

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

This is an empirical study. It has been conducted in a rural area of North Bengal. The focus group studied are the Rajbansis, but other ethnic groups present in the area have also been covered. In this chapter after introducing the Rajbansis-the focus group and the place, where the study was conducted, the methodology of this research shall be presented.

THE RAJBANSIS: A BRIEF DEMOGRAPHIC RESUME

The Rajbansi is an indigenous and numerically dominant Scheduled Caste community of North Bengal. But we know very little about their demographic characteristics. We are not very clear about the trends of changes in population distribution and growth, in literacy, education and in occupation among the Rajbansis of North Bengal particularly since independence. Mukhopadhyay's work is a pioneer one in that respect¹. For non-availability of classified census data after 1971 he has depended on 1971 census mainly.

According to the 1971 census there were in total 13,53,919 Rajbansis in West Bengal. Out of this total 10,27,669 were the inhabitants of North Bengal and the rest (3,26,250) were from South Bengal. So it is evident that about 76 percent of the rajbansis of West Bengal live in North Bengal.

The distribution of the Rajbansis vary in the districts of North Bengal. The highest concentration of the Rajbansis is found in the district of cooch Behar (46.84%) according to 1971 census. Although it is only 3.06% in Darjeeling district, the concentration is much higher in the plains area of the district.

1. Mukhopadhyaya. R.S., The Rajbansis of North Bengal: A Comparative Demographic profile. (Mimeo), 1990.

Table 2.1

Distribution of the Rajbansi population in North Bengal by Districts (1971 census)

District	Rajbansi Population	Percentage
Darjeeling	31,505	3.06
Jalpaiguri	3,29,191	32.03
Cooch Behar	4,81,304	46.84
West Dinajpur	1,34,976	13.13
Malda	50,693	4.94
North Bengal	10,37,669	100.00

Source: Table 2.2 of Mukhopadhyay, The Rajbansis of North Bengal, 1990

Sex Ratio:

According to the 1971 census, among the nonscheduled people of North Bengal, there were 907 females per 1000 males. The corresponding ratios among the other sc Scheduled Castes, the Rajbansis and the Scheduled Tribes were 884,952 and 938 respectively. So it is evident that in North Bengal as a whole, the Rajbansis had the highest and the non-Scheduled people had the lowest sex-ratio in 1971. Even then, in 1971, the sex-ratio among the urban Rajbansis of North Bengal was relatively high than that of the other social groups.

Literacy:

In India a large number of population is still illiterate. According to the 1971 census, the rate of literacy among the females of the Rajbansis was 7.68 percent, as compared to 17.22 per cent in the case of the non-Scheduled population. It is also significant to note that in the districts of Darjeeling and West Dinajpur, the percentage of female literacy among the Rajbansis was even less than that of the Scheduled Tribes. In 1971, the rate of literacy among the males of non-Scheduled people was 37.21 percent. The corresponding percentages were 23.62, 25.90 and 16.00 among the Rajbansis, other Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes respectively. During 1961-71 the relative proportion of male literates has marginally increased among the Rajbansis.

Of all the districts, only in the Darjeeling district, the Rajbansis have registered a relatively higher, percentage of literacy (about 38% in 1971) among the males. In other districts, this percentage was comparatively less than the non-Scheduled population and other Scheduled Castes. On the whole, in the decade 1961-71, the overall progress of the Rajbansi males in the field of literacy was distressingly low. Perhaps this low level of literacy has hindered their (Rajbansis's) progress in all other (socio-economic)

fronts. In 1971, the literacy rate among the Rajbansis of urban areas was even little lower than the Scheduled Tribes and marginally higher than that of the other Scheduled Castes. It is also to be noted that even in rural areas, the non-Scheduled people had relatively better percentage of literates than the other social groups.

Of all the districts, in 1971, only 5.21 percent of the rajbansi literates in rural areas of Darjeeling district and 3.14 per cent in the Malda district were having education upto Matriculation level or above. In the remaining districts, this proportion among the Rajbansis was relatively less than the other Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and much less than that among the non-Scheduled group. Almost in all the districts of North Bengal, majority of the urban Rajbansi literates were educated (as per 1971 census) only upto primary/middle school level. In the urban areas of North Bengal, 4.23 per cent of literates among the non-Scheduled people were graduates or post-graduates.

THE AREA OF STUDY

West Bengal is a state in the Republic of India. North Bengal is the northern part of West Bengal. There are six districts in North Bengal, namely, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch behar, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda Districts. For the purpose of this study a rural area in the plains of Darjeeling district has been chosen.

Darjeeling district has become educationally very advanced during the last few decades. Considering the non-scheduled Caste population the district is almost at par with the district of Jalpaiguri - both with about 38% literacy rates. But when we look at the Scheduled Caste population the picture undergoes a considerable change. In the whole of North Bengal the highest literacy rate is found among the Rajbansis of Darjeeling District (24.66% and 22.18% in 1961 and 1971 respectively) (Census of India, 1961 and 1971).

In the plains of Darjeeling district Kharibari -Phansidewa Block has been chosen as this block has become educationally relatively more advanced during the last few decades. The population of this block is composed of the Rajbansis, the Suris, the Namasudras and some other general castes Hindus; the Muslims and a few Scheduled tribes. This area on the western-bank of the river Mahananda was once under the rule of Sikkim ruler. Phansidewa was a district Headquarters of the Tarai-district of Sikkim. The present Siliguri had practically no existence before 1835. Under the Sikkim administration there was a some sort of learning centre on the land allotted by the then govt. for educational activities. That tiny learning centre has now been raised to the level of XII class Higher Secondary school. Phansidewa, under Sikkim regime, was famous for its commercial activities. So this place is called a Bandar- a market place. But the education for girls was neglected as usual during the Sikkim Raj and British Raj. Girls were not allowed to have the institutional education.

The present study has been designed keeping in mind both the present educational problems and the past attainments and difficulties of the Rajbansi students specially those of the girl students. Two schools, have been purposively selected for this study. Phansidewa Higher Secondary school is a co-educational school with both the rajbansi and non rajbansi students. Phansidewa government Sponsored Ashram type Junior High school for girls is a Scheduled Caste and Tribes girl's school. The selection of the school has also been based on their easy accessibility.

A Historical description of the schools:

A middle English school was established in 1865 at Phansidewa . This School is said to be the oldest school in Tarai region². At that time the school was surrounded by forests and educationally it was one of the most backward places. This area was under the Sikkim government at that time and many criminals were hanged in this area. Thus this area acquired the name Phansidewa (place where hanging takes place). Afterwards this area came under the British rule. In 1945 Phansidewa English High School was established. This English High School has been upgraded and is known as Phansidewa Higher Secondary Schol. At first, with the help of the villagers this school was established. After the affiliation of this school in 1946 only two students appeared in Matriculation examination. They are Upendra Nath Biswas and Kafiluddin Ahammed. Only Upendra Nath Biswas could pass in third division. At that time examination centre was at the Jalpaiguri district school.

Many Muslims students used to study in this school and there was a Muslim Hostel. After the partition of India the number of Muslim students in the school decreased and the Muslim Hostel was closed down. Then the villagers helped to reopen the hostel raising fund for the boarding costs through donations and giving the students some educational materials. As a result a student (Prasanta Bikram Das) passed the Matriculation Examination from this school with first division perhaps in 1949. In this way the education gradually spread among the villagers , For the girl students only one female teacher was appointed (Sujata Das).

At present Phansidewa Higher Secondary School is a co-educational school. In 1991- 1992 session the total enrolment of students in class V to XII was 757. They belong to different castes and communities like Rajbansi, non-Rajbansi, Scheduled Castes, general Hindu castes, Muslims and Scheduled Tribes. At present there is no student's hostel in this school. So most of the students daily commute from distant villages.

2. Das, Harsha bardhan. "Smritikatha" in Bartika, Phansidewa High School, Annual Magagine(in Bengali).1983 pp11

Phansidewa Balika -Bidyalya 4 -class Junior High School for Girls was established in 1974 by the persons interested in education of women in the rural area. The education of girls is not given proper weightage in the society. The generous persons in the management of Phansidewa High School offered the school building for the girl's School to function there in the morning. After crossing many storms and difficulties this poor Girl's school has been recognised by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education with effect from 1.1.86 as a 4-class Junior High School . The School is now still housed in the hostel building of the Phansidewa High School. On the land allotted by the Sikkim administration for educational activities. The present roll strength is near about 300. Efforts are being made to have its own land and building. The school has been playing a very remarkable role in the advancement of learning of girls in this area. This school stands face to face to the Phansidewa High School divided by the Phansidewa High School-Kharibari Road. It was developed into a campus of educational institutions. Phansidewa Junior Basic School is too located in this academic campus. The girl students passing out from this school get preference in admission to class IX of Phansidewa Higher Secondary School.

Phansidewa Govt. Sponsored Ashram type Junior High School for Girls was sponsored by the Government of West Bengal in 1980 for providing educational opportunities to the girls belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It is a residential institution located at Mouza Dhamnagachh in the village Jyotinagar under the block Phansidewa Anchal -Phansidewa Bangaon Kismat. The school has 4.95 acres of land having a nice natural environment. This school is recognised by the West Bengal board of Secondary education as a 4-class Junior High School for girls. The accomodation in the Hostel is 120. Girls are provided with food , uniform, books and medical facilities by the government, The girls are from the poor peasant families having very low level of educational background. Day scholars to a limited number is allowed in the school. The present roll strength is 256. There are six teachers on the staff. They all belong to sophisticated urban elite families, The hostel is located in a two storyed building having ten spacious rooms with an excellent dining room-cum-kitchen. Total annual expenditure exceeds 16 lacs of rupees. There is a small but well-kept library having a stock of about 1200 books. Regular prayer is held in the morning and evening in the Hostel. The Hostel is the life centre of the school.

The main co-curricular activities of this school are -gardening , agricultural activities in the kitchen garden, decoration, needle work , knitting, recitation, music, dancing and nursing.

The school is managed by a managing committee appointed by the government. Many of these poor girls have later crossed the Higher Secondary and College level of education with credit. They have developed a good community life.

METHODOLOGY

In the study area, among the students of the schools described above this study has been conducted. It has two basic aspects. One is to depict the state of education and associated problems among the Scheduled caste students with special emphasis on the girl students. The other is to assess the social change due to educational attainments. This last one is a difficult task involving analysis of emerging realities in an integrated model. However, the changes observed in social, economic, political and cultural life of the sample students and their families have been carefully noted. State actions in educational improvement of the Scheduled Caste and Tribe students have also been given due consideration in this study.

The information has, therefore, been collected from the school authorities, the students-past and present, enrolled as well as dropped out, and their families.

Thus, the methodology has several components. These are (a) to collect information from the school authorities, (b) complete enumeration of the students with a brief census schedule, (c) sample survey of 20% students, (d) case studies of old students and (e) case studies of drop-out students. The field techniques used are interview and observation mainly. Several tools have been used for the purpose of obtaining information, such as interview guide, schedule and questionnaire. These are elaborated below:

(a) From the school authorities and the school teachers 18 persons were interviewed with the help of an interview guide.

(b) A complete enumeration of the students in both the schools was done with the help of a census schedule. Altogether 695 students were surveyed.

(c) In-depth study of the sample students were done in the schools as well as in their homes. Interviews of both the students and their guardians were done with the aid of questionnaires. Observation also formed an important part of the data collection. The sampling was done by stratifying the students into classes in which they study, then further stratifying them into sex and ethnic group. Thus the procedure followed was multi-stage stratified random sampling. Finally 20% sample was selected from all the strata with the use of random digits table bringing the total sample size to 156 from phansidewa H.S. school and 22 from phansidewa Govt. Sponsored Ashram type junior High School for girls.

(d) 20 case studies of old students were done through interview with the help of a questionnaire. The respondents were selected purposively.

(e) Interviewing drop-out students has been done with the help of a questionnaire. The students were taken on availability basis.

Thus altogether 200 cases of past and present students have been studied in depth. A census schedule and three questionnaires have been used to aid the collection of data (see Appendix).

The period during which the data has been collected stretches over two years from 1992 to 1994.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis has been presented in seven chapters. The First chapter is introductory chapter in which statement of the problem and relevance of the proposed study and literature review have been arranged. The second chapter Methodology-deals with the area of study and the school's history in addition to discussing the methodology which I have followed.

The third chapter - the State of Education -deals with some of the findings of survey of all the students and generally discusses the state of education in the two schools with reference to enrolment, drop - out and the catchment area.

In the fourth chapter -Socio-economic Background of the Students - I have presented the findings about the socio economic background of the students through interview of the sample students of all classes and drop-out students and the guardians.

In the fifth chapter - The Social Determinants of Education - the social milieu of the students has been analysed in order to assess the extent of conducive atmosphere available to the students.

In the sixth chapter -Utilisation of Formal Learning- I have tried to relate the educational attainment with the occupation and aspiration for the children's education of the old students and the guardians. I have also attempted a peep into the social, cultural and political changes caused probably by the factor education.

In the seventh and the concluding chapter I have presented the summary of the whole thesis with my observations.

Limitations

I have received co-operation from the school authorities, the students and their guardians and this research has been a pleasant learning experience for me. But I have also faced many difficulties and this study does have some limitations as, I suppose all the studies do. The methodology of the study involved visiting the students at their home environment. This took me to distant villages. Often it became noon by the time I reached there. Most of the villagers then worked in their fields and I had to either repeat the visit or collect information from other available villagers. This may have created some inaccuracies and lacunae in the data collected.

It has not been possible for me to reach all the drop-out students as many of them could not be traced. The travelling back and forth between the villages and the schools has taken a lot of my time, which could, perhaps, been better spent if some amount of clustering of the respondents could be arranged. Time has thus been a constraint in this research.