

## **CHAPTER – II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **2. 1. 0. Review of Literature**

There is no denying the fact that the Scheduled Castes people of Assam are socially and economically very poor. Social backwardness is due to certain socio-cultural factors which make them neglected by others. Economic backwardness is due to the dependence on the indigenous occupations. Scheduled Castes people both in rural and urban areas with very low income till have not been able to cross over the poverty line in a large measure along with bulk of the state's population.

A number of studies about the Scheduled Castes have been undertaken in the past. It is true that the problems of poor Scheduled Castes people of Assam had attracted the attention of scholars in earlier days also. For example, Sarma Thakur (1992), Hazarika (1994), Das (1986) and many others wrote on the problems of Scheduled Castes people of Assam.

#### **On Occupational Status**

DhekialPhukan (1829) while discussing the occupations of the Kaibarta people of Assam, said that a greater section of the Kaibartas such as, Nadials, Doms and Jaliya, Keots practice fishing and fish trade. There are a few rich and educated Kaibartas who engage themselves in other trade and commerce.

Mortin (1976), Barua, Gohain (1976), Choudhury (1987), Shastri (1990), Gogi (1994), Bezbarua (1999), Das (1990), Barua (2003), Risely (1891) all agree that the main occupation of the Kaibartas is fishing.

Barua (1984) has discussed about the occupation of the Scheduled Castes people of Kaibarta community of Assam. According to him traditional occupation of this community includes fish catching and selling, boat making and plying, lime making and selling, etc. Now they are engaged in agricultural activities and other trades also.

Sharma Thakur (1994) points out that the Scheduled Castes people had to face problems in the changing profession because of the changing social scenario. He observes that a few Scheduled Castes families used to live with the earnings of playing drums in festivals

and other socio-religious occupations. But now-a-days, people do not employ them in such festivals, a renowned institution mostly of the Scheduled Castes people, is fast disappearing

Athparia and Pandey (2000) made a study of Hiras in Assam state. In this study, they have given an account of the difficulties faced by the Hiras. According to him, another sadest occupation of the Scheduled Castes of Assam is the pottery industry. This occupation is confined to Hiras only. Today the Hiras are facing some problems in collecting the raw-materials popularly known as “Hira Clay” from the specified clay fields at free of cost without any obstructions. Earlier, they used to produce some particular earthen pots for cooking and other use for the common people, which have been replaced now by the modern metallic utensils and equipments available in the market. Besides this, there are some other problems of the Hiras like housing, education and unemployment. By and large, the Hiras live below the poverty line.

Das (1992) made a study about the problems of Scheduled Castes fishermen of Assam. He states that “it is a complex phenomenon and as such it is the outcome of the interaction of the diverse factor— economic and non-economic”. According to him the main economic factors are existence of middlemen agencies in the fishing industry, high interest of loan (10%) from Gaonlia Mahajan and Kabulies, encroachment of fishery area for agricultural purposes deprives of reasonable prices for their fish product in fishing market, industrial pollution of water etc. He points out that the Scheduled Castes fishermen are leading miserable life since time immemorial and are still backward. And due to lack of proper care, they are gradually vanishing from their lands.

Selvanathan (1989) in his study points out that even given the existence of alternative job opportunities, the change of occupation does not take place automatically or easily for member of Scheduled Castes.

### **On Land Holding Pattern**

Bezbarua (1999) has stated that the land holding pattern of the Kaibartas is miserable. Fishing was main occupation and very recently they have switched over to agricultural activities. The forefathers of the present generation did not care much to occupy land and the present generation is feeling the acute shortage of land.

Sing (1951) states that the Scheduled Castes people are hungry for land. Poor quality of land, small holding size, poor techniques of production and the burden of indebtedness are

some of the factors that have largely been responsible for the handicaps which the scheduled castes have been suffered for years.

### **On Social Status**

From the writing of different writers it becomes clear that the social status of the Scheduled Castes people of Assam is relatively better than that of the rest of the country.

Kumble (2002) has said that untouchability is still continuing in the country. In Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, the untouchability problem is more severe where the Scheduled Castes people are prohibited to enter the temples, riding horses, etc.

Das (1986) has argued the social status of the Scheduled Castes people in the southern states is deplorable. They are not allowed to wear sandals, silk cloths, golden ornaments, to use umbrellas and the women are not allowed to wear upper garments to cover their breasts.

Srinivas (1994) states that many untouchable families and peasant families were bounded together in enduring ways by the institution of traditional servant ship despite the wide separation of the two castes in the hierarchy. Since untouchables are very poor, it is likely that some of the traditional servant-master relationship were reinforced by the tenancy, contractual servant ship, debtor ship and other ties as well.

Dev and Lahiri (1984) have explained that atrocities on Scheduled Castes people are still taking in some part of Assam, specially in rural areas. The socio-religious and political atrocities relate to rape, molestation, arson, violence resulting in grievous hurt, discriminatory practices involving untouchability offences like denial of the use of public utility services such as hostels, restaurants etc. The economic atrocities spring from land disputes, forcible harvesting, wage dispute, bonded labour and indebtedness.

Dev and Lahiri (1984) have stated that the socio-economic condition of the Scheduled Castes people in other parts of India is miserable. They are looked down upon with great contempt as the remover of filth and dead bodies. As compared to the social status of the Scheduled Castes people of the other parts of India, these people have a high status in Assam. The authors have stated that Assam is one of the few states in India where caste rigidities are conspicuous by their absence. Indeed, Assam can claim the distinction of having removed untouchability from the web of social relationship. In the rural area, the upper castes do maintain an aura of superiority, yet the traditional parameters of untouchability have never found in any part of Assam.

However, some writers have put forward opposite views regarding the social status of the Scheduled Castes people of Assam. Mallik (1982) has observed that untouchability is found in the rural area of Assam. In the towns and cities, the educated and economically enriched Scheduled Castes people leave their Scheduled Castes localities and move to new localities where people belonging to various castes live side by side. Mallik has concluded that as a matter of fact deprivation of rights since centuries made Scheduled Castes people slaves and killed their self-respect. Since childhood they learn only to obey and not to question and command and this resulted in their utter poverty and exploitation.

Sharmah Thakur (2003) has stated that untouchability it is still surviving in the Hindu society as a social stigma which is traditionally attached to the Scheduled Castes population and it is associated to the nature of jobs done by them. With the spread of education, it is reduced to a significant extent in Assam.

Raju (1998) has observed that in Assam valley, the problem of untouchability did not exist at all and there are practically no untouchables worth the name.

Trivedi (1977) in his book points out that Scheduled Castes women and men have had to perform certain social duties towards the high castes which have been considered defiling. This impure moments are birth, initiation (to attain the status of a full grown member of society), puberty, menstruation, marriage, co-habitation and death. At the time of marriage, the low caste persons are called upon to perform certain menial services of carrying and disposing of the wastes.

Bania (1995) conducted a study about depressed classes. In that study he refers to the relationship between master and servant in case of seven castes. According to him the master-servant relationship has not facilitated occupational mobility.

### **On Marital Status**

Marital Status of a community represents their sex ratio, marriage system, adoption of family planning measures, etc.

Medhi (2001) has said that marriage among the Schedule Castes people does not involve much complexity; it is rather a matter of convenience for both the parties. They have Gotra divisions and avoid marriage relation within the Gotra and they also practice child and widow marriage.

Sen (1999) states that the traditional pattern of social interaction between the Scheduled Castes and the Castes Hindus reflects the idea of social distance. At present inter caste marriage between Schedule Castes and non Scheduled Castes Hindus develops.

Bezbarua (1999) has said that the percentage of inter-caste marriage among the landless people is more as compared to others. In a study he has found that only 2.76% Kaibarta people support inter-caste marriage.

### **On Health Status**

Health is one of the principal assets of every human being. Health and diseases are indispensably related to bio-cultural spectrum of a community in a particular environment. In the traditional societies, these traits are deeply rooted in socio-economic matrix.

Mahanta (1999) has argued that the common diseases of the scheduled castes people are Dysentery, Malaria, Headache, etc. Diseases like AIDS, Colour blindness, Gonorrhoea, Syphilis, Tetanus are not familiar to the people, though some educated people know these names. They use herbal medicine to cure such diseases. The Scheduled Caste people go to the doctor only at the time of emergency.

Medhi (2001) states that normally the Kaibarta villages are thickly populated. Most of the huts are made of thatch, bamboo and mud. During the rainy season the villagers suffer from various diseases. The village quack is an integral part of "health culture" of the Scheduled Castes people.

Srivastava (2003) states that 19% of the Scheduled Caste population of India are depriving themselves of health care and nutrition. For Assam, it is 45%. Here the antenatal care for S.C. women is only 15.78%. Most of them go for unsafe delivery.

### **On Religious Life**

Neog (1994) states that after the spread of Vaishnavism among the Kaibartas, a large section of them become the follower of it. These appears a mixed group, followers of Vaishnavism and Saktism simultaneously. This mixed group is about 22.55% of the total Kaibartas and they worship lots of Gods and Goddesses.

Sen (1990) states that the Kaibarta people believe that men, evil spirits and deities can cast diseases to human beings. The evil spirit such as Bira, Ghosts, Pisas are also harmful for them and they believe that if the people fail to satisfy them, they become furious and caste

epidemics to the people. For example, Ai Bhagawati, the Goddess of pox, spread pox among them.

### **On Demographic Aspects**

Demographic behavior of a community includes their fertility and mortality status, attitude towards additional children, knowledge and practice of family planning etc.

Regarding attitude towards additional children, Roy and Paswan (1995) in their study in the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh have observed that the percentage of Scheduled Castes women desiring more children is slightly higher than that of other women.

Different studies have found that the knowledge and practice of family planning is lower among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes people. A survey conducted by International Institute of Population Science, Mumbai and Population Research Centre, Baroda in 1983 in two districts of rural Gujrat has revealed that family planning practice is low among the Scheduled Castes in comparison to the other caste groups.

Roy and Paswan (1995) in their study in Uttar Pradesh have found that 25.3% of the total Scheduled Castes women had knowledge about all the modern methods while 39.1% of other women groups knew about all the modern methods.

Bezbarua (1999) has found in one of his study that fertility and mortality among the Kaibarta people of Assam is high.

### **On Political Status**

Choudhury and Naqvi (2006) in their book “Comment on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Act, 1989” have observed that the Government of Assam passed an Act, viz. The Assam SC/ ST Reservation of Vacancies in Services and Posts Act, 1978 and framed rules there under in 1983 to ensure reservation of SC/ ST (7%) in appointment to services under the state Government and public bodies. The state Government has also issued instruction from time to time for proper implementation of the Act and to ensure fulfillment of the backlog in regard of appointment of SC and ST. But it is matter of regret that this Act is not yet implemented vigorously.

Das (1986) in his study has indicated that Scheduled Castes people of Assam are accorded very low social status and they are termed as untouchables and named as Panchama. They have always been economically depressed, politically suppressed and debarred from

participation in the collective activities of the village and towns where they live. They are debarred from enjoying many public facilities. Although untouchability is now illegal, the majority of the Scheduled Castes people living in rural areas have not undergone any material change.

Yadav (2000) clearly mentions that the biggest problem for the Scheduled Castes communities today is that there is no such leader like Ambedkar who can guide the destiny of the Scheduled Castes and fight for them. Today's so called leaders of Scheduled Castes are self-centred, incompetent and are least concerned with the well-being of the Scheduled Castes. They are bonded leader of their political parties.

Dev and Lahiri (1984) have stated that among the sixteen Scheduled Castes communities of Assam, Kaibarta community is politically more articulate because of their numerical strength. The process of political mobilization of the Kaibartas had started much earlier because of their organizational activities such as All Assam Kaibarta Sanmilion, All Assam Kaibarta Mahila Sanmilion etc.

### **On Economic Status**

Das (1992) has stated that the economic condition of the Scheduled Castes people of Assam is very miserable. She points out the role of the middlemen who exploit the Scheduled Castes people in various ways as one of the major cause of low income.

Sharma Thakur (1992) states that employment is admittedly a strong power to boost up the socio-economic condition of a community. The Scheduled Castes community is, however, in this respect in a bad shape. Unemployment at the moment is chronic problem of this community as a whole and this weaker section people are worst victims.

It is true that economic growth socio-economic transformation though at a slow pace .Selvanathan (1989) in his study points out that the participation of the Scheduled Castes people in such processes is limited. The degree to which this is due to their social handicaps on the one hand or to their economic backwardness on the other is a matter of controversy. He has also noted that the social stigma of untouchability their age old subjugation and the value pattern inculcated thereby mitigate against the improvement of their economic position.

### **On Others Aspects of Scheduled Castes**

Bulletin of Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes (2000) gives a detailed account of the various developmental schemes implemented by the Directorate of Welfare of SC, Assam for upliftment of SC people. The welfare schemes implemented by this

Directorate for welfare of SC are as follows— (1) Self-help scheme for self-employment of unemployed SC Youths. (2) Self-help for SC women. (3) Family oriented income generation scheme. (4) Provisions for soft loan as seed/ Margin money under NSFDC. (5) Share capital contribution to the ASDC for SC. (6) Prevention of Atrocities Act. (7) Coaching and Allied Scheme. As per directive of the government, the ASDC for SC Ltd. is implementing the schemes like (8) National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation loan scheme. (9) National Safai Karmacharies Finance and Development Scheme. (10) National Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents Scheme for the benefit of the poor Scheduled Castes people of the state living below the poverty line and for the Scavengers/ Safai Karmacharies.

Muthalagu, (2007) has attempted to throw some light on the process of development by examining the various schemes. He indicates that a number of development programmes like IRDP, TRYSEM, JRY, NRY, IAY, PMGY, SGSY, SGRY, etc. are in operation for the upliftment of the poor people including the SCs. According to him, the benefits derived from the above welfare schemes are only nominal and not adequate. The poor do not gain much directly from these programmes due to bribery, political influence in the allocation of fund, diffused focus and priorities, poor execution, shortage of rural infrastructure and social inequality. These programmes are not able to eradicate poverty completely and improve life condition of poor people due to limited role of government and NGOs in the execution of anti-poverty programmes.

Das (1995) makes an attempt to study the environmental awareness among the Scheduled Castes people of Assam. According to him, the Scheduled Castes people of Assam appears to have learnt to accept and live within the environmental hazards. It would naturally be a folly to expect among the Scheduled Castes people about modern values like environmental consciousness, hygienic and pollution free living, maintenance of eco-balance, preservation of natural resources, population limitation etc. According to him, nobody bothers about environmental problems.

Mali (1995) in his article tries to throw some light on the entrepreneurial activity of SC youths. According to him, the number of entrepreneurs emerging from the Scheduled Castes community is negligible as compared to other castes. The reason is that they do not have experience of occupations other than their own caste occupations. The general tendency among them is to search for wage employment opportunities and not for self-employment. They never influenced by their own family and society for entrepreneurial activity.

Bhattacharya (2000) points out that the Scheduled Castes people of Assam are culturally backward. They preserve the traditional religious belief, primitive food and drinking habit, customary dress and ornaments, folk dance, music and instruments and other items of day to day life. They are always neglected by the upper caste Hindu like Brahmin and Kalita. According to him, cultural backwardness is also responsible for their poverty and misery.

Alte (1992) in his book expresses the view that the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are weakest among the weaker sections of the society. They are not only socially oppressed, but they are deprived of assets of all kinds. The economic status of these communities is very pitiable. These communities characterized by below the poverty line economic status. Poor assets ownership generally depending on agricultural labour, subsistence farming, share-cropping, leather works and other type of low income occupations

Sharma Thakur (1985) in his study has selected two Kaibarta villages of Jorhat district of upper Assam and studied diverse aspects of the villages. He divided the population into three categories namely Scheduled Castes, backward castes and advanced caste. A comparison is made between the Scheduled Castes (Kaibartas) and other castes and difference between them that has been noted. According to him the profession of Kaibartas is considered as derogatory. The traditional occupation has dual handicap, viz. social disability and economic deprivation.