

CHAPTER – III

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SCHEDULED CASTES PEOPLE IN THE STATE OF ASSAM AND THE DISTRICT OF DHUBRI AND OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN OF SCHEDULED CASTES PEOPLE

3. 1. 0. State Profile

According to the Census of India 2011, the population of Assam stands at 3,12,05,576, of which 1,59,39,443 are males and 1,52,66,133 are females. The decadal growth of the State's population works out at 17.07 percent during the decade 2001-2011 as against 17.68 percent for the country as a whole. The density of the population of Assam has gone up to 398 in 2011 which was 340 in 2001 Census. The corresponding all India figure was 382 as per Census, 2011. The number of Census house used as residence houses is 63,52,226 for population size of 3,12,05,576 in the State as per Census, 2011.

Table: 3. 1
Population Trend in Assam and India

Year	Population (in lakh)		Percentage Decadal Variation		Density (Person per Sq.Km.)	
	ASSAM	INDIA	ASSAM	INDIA	ASSAM	INDIA
1901	33	2384	–	–	42	77
1911	38	2521	17.0	5.8	49	82
1921	46	2513	20.5	0.3	59	81
1931	56	2789	19.9	11.0	71	90
1941	67	3186	20.4	14.2	85	103
1951	80	3611	19.9	13.3	102	117
1961	108	4392	35.0	21.5	138	142
1971	146	5481	35.0	24.8	186	177

1981	*180	6833	*23.4	24.7	*230	230
1991	224	8463	24.2	23.9	286	267
2001	266	10270	18.9	21.5	340	325
2011	312	12106	17.1	17.7	398	368

*Interpolated

Source: Census of India 2011.

District-wise Demographic Profile of Assam is shown in the following Table: 3. 2

Table: 3. 2

District-wise Demographic Profile of Assam, 2011 Census

Sl No	District	Area in Sq. Km.	Population	Rural Population	Urban Population	Population Density per Sq.Km.
1	Dhubri	2176	1949258	1745557	203701	896
2	Bongaigaon	1093	738804	628994	109810	676
3	Kokrajhar	3296	887142	832201	54941	269
4	Chirang	1923	482162	446825	35337	251
5	Baksa	2454	950075	937833	12242	387
6	Goalpara	1824	1008183	870121	138062	553
7	Barpeta	2282	1693622	1546269	147353	742
8	Nalbari	1052	771639	688909	82703	733

9	Kamrup(M)	955	1253938	216927	1037011	1313
10	Kamrup(R)	3105	1517542	1375148	142394	489
11	Darrang	1585	928500	873006	55494	586
12	Udalguri	2012	831668	794094	37574	413
13	Sonitpur	5204	1924110	1750265	173845	370
14	Lakhimpur	2277	1042137	950804	91333	458
15	Dhemaji	3237	686133	637848	48285	212
16	Morigaon	1551	957423	884125	73298	617
17	Nagoan	3973	2823768	2454234	369534	711
18	Golaghat	3502	1066888	969152	97736	305
19	Jorhat	2851	1092256	871722	220534	383
20	Sivasagar	2668	1151050	1040954	110096	431
21	Dibrugarh	3381	1326335	1082605	243730	392
22	Tinsukia	3790	1327929	1063186	264743	350
23	Karbi- Anglong	10434	956313	843347	112966	92
24	Dima Hasao	4888	214102	151613	62489	44
25	Karimganj	1809	1228686	1118986	109700	679

26	Hailakandi	1327	659296	611156	48140	497
27	Cachar	3786	1736617	1421153	315464	459
	ASSAM	78438	31205576	26807034	4398542	389

Source: Census of India, 2011.

3. 1. 1. Scheduled Castes Population in Assam

As per 2011 census, the total Scheduled Castes population in Assam is 22,31,321 persons, which is 7.15 percent of the total population of the state. Out of them 11,45,314 persons are male population and 10,86,007 persons are females population. The highest concentration is found in Nowgaon district— 2,66,350 (Males—1,36,473; Females—1,29,877) persons followed by Cachar district— 2,64,897 (Males— 1,36,051; Females — 1,28,846) persons. Dima-Hasao district shows the lowest concentration with 4,337 persons while males are 2,340 persons and females are 1,997 persons. District wise Scheduled Castes population in Assam is shown in the following Table: 3. 3

Table: 3.3
District-wise Scheduled Castes Population in Assam

District	Population	Scheduled Castes			Percentage of SC Population to the total population
		Person	Male	Female	
1	2	3	4	5	6
Dhubri	1949258	70395	36359	34036	3.61
Kokrajhar	887142	29570	15386	14184	3.33
Bongaigaon	738804	82784	42513	40271	11.20
Goalpara	1008183	45094	22999	22095	4.47
Barpeta	1693622	95320	49165	46155	5.62
Nalbari	771639	60216	30654	29562	7.80
Kamrup (M)	1253938	101789	52106	49683	8.11
Kamrup (R)	1517542	107827	55237	52590	7.10
Darrang	928500	40260	20566	19694	4.33
Sonitpur	1924110	109130	55817	53313	5.67
Lakhimpur	1042137	81840	41689	40151	7.85
Dhemaji	686133	44225	23006	21219	6.44
Morigaon	957423	117841	60194	57647	12.30
Nagaon	2823768	266350	136473	129877	9.43
Golaghat	1066888	62298	31807	30491	5.83
Jorhat	1092256	88665	45194	43471	8.11
Sivasagar	1151050	42347	21568	20779	3.67
Dibrugarh	1326335	58876	30517	28359	4.43
Tinsukia	1327929	37688	19443	18245	2.83
Karbi-Anglong	956313	44961	23436	21525	4.70
Dima Hasao	214102	4337	2340	1997	2.02
Karimganj	1228686	157890	81384	76506	12.85
Hailakandi	659296	70659	36369	34290	10.71
Cachar	1736617	264897	136051	128846	15.25
Assam	31205576	2231321	1145314	1086007	7.15

Source: Population census, 2011.

Table: 3. 4
Caste-wise Distribution of Scheduled Caste Population in Assam

Name of the Caste	Population of each Caste	Percentage of total SC Population
1. Bansphore	18,312	1.1
2. Mali,Bhuimali	58,334	3.5
3. Brittial-Bania	49,367	3.0
4 .Dhupi	54,028	3.3
5. Dugla	6,502	0.4
6. Hira	49,336	3.0
7. Jal-keot	30,663	1.9
8. Jhalo-Malo	68,829	4.2
9. Kaibarta	5,43,356	32.7
10. Lalbegi	782	0.05
11. Mahara	2,438	0.1
12. Methor	15,025	0.9
13. Muchi	67,187	4.0
14. Namasudra	5,05,384	30.4
15. Patni	1,36,661	8.2
16. Sutradhar	53,208	3.2
Total	16,59,412	100.00

*Census Report 2001, Assam, Part – VIII (i), Special Table for SCs.

Note: Population census, 2011 is silent about the caste-wise distribution of Scheduled Castes people of Assam.

3. 1. 2. Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Scheduled Castes of Assam

The Scheduled Caste population of Assam is characterized by having (a) un-economic land holding, (b) small capital input, (c) chronic under employment, (d) low productivity and (e) perpetual indebtednesses etc.

The Scheduled Castes have been at the lowest level of the Hindu social caste hierarchy based on birth. The social system ascribed occupations to this group which were not only low in social ordering but were also characterized by very low productivity. With ascription on the basis of birth, this group remained at the lowest end of the economic hierarchy as well. While the intensity of caste based discriminatory social practices varied in different parts of the country and was partially moderated with the penetration of impersonal market forces in varied degrees, this group remained on the fringe of traditional village society and rural economy. SC group has continued practicing lowly occupations with little exposure to educational opportunities. The major socio-economic parameters of the Scheduled Castes population with those of the general population of Assam are shown in Table: 3.5

Table: 3. 5

Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Scheduled Castes of Assam

Characteristics	General Population	Scheduled Caste population
1. Working population	35.8%	29.36%
2. Cultivator	52.65%	40.4%
3. Per-capita Cultivable land	1.31 hector	47.22%
4. Consumption of Electricity	112 kilowatt per annum	0.76 hectare
5. Supply of Entrepreneur	26.7%	3.9%
6. Pipe water supply	39%	7.79%
7. Poverty level	36.09%	65.9%
8. Population per Hospital bed	166	700
9. Indebtedness	39%	70%

Sources:-1. Census Report, 2001, (Assam) part – III, Special Table for SCs.

2. Annual Administrative Report, Directorate of Welfare for Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, Assam, 2002.

3. 1. 3. Community-wise Traditional Occupational Pattern of Scheduled Castes People of Assam

Das (1986), Hazarika (1995) and Sharma Thakur (1992) have broadly discussed about the traditional occupational pattern of Scheduled Castes people different community of Assam.

It is commonly felt that the Scheduled Castes population carry out their own specific profession or occupation, but in reality under the existing conditions they are primarily agricultural labourers and their specific occupations may be considered as subsidiary ones. Population Census, 2011 reveals that out of total population of 3,12,05,576 in the State, 11969690 are total workers. Out of the total 11969690 workers in Assam, 3138554 are Cultivators (26 percent), 903294 are Agricultural labourers (7.5 percent), 242071 are engaged in Household Industries (2.0 percent) and 4403204 are Other Workers (36.8 percent)

Kaibarta: The Kaibartas are the major Scheduled Caste group in Assam having total population 5,43,356 lakhs (32.7 percent) as per 2001 census. The dictionary meaning of the word KAIBARTA is to live from the products of water as KOI means ON water and BRIT means subsist or live. Their main traditional occupation is fishing and cultivation. But they do not possess agricultural land as they were depending on water based fishing industry, and did not get any opportunity to get allotted agricultural land for them neither during Ahom period nor during the British period. Nowadays, the KAIBARTA'S do not have any right over river *Beels*, *Khals* and even over *Doba's* also, as these are nowadays auctioned by the government and panchayats.

Namasudra: The Namasudras are the origins of Uttar Pradesh. On different occasions they migrated to different places of India. A branch of this community came to Assam and some of them converted to Christianity to save them from inhuman treatment from caste Hindus. The Namasudra population as per 2001 census stood at 5,05,384 which is 30.4 percent of the total Scheduled Caste population in Assam. The Namasudra people are found in all over of Assam. Their occupation is boating and cultivation. They have a separate class of Brahmins as their priest.

In Bengal during the period of King Gopal and other Kings of his dynasty and Raja Sitaram they were economically sound. They belonged to the aristocratic community in culture and dignity and magnitude of their livelihood was high. But afterwards due to political changes and violence of untouchability incited causing the reign of Raja Ballov Sen, who was a strong supporter of Brahmins and caste distinction, forced the Namasudras to accept the inhuman rules. Thus they were placed in the lowest class of Hindu society. Being disgusted by

such treatment a large number of Namasudras migrated to Assam and settled in Dhubri, Goalpara and Cachar districts.

Bania: The word BANIA implies tradesman. The BANIAS are Assamese Jewellers. In the British period they all primarily engaged themselves in making Gold ornaments and jewellery was their primary occupation. But in course of time as result of the Gold Control Act, they became handicapped and had to abandon their traditional occupation, those who had their parental land changed their occupation to agriculture. But their land holdings were small and became marginal farmers and landless labourers. Those who did not own land or did not possess cultivable land became poorer day by day.

The Bania people are found in all the districts in Assam, except Cachar district. As per 2001 census the Bania population are 49,367 which is 3.0 percent of the total Scheduled Caste population of Assam. They live in most cases in clusters. Unlike other Scheduled Castes the Banias are not backward in respect of education.

Hira: The Hira population as per 2001 census stood at 49,336 which is 3.0 percent of the total Scheduled Caste population in Assam. They are spread throughout Assam. Their traditional occupation is to make earthen pots. The members of this community used to exchange their pots for paddy in the villages specially in harvest season, they used to carry a full load of pots upstream the small rivers to villages and exchanged these pots for paddy and return with a full boat load of paddy which in most cases was more than the actual requirement of the family. Now this barter system is almost dead.

The Hiras cannot take to cultivation as only a few percentage of them have cultivable lands. For want of finance they cannot take to other business also. Not even 5 percent of the population of Hira community owns cultivable land. Due to their poor economic condition, majority of them cannot afford to educate their children and within teens most of them leave school to help their parents in their profession.

Patni: Patnis who were known as PATAUNI, NADIALS and (Adi) Mahishya had different trades like boating, fishing, basket making trading and cultivation in the early 19th and 20th centuries. Patni and Kaibarta originally belonged to the same stock. They have now switched over to cultivation while fishing is their secondary occupation. At present patni as a caste is found only in Karimganj and Cachar districts of Assam. Patnis are all making endeavor to lift themselves up socially and economically. Out of the total Scheduled Caste population in Assam, Patni community have got 1,36,661 which accounts for 8.2 percent of the Scheduled Caste population in Assam as per 2001 census. Few families have come up economically, but majority are poverty stricken.

Sutradhar: The Sutradhar is the carpenter caste of Cachar district, Goalpara and Dhubri district. The people of the caste occupy a very low position in the society. They have been degraded because legend says that once they failed to supply fuels to the Brahmins at the time of their devotion. Ganaks perform as their priest. Their touched water is not in use amongst the caste Hindu. The Sutradhar population as per 2001 census stood at 53,208 which is 3.2 percent of the total Scheduled Caste population in Assam.

Malo: The Malos are said by Mr. Risley to be Dravidian boating and fishing caste, and Dr. Wise, whom he quotes, was of opinion that the Malos with the Kaibatas, are representatives of the pre-historic dwellers in the Gangatic delta. The Malos are the inhabitants of Cachar district of Assam. A few families also living in Goalpara and Dhubri districts of Assam. Out of the total Scheduled Caste population in Assam, Malo community have got 68,829 which accounts for 4.2 percent of the Scheduled Caste population in Assam as per 2001 census.

Dhupi or Dhobi or Dhoba: They are not original inhabitants of Assam. In Assam they have come from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. They are not the indigenous people of Assam and a great controversy arose in 1935 on the issue of their inclusion in the list of Scheduled Caste in Assam. Mr. Risley said these Dhobi and Dhoba to be of two distinct castes. Dhoba being the washerman from Bengal and Orissa and the Dhobi of Bihar. They follow the cloths washing occupation from their forefathers. The Muslim washerman is called usually Dhobi in Assam, while the term Dhoba is generally applied to the Hindu washerman. As per 2001 census report the Dhobi population strength in Assam stood at 54,028 which is 3.3 percent of the total Scheduled Castes in Assam.

Mahara: In the census of 1961 Vol.III Assam, PartV-A we find that Maharas are chiefly employed as Zamindars, peons, Mandals etc. their traditional occupation is Palki bearing. The legend is that the Maharas are the decendents of palki bearers engaged by the Zamindars in Bengal. This castes is peculiar to Cachar district only. Before participation they were seen only in Sylhet, but after participation of the country few families migrated to Cachar district. They are from the indigenous group of Bengal and not of Assam. Out of the total Scheduled Caste population in Assam, Mahara community have got 2,438 which accounts for 0.1 percent of the Scheduled Caste population in Assam as per 2001 census.

Dholis or Dholas: The Dholis or Dholas as they aer called drummers. They are immigrants from Bengal and settled in Cachar district of Assam. Some of them are cultivators and rearer of animals. This caste is said to be very degraded one. They have no Brahmin. Its priests are chosen from amongst the members of the caste itself. . As per 2001 census report

the Dholis population strength in Assam stood at 6,502 which is 0.4 percent of the total Scheduled Castes in Assam.

Muchi: The Muchi is a leather working class and they are mainly found in Cachar district of Assam. They are however available in other districts of Assam also. Where however they are immigrants from Bihar and Orissa. Muchi is a cobbler and leather dresser. They are an offshoot of the Chamar caste. Out of the total Scheduled Caste population in Assam, Muchi community have got 67,187 which accounts for 4.0 percent of the Scheduled Caste population in Assam as per 2001 census.

Bhangi, Bansfor, Lalbegi: They are scavengers from outside Assam. They are all in the employment of the municipalities and town committees. The Lalbegi is half Hindu and half Muslim in his custom and belief and is supposed to have come originally from Upper India. In Assam, sweepers and scavengers mostly come from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. All of them live in quarters allotted to them by the Municipal Boards and Municipal Corporation. As per 2001 census report the population of Bhangi community in Assam stood at 18,312 which is 1.1 percent of the total Scheduled Castes in Assam.

Bhuimali or Mali: The main occupation of Bhuimali or Mali now is gardening of flowers to sell in the temples and cultivation. Though they are present in Surama Valley, but a section of them settled near various Temples and other places of Assam. Their main occupation now is agriculture. Out of the total Scheduled Caste population in Assam, Bhuimali or Mali community have got 58,334 which accounts for 3.5 percent of the Scheduled Caste population in Assam as per 2001 census.

Jal- Keot or Jalla-Keot: Selling of fish was confined to the Kaibartas and Jal-keot in Assam and Surama Valley. But the Jal-Keot improved their relative position in the social hierarchy. Majority of them have taken to agriculture as a means of livelihood and also as a device of upgrading their position in society. As per 2001 census report the population of Jal-Keot or Jalla-Keot community in Assam stood at 30,663 which is 1.9 percent of the total Scheduled Castes in Assam.

3. 1. 4. Existing Occupational Pattern of Scheduled Castes People of Assam

Datta Roy, Mazhari, Passah and Pandey (2000) and Hazarika have broadly discussed about the existing occupational pattern of Scheduled Castes people of Assam.

(A) Agriculture

A number of Scheduled Castes communities of Assam pursue agriculture as their major occupation. In this district, it appears that not more than 10 of the 16 Scheduled Castes communities are engaged in agriculture. They engage themselves in cultivation during the cultivation season keeping other months in other occupations. Bania (1995:21) opines that “many of these people are landless— their holdings are limited to 5 bighas per family— the production of which is not sufficient for maintenance of a family. They are also financially extremely weak. They subsidize their maintenance expenditure out of petty fish business”. The Scheduled Castes who fall in this category are: Jalkeot, Kaibarta or Jalia, Namasudra, Patni and Sutradhar. It is on record that the Government of Assam one decided and promised to allot 40 bighas of land to some of the Scheduled Castes for residential purpose at Guwahati. But it was not materialized so far due to some technical reasons (Bania 1995:21). It is a fact that the production from the limited cultivable land of 5 bighas is not at all sufficient for the Scheduled Castes people to maintain the family. So many of them take to Marakia system of cultivation on half to half harvest share. But this system is also gradually disappearing from the society as the land holders are themselves cultivating their land with the help of improved variety of seeds, fertilizer and loan for plough etc. from the Agriculture Department.

(B) Fishery

Next to agriculture, fishing is an important occupation of most of the indigenous Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district. It is practiced mostly by Kaibartha, Jalia, Namasudra and Jhalo-Malo. They are taking fish catching as their livelihood from ancient time. They catch different fishes in various rivers, beels, community tanks, ponds etc. and carrying it to the nearer market for sale. Earlier, fish catching and selling was exclusively done by the above mentioned communities only. But now, the fishermen from other communities mainly Muslim have taken over this age old trade from the indigenous fishermen communities of Assam. Moreover, some affluent persons from the fishermen communities began to patronize this trade. Sharma Thakur (1995:95) states that “even those poor Kaibartas who are clinging to this traditional business in spite of the odds, are suffering from the 60:40 syndrome, i.e. a sizeable share of the catch has to be given to the Mahajans who provide the

capital. The Mahajan lends money to the fishermen on that for small catches, the fishermen have to pay 40 percent to the Mahajans and for the bigger catches their percentage is 60. The poor fishermen have no alternative but to agree to the terms of the Mahajans. It is also observed that the fishing sources like rivers, beels etc. are not accessible to the poor fishermen as the same are auctioned to the big traders or Mahajans who generally prefer the fishermen of other areas than to the local ones. Consequently, the local fishermen are suffering from the economic hardship.

It is noteworthy to mention here that the local fishermen are exploited by the middle men (dalals). For improving the economic status of the fishermen communities, the Assam Government has taken up a number of development schemes, like Fishery Development Corporation, Fish Farming Development Agencies and Fishery Co-operative Societies. Government of Assam has also established a Fishery College at Raha, in Nowgaon district for upgrading and to train the unemployed fishermen and enthusiastic young boys in this profession. In spite of all these attempts, the fishermen are not benefited out of it. They are still in the poverty line.

(C) Goldsmith and Silversmith

One more traditional occupation of the Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district is goldsmith and silversmith. It was the chief occupation of the Bania/ Brital Bania since time immemorial. It is on record that this noble profession was encouraged by the Ahom kings and the Banias were allowed to access to the inner apartment of the Ahom kings and the queens (Bania 1995:25). The Banias are not only goldsmith but they are expert in silversmith also. Now, this profession has taken up by other castes groups. Before the influx of outsiders on this trade, the Banias were the main source of supply of gold and silver ornaments to the people of Assam. But at present, the Banias have almost left this profession.

(D) Pottery Industry

Another saddest occupation of the Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district is the Pottery Industry. This occupation is confined to the Hiras only. They are making earthen pots for cooking and other use for the common people. The members of this community used to exchange their pots for paddy in the villages specially in harvest season, they used to carry a full load of pots upstream the small rivers to villages and exchanged these pots for paddy and return with a full boat load of paddy which in most cases was more than the actual requirement of the family. Now this barter system is almost dead.

They have been carrying this occupation for their livelihood since the past. No alternative source of income was obtained by them as they got a good earning from this occupation. Earlier, the earthen pots which they produced for cooking and other use for the common people, have been replaced now by the modern metallic utensils and equipments available in the market.

In the past, the Hiras used to exchange their products in terms of food and others in the barter system. As they were happy with the traditional occupation, they did not feel for any other occupation other than the Pottery Industry. They were even not engaged in cultivation and its related occupation in the past. As such, the Hiras have neither cultivable land nor any other base for engagement. But now the Hiras are facing some problems in collecting the raw materials popularly known as “Hira Clay”. This clay is found in some specific areas of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgaon districts. Since British period the Hiras used to collect the “Hira Clay” from the specified clay fields or bathans at free of cost without any obstruction. Now, there has been a serious problem to the Hiras to collect the clay from the bathans as most of the clay areas have been occupied by some occupants who obstruct the potters to collect the clay. Due to non-availability of the “Hira Clay” the Pottery Industry has become almost dead. 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.

(E) On Leather Work

In Assam, a section of Scheduled Castes people who are known as Cobbler and leather dresser are completely living on leather-work. They are Muchis / Rishis who are non-indigenous Scheduled Castes. They are mostly from Bihar and engage themselves in leather-work. They move from place to place and do their daily business on leather-made things like shoe repairing and manufacturing at certain convenient places of urban and semi-urban areas. They do not possess any permanent plot of land for residential purposes. They live in the hired residential houses.

(F) Terracotta

At present, Terracotta is a profitable profession of Scheduled Caste people of Dhubri district of Assam. This is the traditional occupation of Malis. They are manufacturing various kinds of flower vases, earthen pots, vessels, various kinds of show pieces like tiger, lion, horse, camel, bull ox, cat, fish, mouse etc. They are also manufacturing different kinds of toys

like king, queen, soldier etc. which expresses the olden heritage of our country. Again, they are manufacturing various Deities throughout the year and earning huge amount of money.

(G) Other Occupations

(i) Cleaning

In Assam, there are another group of Scheduled Castes people who are by profession cleaners. They are Scavengers and sweepers from outside Assam mostly come from Bihar. They are working in various offices of the Government both Central and State, Govt. and private Hospitals, Railways, Municipal Bodies and Municipal Corporation. All of them live to quarters allotted to them by the Municipal Boards and Corporation. Here, there are another cleaner groups and they are Dhobis or Dhobas. The Dhobis (Washermen) mainly earn their income by washing cloths of others.

(ii) Government Service

In Assam, a minimum portion of the Scheduled Castes people are in state government service and as well as in central government service. Most of the service holders belong to grade- III and grade-IV categories. They are servicing in various schools, colleges, offices, railways and defense department and a few sections in multinational companies outside the district. The Scheduled Castes people of Assam are enjoying reservation quota in state government service as well as in central government service.

(iii) Domestic Servant

From empirical study it is seen that the poor Scheduled Castes people keep their young boys and girls as domestic servant in the house of rich non-Scheduled Castes people on monthly wage basis. This tendency is more among the girls as compared to boys. They are working in a minimum wage, i.e. rupees five hundred to rupees seven or eight hundred per month.

(iv) Daily Wage Worker

From empirical study it is also seen that the majority of the Scheduled Castes people (more than 60 percent) are working as daily wage workers. They are non-agriculturists group and have no scope for acquiring any land for agriculture. They are working in the house of non-Scheduled Castes people and doing various activities with minimum wage Rs. 100 to 200 per day. Some of them are working in various cloth stores, glossary shops, hotels, restaurant as sale man. Some of them are taking other occupations such as vegetables sellers, tailors,

drivers, porters, rajmistri and small businessman and so on. A few sections of them are the employees of municipal bodies of different towns under sub-division.

3. 1. 5. Occupational Distribution of the Sample Populations

By occupation, the total population of the area can be divided into workers and non-workers. The workers are those who participate in the economic activities and the non-workers constitute the dependent population of the society. Greater is the number of non-worker population, higher is the dependency ratio. The occupation of the sample populations are divided categories into 9 categories including the one who has multiple occupations. These are: service, business, professional, skilled labour, unskilled labour, fishing, cultivator, potter and multiple occupations.

Table: 3. 6 shows the occupational distribution of the sample populations.

Table: 3. 6
Occupational Distribution of the Sample Populations

Sl No	Nature of Work	Number of Households	Percentage
1	Service	12	5.00
2	Business	31	12.92
3	Professional	29	12.08
4	Skilled Labour	21	8.75
5	Unskilled Labour	68	28.33
6	Fishing	19	7.92
7	Cultivator	22	9.17
8	Potter	14	5.83
9	Multiple occupation	24	10.00
10	Total	240	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

It reveals that the majority of the households are unskilled labour (28.33 percent) followed by business (12.92 percent). The proportion of professional (electrician, bicycle maker, priest, drummer, etc) and skilled labour among the households are 12.08 percent and 8.75 percent respectively. The proportion of the service holders (5.00 percent) among the households is very low as compared to other occupations. The proportion of the multiple occupations (10.00 percent) among the households is slightly higher than the cultivator (9.17 percent). The proportion of the potters among the households is second lowest and it is 5.83 percent.

Table: 3. 7
Distribution of the Couples by the Nature of Occupation

Nature of work	No. of Husbands	Percentage	No. of Wives	Percentage
Service	9	3.75	3	1.25
Business	30	12.50	1	0.42
Professional	28	11.67	11	4.58
Skilled Labour	21	8.75	7	2.92
Unskilled Labour	72	30.00	18	7.50
Fishing	19	7.92	—	—
Cultivator	26	10.83	—	—
Potter	10	4.17	6	2.50
Multiple occupation	23	9.58	9	3.75
Unemployed	2	0.83	185	77.08
Total	240	100.00	240	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

*In case of the husbands who are dead, their occupation at the time of death is taken for consideration.

It reveals that the majority of the husbands (30.00 percent) are unskilled labour and wives (77.08 percent) are engaged in household activities. The proportion of service holders among the husbands (3.75 percent) is higher than the wives (1.25 percent). Women's participation in business (0.425 percent) is very negligible as compared to the husbands (12.50 percent). The proportion of cultivator among the husbands is 10.83 percent and unskilled labour is 30 percent. The proportion of multiple occupation among the husbands is 9.58 percent whereas it is 3.75 percent in case of wives.

Occupational Status

The determination of occupational status of the sample population is problematic because a large section of the population in these areas does not perform a single specialized work. People often do more than one work and keep on moving in and out of agriculture and other non-skilled jobs. For example, in these areas a large number of people working in the unorganized sectors in urban areas return to their home (Villages) to participate in sowing and harvesting operations along with other members of their families. This is particularly true of the construction labour, which temporarily migrates to cities when it is free from farm operations. The lack of clear-cut specialization thus makes it difficult to classify population accurately on the occupational basis. However, the occupation of the sample population is divided into two types as temporary and permanent depending on the nature of the occupation.

Table: 3. 8
Occupational Status of Sample Population

Sl No	Occupational Status		Number of Husband / Wife /Widow	Percentage
	1		2	3
1	Temporary Occupation	Husband	132	62.86
2		Wife	92	34.07
3		Widow	24	8.89
4	Permanent Occupation	Husband	78	37.14
5		Wife	24	8.89
6		Widow	2	0.74
7	House wife / unemployed		120	44.44

8	Unemployed widow	8	2.96
9	Total	480	200

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

*In case of the husbands who are dead, their nature of occupation at the time of death is taken for consideration.

Table: 3. 8 shows that majority of the husbands (62.86 percent), wives (34.07 percent) and widows (8.89 percent) of sample population have followed temporary type of occupation. They have not got work every day throughout the month. Generally, they have got work 15 to 20 days in a month and in rest of the days they remain workless. They have done different types of works without any hesitation what they able to get. They generally belong to casual labour group.

In case of permanent occupation, only 37.14 percent husband and 8.89 percent wives are able to get the permanent type of work. They are generally servicemen, cultivators, businessmen and some other persons who are still following the traditional occupations. A very negligible portion of widows i.e. only 0.74 percent are in permanent occupation.

It is interesting to note that a huge portion of the respondents (44.44 percent) are house wives /unemployed. They do not go for work for various reasons in spite of their wide spread poverty. Majority of them have remained at home for looking after their children. Similarly, only 2.96 percent widows are unemployed. They are dependent either on their sons or on other members of their families.

Changing Occupation

Datta Roy, Mazhari, Passah and Pandey (2000) and Hazarika (2002) state that a number of Scheduled Castes communities of Assam pursue agriculture as their major occupation. They engage themselves in cultivation during the cultivation season keeping other months in other occupations. The Scheduled Castes people who fall in this category are: jalkeot, Kaibartha, Namasudra, Patni and Sutradhar. But at present, majority of Scheduled Castes people belonging to these communities have left their agriculture occupation because they become poorer with the passing of time. As a result, they have sold their agricultural plot of land to other communities and shifted to other occupations for their survival.

Another traditional occupation of the Scheduled Castes people of Assam was carpentry. This occupation was practiced by Sutradhar only. But now, the Sutradhar have completely left this profession. People from other communities mostly Bengali have taken over this age-old profession from the Sutradhar. The finishing of the product of Bengali carpenters is far better than the finishing of the sutradhar carpenters. The sutradhar carpenters are unable to compete with the Bengali carpenters with their products in the market. As a result, they have given up their old trade and motivated to other professions. Similarly, the potters and fishermen have also shifted their age-old occupation to other occupations.

While conducting field survey it is found that many people have changed their previous occupations due to various reasons. The major reasons have been detected as financial crisis and uncertainty of profit in their previous occupations. The number of households by change of occupations is shown in table: 3. 9

Table: 3. 9
Number of Households by Change of Occupations

Sl No	Occupational Status	Number of Households	Percentage
	1	2	3
1	Households who remain with the previous / fore-father's occupation	52	21.67
2	Households who changed the previous occupation	188	78.33
3	Total	240	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

By occupation, the total households of the area can be divided into two categories. One category is the households who remain with the previous i.e. fore-father's occupation. And another category is the households who changed the previous occupation. By collecting data on occupational distribution of households of sample area we have found that majority of the Scheduled Castes people changed their fore-father's occupation. Only 21.67 percent Scheduled Castes people are still following their traditional occupations and 78.33 percent Scheduled Castes people have changed their fore-father's occupations due to various reasons.

The households who changed their traditional occupation are more among the cultivators. The reason is that their cultivable lands are divided among their sons and daughters when they grow up and marry. Then the small plot of cultivable land is not sufficient for earning their yearly expenditure. Again, majority of them are compelled to sell their cultivable land at the time of their daughter's marriage. The fishermen have left their traditional occupation fish catching and selling due to uncertainty of profit in this profession and captured this profession by other castes groups. But some other Scheduled Castes groups whose sub-caste is Hira, Muchi, Mehtor, and Mali are still following their traditional occupations.

Religion

The influence of religion extends to the very core of social behavior, attitude and values. Religion is characterized by a set of beliefs, attitudes and organization which may influence the fertility level of a couple. Several studies made in India and abroad reveal that a particular religion may be responsible for fertility differentials among the people. Religion which puts no barrier on the number of children and marriage is likely to have more children than the others

Most of the American studies have found higher fertility among the Catholic than the Protestant and Jews. Similarly, studies conducted in India have revealed that the Muslims have higher fertility than the Hindus. For example, Mukherjee & Singh (1961), Visaria (1994), Sadik (1966), Iyer (2002), Reddy (2005), Bhagat & Purjit (2005) have found higher fertility among the Muslims.

NFSH-2 (1998-99) has also found higher fertility of Muslims than the Hindus in Assam (TFR for the Hindus is 2.00 and 3.05 for the Muslims).

Davis (1951) has noted that the child-women ratio of the Muslims in undivided India was about 12%-14% higher than the Hindus. The difference in the number of children per women between Hindus and Muslims is exactly one child (3.1 for Hindus and 4.1 for the Muslims). In most of the states and union territories Muslim fertility is found to be higher than the Hindus.

Dharmaliagam & Morgan (2004) have observed that Muslim Hindu Fertility differential was pervasive across India in all major states with the exception of Madhya Pradesh. An average Muslim women is in general more likely to want to have another child for a given parity and she is less likely to use contraceptives given. Joseph (1977), Maribhat

and Frances Zaviour (2004) all agree that religion plays an important role in determining fertility of a population.

On the other hand, some studies have found that the role of religion in determining the fertility level is significant. Driver's (1963) study in Nagpur district found that the fertility of Hindu and Muslim is 4.5 and 4.6 percent respectively and the Mysore Population study (1961) has found that the fertility differentials among the Hindus and Muslims is negligible.

Vijayasri (2004) in a study made in Andhra Pradesh had noticed that the difference in fertility among the Hindus and Muslims is not significant. Fertility among the Hindus in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh is higher than the Hindus of Coastal Andhra Pradesh, similarly Muslims in Coastal Andhra Pradesh had a significantly lower fertility than among Muslims in Telangana.

According to some other researchers like Kulkarni, Alagarajan and Manoj (2005), it is not the religion but the regional factor that is responsible for fertility differential. If a population of a religion is concentrated in high fertility regions, they are likely to have high fertility on account of the regional rather than the religious factor. It is found that Christian population is relatively large in the south and the north-east, the Sikh population is relatively large in the north-west and the Muslim population is small in certain states such as Punjab, Odisha, Chattishgarh and Himachal Pradesh.

Some other scholars argue that since the minority status of a religious group can endanger the social and psychological securities of the group, they want to improve their socio-economic status by reducing family size. For example, Halli (1987) argues that the minority couples always want to limit their family size in an attempt to solidify their socio-economic position and so their fertility is lower than those of the majority of upper socio-economic levels and vice-versa. He has cited the example of American ethnic groups like Jews, higher status Blacks and the Japanese-Americans whose fertility is lower than those of the majority groups. Goldscheider and Uhlenberg (1969) have also supported this.

Cleland & Rodriguez (1993) suggest that in some countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and more recently Bangladesh – all Islamic countries by political orientation have witnessed decline in their total fertility rate. So the influence of religion on fertility depends on the support of other institution such as the state.

In our survey area, it is found that all the sample households are Hindus and no one is found whose religion is other than Hindu. Since the entire sample households are Hindus, no

analysis has been done to determine the influence of religion on fertility and mortality differentials among the Scheduled Castes which are indirectly related on the socio-economic condition and poverty among them.

Marital Status

Marriage is a quasi-religious duty – a sacred institution. In Hinduism, marriage is not only permitted but praised. Vedas (c. 1500 – 1200 B. C.) condemn prolonged celibacy. Marriage is necessary for women at 16 and men at 18. Rig Veda recommends 10 children per couple. But Vedas do not advocate child or early marriages. In India, the marriage age practically is raised to 18 for girls and 21 for boys. Among all communities, a superstition exists that a large family is an auspicious and desirable thing. The Muslim religion says that the best man is he who has most wives.

The people of higher castes and the people in urban areas face less obstacles and are comparatively free for late marriage. Marriages in industrial and urban areas are performed after a specified education and training. Education takes longer time for settlement in life. Therefore, educated people generally marry at late age. But the lower castes and the people residing in the agricultural societies have to face so many taboos and superstitions against late marriage.

Marital status of a community influences the fertility level to a great extent. A community with a large proportion of unmarried, widow and separated women represent lower fertility.

Veilrose (1965) observes that a community with a high proportion of married females of child bearing age shows a higher birth rate than the one with a lower proportion of married women of such age.

It is generally found that mortality is always lower among the married males and females than the unmarried of the same sex and age. According to demographers and sociologists like Kapadia (1966), the reason for this phenomenon is the fact that marriages are selective to the health status of the persons, for those who are healthy are more likely to get married, with the result that the risk of dying is also less. Besides, marriage facilitates timely bath, timely food and systematic life. Therefore, the married persons are generally more secure and protected and they usually lead a more sober life than those who are unmarried.

Table: 3. 10
Marital Status of the Population of the Sample Households

Marital Status	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Total (Male & Female)	Percentage
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Un-married	362	59.44	352	55.09	714	57.21
Married	238	39.08	250	39.12	488	39.10
Widow/ Widower	6	0.98	32	5.01	38	3.04
Devorce/ Separated	3	0.49	5	0.78	8	0.64
Total	609	100	639	100	1248	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

In our survey area it is found that total un-married male and female is 57.21 percent of sample population of which 59.44 percent is male and 55.09 percent is female. Similarly, it is found that the percentage of married male and female are almost same, it is 39.08 percent for male and 39.12 percent for female. The percentage of widower among the male is only 0.98 percent and the percentage of widow among the female is 5.01 percent, and it is 3.04 percent compared to the sample population. Similarly, the percentage of devorcee among the female is 0.78 percent while the separated men is only 0.49 percent.

Age at Marriage:

Agarwala (1972) states that age is one of the most important factors for marriage. As age at marriage increases, maturity of both husband and wife increases. So, it may affect their demographic behavior as well. Wife's age at marriage has important social, demographic and psychological importance which can profoundly influence her reproductive health. It is generally accepted that early marriage is related with higher fertility and late marriage is associated with lower fertility. On the other hand, pregnancy related complications are very high in the case of very young mothers when she remains still biologically immature. When

females marry at a lower age, they suffer a higher incidence of miscarriage, infant and child mortality than the females who marry late.

Again, he states that fertility is very much affected by age at marriage, the proportions of women married at a given time, and the spacing of births. In the USA, the marriage rate declined rapidly during the days of depression. The lowering of the age at marriage and the increase in the proportion of the women marrying, will increase the birth rate. In underdeveloped countries, marriage takes place at early age. This prolongs the period of reproduction and thereby increases the birth rate. Most of the backward countries are within the zones of hot climate. In such countries, girls attain puberty at very early age (15 years) and are capable of producing children at an earlier age as compared to their counterparts in advanced countries.

According to Benjamin (1968), the extent to which people marry at any time exercises a powerful influence on the subsequent flow of births. Late marriage and wide-spread celibacy provided one of the mechanisms by which age-specific fertility rates were brought to low levels in the populations of Western Europe. A large number of surveys conducted in India show that fertility falls with the rise in the age at marriage of the female. The Mysore Population Study (1961), for instance, reveals that those rural females who marry between ages 14 and 17 give birth to 5.9 children but those who marry between ages 18 and 21 give birth to only 4.7 children.

Majumder's (1960) Kanpur study has brought out that females marrying up to age 15 give birth to 6.9 children while those marriage after 19 give birth to only 6 children. Studies conducted in Calcutta and Madras has also found the similar result.

Mitchell (1971), Coale & Tye (1961), Bumpass (1969), Kim (1965), Kapadia (1966) and Rajen (1994) have found negative relationship between age at marriage and fertility. Agarwalla was of the opinion that the India's population would have to be fallen to an extent of 20% over a period of 25-27 years if the legal minimum age at marriage for the girls (18 years) is rigidly enforced.

However, researchers like Reddy (2003), Dandekar & Dandekar (1953), Sovani (1966), Iyer (2002), Sharmah (1991) and Goswami (1998) have found no significant association between age at marriage and fertility.

While studying the relationship between age at marriage and infant mortality Bhande & Kanitkar (1978) have found that infant mortality is the lowest where the marriage age of

mother is neither too low nor too high. This factor is related to the formation of the foetus to the mother's womb and is, therefore biological in nature.

The higher castes generally have higher mean age at marriage and the lower castes have lower mean age at marriage. In survey area it is found that the Scheduled Castes people have lower mean age at marriage. In their illiterate, traditional and superstitious society, late marriage for girls is looked down upon and is considered a curse. Therefore, the parent always tries to give marry their girl child as early as possible when she attains the age of 14 or 15 years. Male children among the Scheduled Castes people become earning members at the age of 16-17 years when they feel self-sufficient and try to establish their own families.

Table: 3. 11 shows the age at marriage of the Scheduled Castes women of the sample households.

Table: 3. 11
Distribution of the Wives by Age at Marriage

Sl No	Wife's Age at Marriage (in years)	Number of Wives	Percentage
	1	2	3
1	Age Up to 15 years.	84	35.00
2	Age 16 – 19 years	116	48.33
3	Age 20 – 24 years	32	13.33
4	Age 25 years and above	8	3.33
5	Total	240	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014.

Table: 3. 11 shows that child marriage is still practiced among the Scheduled Castes people of Dhubri district of Assam. 35 percent respondents of the survey area are married below the legal age of marriage which is recognized by constitution as 18 years for the females. The highest percentage of women (48.33 percent) got married in the age group 16-19 years which prolongs their reproduction period. The age at marriage of only 8 sample women have found at 25 years and above which constitutes 3.33 percent of the surveyed married women.

Considering the importance of age at marriage of the women in influencing the fertility of a population which increases the number of children and indirectly responsible for poverty, it has been taken as an important variable in influencing both fertility and mortality among the scheduled Castes people of Assam.

3. 1. 6. Summary

In the third chapter we have discussed about the demographic profile and occupational pattern of the Scheduled Castes people of Assam. According to the Census of India 2011, the population of Assam stands at 3,12,05,576, of which 1,59,39,443 are males and 1,52,66,133 are females. Similarly, according to 2011 census, the total Scheduled Castes population in Assam is 22,31,321 persons, which is 7.15 percent of the total population of the state. Out of them 11,45,314 persons are male population and 10,86,007 persons are female population. The highest concentration of population is found in Nowgaon district followed by Cachar district and Dima-Hasao district shows the lowest concentration. In Dhubri district, total Scheduled Castes population is 70,395 persons of which 36,359 persons are male population and 34,036 persons are female population. The percentage of SC population to the total population in Dhubri district is 3.61.

According to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act 1976, there are sixteen Scheduled Castes communities in Assam. They are: Bansphor, Bhuimali/ Mali, Brittal Banka/ Bania, Dhupi/ Dhobi, Hira, Jalkeot, Jhalo/ Malo/ Jhalo-Malo, Kaibartha/ Jaliya, Lalbegi, Mahara, Mehtor/ Bhangi, Muchi/ Rishi, Namasudra, Patni and Sutradhar. Earlier, all these Scheduled Castes communities used to perform different traditional occupations. Different communities had the different traditional occupations and they were happy with their traditional occupations. But today, the situation has changed. They have almost given up their traditional occupations and shifted to other occupations due to several reasons. Different researchers and demographers have expressed their different views about the occupational status and changing occupations of the Scheduled Castes people of Assam in different ways.

But it is a 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 traditional occupations. However, growth of population, sub-division and fragmentation of land holding, pressure of population, tough competition from machine-made goods, lack of

technical knowledge of modern system of production, lack of capital money, influx of outsiders on the trade once solely meant for Scheduled Castes are the main causes of poverty, homelessness and unemployment among the Scheduled Castes people of Assam.