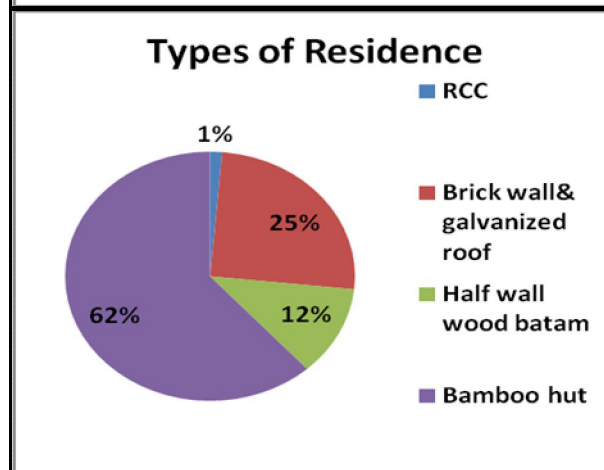
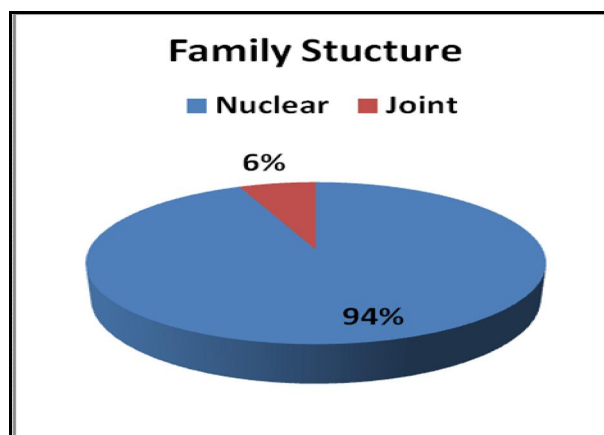
Observations made during the study:

Following observations were made during the survey period. The Scheduled Caste people of Lakhimpur district mainly depend on fishing for their livelihood, but it is observed from the surveyed families that they have also parallel interest in agriculture. But only 0.66% of the population has agricultural land of over 6 acres. Some people are also engaged in allied activities like covering crops, orchard, livestock and poultry, fishery and sericulture. Major crops include rice, wheat, pulse, vegetables etc. Orchard includes banana, betelnuts etc. Livestock and Poultry includes bullocks, cows, goats, hen, duck etc. Since these are not in large scale, they can earn very little from these allied activities. The variety of income sources as reported by the surveyed households have been presented in the following diagram.

Some members of the villagers are engaged in business sector, but their earning is very poor. Due to lack of capital and sufficient knowledge they can not engage in big business. 26 persons of the village have been doing services (Govt. Private). Those who are highly educated and well placed; they settle in town or out side the district. So, the service holders of the village are not of a higher rank. Their economic condition is also not very sound. Some facts of the surveyed village are shown in the following figures.



It is observed from the above data that maximum families are very poor. The main source of income of the village is agriculture and fishing. Annual income of the households are presented in Figure below

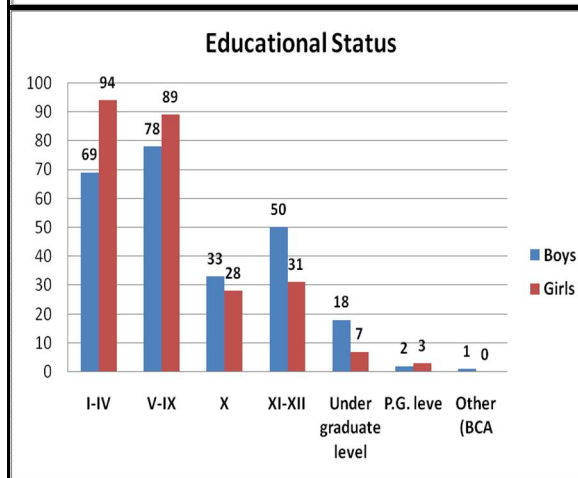
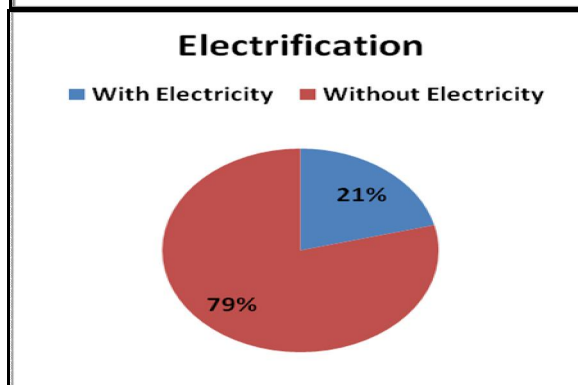
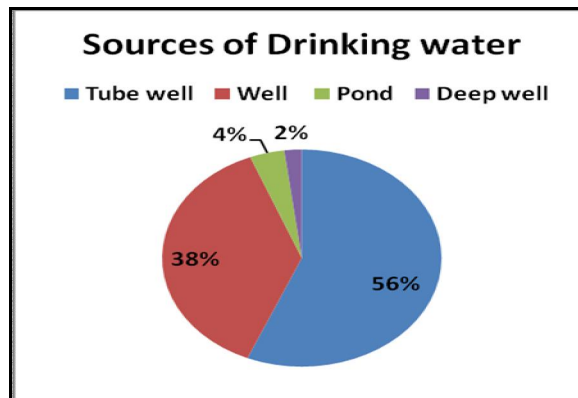
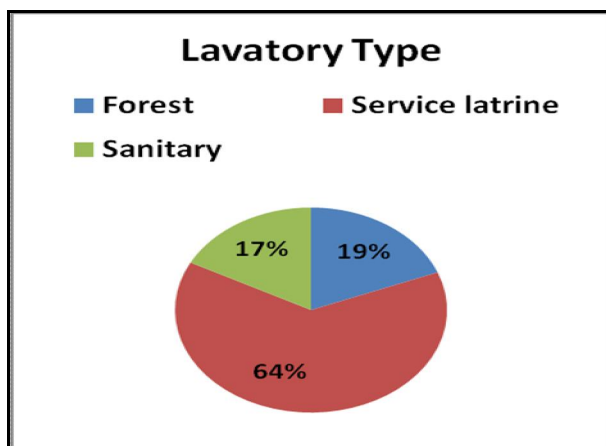


From the above, it is seen that in reality only 31% boys goes to school under V-IX level and 27.40%, 13.14%, 19.92%, 7.17% and 0.39% are studying in I-IV, X, XI-XII, under graduate level, P.G level and others respectively. Thus, the scenario is quite unsatisfactory in the village. The literacy rate of male is found to be 82.40% while for female it is 74.68%. As a whole, the socio-economic condition of the surveyed area is not up to date.

Govt. of Assam has implemented various poverty alleviation schemes in Lakhimpur district under DRDA. Various schemes like IROP, JRY, TRYSEM, DWCRA etc. have been implemented. But it was found that the fruits of the programme did not reach the weaker section effectively which are observed in the present study. Following are the important shortcomings of these poverty alleviation programmes:

1. The benefits of the programme have not reached the intended beneficiaries because of wrong identification and selection of the beneficiaries.
2. A system of brokerage and wide spread corruption has emerged in the distribution process of subsidy under these schemes.
3. Beneficiaries have not received proper information due to lack of information.

The poor and weaker sections of the society are not organized to process their claims, to correct the biased section and other defects and drawbacks of the programmes



5. Suggestions

In the study our ultimate purpose is to know the socio-economic conditions of the villages and the causes responsible for it. It is found that the unsatisfactory socio-economic conditions directly influence the pattern of education in the area. As a result all-round development of the village has not been possible. Here are some possible suggestions that can be taken in account while implementing policies for all-round development of the village.

1. Villagers should be more laborious. They should cultivate two or three times a year instead of the traditional annual cultivation pattern.

2. Existence of chronic mass poverty is another problem of the village. The problem of poverty arises not due to any temporary economic maladjustment but arises mainly due to existence of orthodox methods of production and social institutions. It is suggested that modern scientific methods of cultivation should be immediately introduced in the village by the agriculture department of the government.
3. Lack of proper infrastructure is a common reason behind the underdevelopment. As such transportation, communication, electricity, credit facilities etc must be improved in the village by the respective development authorities through well planned projects.
4. Villagers are not conscious about family planning. Proper awareness regarding family planning and its impact on economic condition is needed at the earliest.
5. The young generation of the village should choose alternative occupation instead of searching government jobs only. It is suggested that people can look for alternative occupation by working as barbers, shopkeepers drivers etc.
6. Proper marketing of the produced products of the village is utmost necessary for improving their economic conditions
7. The agriculture department and the department of small scale industry of Lakhimpur district should train them in the field of agriculture and small scale industry as there are sufficient of raw material like bamboo, cane, wood etc. in the area.
8. People of the area should be trained by the Fishery department of the district, which is much needed in the village as almost all the population depends heavily on fishing and its trades.

6. Conclusions

As the area is flood prone, the rural infrastructure and the economic situation is miserable. 80%-90% of the population depends heavily on agriculture and fishing. Thus, in order to improve the life style of this village community and eradicating poverty and unemployment, it is now essential that the government departments, NGO s, local populace be involved in rural development work and suitable technology for development of rural area infrastructure be made. In this connection, a committee should be formed among the educated and the enlightened members of the village to work hand in hand for the all round development of the village. They should frequently sit

and sort out the problems of the villagers. The researcher also feels that it is very essential to discuss the socio-economic activities along with the heritage of this community. The key recommendations of this study are to take a more strategic approach to the socio-economic issues in the study area at project, regional and national levels.

Acknowledgement:

The author is thankful to the survey team members and Dr. Bhabajit Bhuyan, Assistant Professor, Department of Chemistry, North Lakhimpur College for their support.

Correspondence to:

Dr. Golok Chandra Dutta
Associate Professor
Department of Education
North Lakhimpur College, Khelmati
North Lakhimpur, Lakhimpur,
Assam- 787 031, India
E-Mail: dutta.goloknlp@gmail.com

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11/12/2011