

CHAPTER-II

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CHAPTER-II

Profile of the Scheduled Tribes

In this chapter an attempt has been made to discuss the profile of the tribals in terms of its physical, social and economic indicators. Assam is one of the seven States of North- East India and only plains State of the region with its is the unique identity. It is the home land of about 90 ethnic groups with various socio - cultural, linguistic and racial affiliations. In this chapter socio-economic profile of tribals in India in

general and Assam in particular is being covered to understand the socio-economic character to access development process of the study area. The chapter is divided into two parts. Part- I describes the socio-economic profile of tribal of India and Part- II an overview of Assam with profile of tribes.

The tribal situation in the country presents a varied picture. Some areas have high tribal concentration while in other areas; the tribals form only a small portion of the total population. There are some tribal groups, which are still at the food gathering stage, some others practice shifting cultivation, yet other may be pursuing primitive forms of agriculture. The tribal areas in the country were classified under three broad categories:

- States and Union Territories having a majority ST population.
- States and Union Territories having substantial tribal population but majority tribal population in particular administrative units, such as block and tehsils.
- States and Union Territories having dispersed tribal population.

The Northeast is India's chief tribal area, and the numerous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and those in

the rest of India make a glorious and colorful portray of Indian history through its ethnic world.

Part-I

Profile of Tribal of India

According to 2001 Census, the population of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the country is 84.3 million, which is 8.19 percent of the total population of the country. The population of STs has been found

Demographic Changes (Table-1.1)			
Census Years	Total population	Population of ST	ST percentage
1951	361.1	19.1	5.29
1961	439.2	30.1	6.85
1971	548.2	38.0	6.93
1981	685.2	51.6	7.53
1991	846.3	67.8	8.10
2001	1028.6	84.3	8.19
Source: Ministry of Tribals Welfare, 2006 Population in millions			

increasing after 1951 (Table-1.1). In 1961, there was 30.1 million tribal population (total population 439.2

million) and in 1991, tribal population was 67.8 million (total population 846.3 million) in the country. According to 1991 Census, 99.71 per cent of the Scheduled Tribes population is spread over 22 states; the states of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Gujarat and

Rajasthan shelter more than 60 per cent of the scheduled tribe population.

The ST population had increased by 127 per cent during 1961-1991. The percentage share of ST population to total population of the country has progressively increased over the decades, from 5.29 per cent in 1991 to 8.19 per cent in 2001. The growth in tribal population might not reflect the higher natural growth rate. This might also not be a sign of their rising standard of living; rather, it could be attributed to the fact that since its first notification in 1950 the list of STs has been amended and supplemented subsequently.

T R U	Percentage of Total Population(Table-1.2)					
	1991			2001		
	Persons	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Total	8.08	7.90	8.28	8.20	8.01	8.40
Rural	10.08	9.88	10.28	10.42	10.23	10.61
Urban	2.32	2.29	2.36	2.44	2.39	2.50
Sources: Census of India - 2001						

The table-1.2 indicates the higher and healthy sex ratio in the tribal population and this has been maintained over the decades. Both in 1991 and 2001 the percentages of ST female population to total female population have more than the percentages of ST male

population to total male population in the country. The trend is more or less similar in both rural and urban areas.

The modern vices of amino synthesis and female fetus destruction are largely unheard of by the tribal communities which largely live in rural areas. Unlike in the general population, the gender discrimination in the tribal communities thus does not find much reflection in the demographic features.

(Table-1.3)
Distribution of STs Population indifferent States/ UTs

State		Percentage of ST Population in State/UTs to the total ST population of the country	
1. Madhya Pradesh	14.51	2. Jammu and Kashmir	1.31
3. Maharashtra	10.17	4. Tripura	1.18
5. Orissa	9.66	6. Mizoram	1.00
7. Gujarat	8.87	8. Bihar	0.90
9. Rajasthan	8.42	10. Manipur	0.88
11. Jharkhand	8.40	12. Arunachal Pradesh	0.84
13. Chhattisgarh	7.85	14. Tamil Nadu	0.77
15. Andhra Pradesh	5.96	16. Kerala	0.43
17. West Bengal	5.23	18. Uttaranchal	0.30
19. Karnataka	4.11	20. Himachal Pradesh	0.29
21. Assam	3.92	22. Dadra & Nagar Haveli	0.16
23. Meghalaya	2.36	24. Sikkim	0.13
25. Nagaland	2.10	26. Uttar Pradesh	0.13

Source: Census of India - 2001

Tribal people constitute 8.14 percent of the total population of the country, numbering 84.51 million¹. The population of tribes had grown

at the rate of 24.45 percent during the period 1991- 2001². This is slightly more than the decadal growth rate of 22.66 percent for the nation as a whole. More than half of the tribal population is concentrated in the States Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Jharkhand and Gujarat whereas in Haryana, Punjab, Delhi, Pondicherry and Chandigarh no community has been notified as a ST³. The main concentration of tribal population besides Central India is in the North- Eastern states.

Major Tribes of India

The northeast is India's chief tribal area, and the numerous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, Orissa, Nagaland, Manipur and those in the rest of India make a glorious and colorful portray of Indian history through its ethnic world. Here's a list (table-1.4) of some of the tribes in India and the areas they inhabit.

Major Tribes (Table-1.4)

Tribes	Place where they inhabit
Abors	Arunachal Pradesh, Assam
Adi, Apatani, Khampi, Miri, Tagin	Arunachal Pradesh
Angami, Ao, Rengma, Sema, Zeliang	Nagaland
Badagas, Todas	Tamil Nadu
Baiga, Bhils	Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat
Bhotias	Uttar Pradesh (Garhwal and

	Kumaon
Bhutias, Mundas	Sikkim
Birhor, Mundas, Oarons	Bihar
Bodos, Chutia, Kacharis, Karbi, Mishing, Rabhas,	Assam
Chenchus	Andhra Pradesh, Orissa
Dangs	Gujarat
Gaddis	Himachal Pradesh
Garos	Meghalaya
Gonds	Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh,
Great Andamanese, Sentinelesse	Andaman Islands
Irulas, Kotas	Tamil Nadu
Jaintias	Meghalaya
Jarawas, Onges	Little Andamans
Kanis, Uralis	Kerala
Khasis	Meghalaya, Assam
Khonds	Orissa
Kol, Oarons, Murias	Madhyapradesh
Kuki	Manipur
Lepchas or Rongpa	Sikkim
Lushais	Tripura
Meiteis	Manipur, Nagaland
Mina	Rajasthan
Santhals	West Bengal, Bihar
Shompens	Great Nicobar Islands
Source: Ministry of Tribals Welfare, 2006	

Tribal Literacy Levels in India

The total ST population comprise today of 8.08 percent⁴. In spite of various measures taken to improve the level of education in the country, literacy levels among tribal communities irrespective of the gender continues to be extremely low. The gap in the literacy level

between the general population and the socially disadvantaged sections is persisting and even widening in some cases. A number of steps have already been taken by the Government and considerable progress has been achieved in improving the level of literacy and education, but there is still a long way to go before respectable levels of literacy are achieved, as can be seen in the table.no. 1.5.

Growth in Literacy Rate among total Population and ST Population in India (Literacy in percent) (Table-1.5)

Year	Total literacy	ST literacy	Gap
1931	7.50	0.75	6.25
1951	18.30	NA	-----
1961	28.28	8.54	19.74
1971	34.50	11.29	23.21
1981	41.00	16.25	24.65
1991	52.21	29.60	22.61
2001	62.20	47.10	18.10

Source: Census of

Enrolment Ratio (Table-1.6)			
S.No.	Parameters	Overall	STs

India, 1931, 1951-2001

As per 2001 Census, the general female literacy percentage is at 35.67 percent that of STs is 34.76 percent. Similarly, general male literacy percentage is at 75.26 percent that of Scheduled Tribes is 4.65 percent.

The Enrolment Ratio (1997-98) and School Drop-out rates for overall and STs is:

1.	Enrolment Ratio (1997-98) (Class I-V) Class VIVIII)	89.7& 58.6	90.7 43.2
2.	School Drop-out rate (1993-94)	52.8	77.7
Source: Ministry of Tribals Welfare, 2006			

As per the 2001 Census figures, the female literacy rate has increased from 39.3 percent to 34.76 percent and for male the literacy rate has increased from 64.13 percent to 75.26 percent (table-1.7).

The difference between the literacy rate of STs and that of the general population is quite large.

Literacy amongst STs and all Social Groups (Table-1.7)

Year	STs			General		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1961	13.83	3.16	8.53	40.40	15.35	28.30
1971	17.63	4.85	11.30	45.96	21.97	34.45
1981	24.52	8.04	16.35	56.38	29.76	43.57
1991	40.65	18.19	29.60	64.13	39.29	52.21
2001	59.17	34.76	47.10	75.26	53.67	64.84

Sources: Source: Ministry of Tribals Welfare, 2006

The status needs to be improved and for this serious efforts and focus is required on raising the level of literacy of the Scheduled Tribes population both males and females. There are historical and socio-economic reasons for having this wide gap between one section of society and the rest.

However, it is seen that where educational facilities are provided they are not accessible in the real sense of the term to the targeted group. So far as STs population and in particular the ST Girls are concerned, it is fret that lack of residential facilities in educational institutions both of general and of quality education deters, scheduled tribe families to send their children to such institutions. Considering the important role of women in shaping the size of the family and outlook of its members, and also as an active agent of economic and social development, investment in providing education to the women of these communities will not only improve their social and economic status, but will also help in accelerating the pace of development of these communities and the nation as a whole. Similarly, male literacy also needs special attention amongst the tribal population to raise the overall standard/quality f if, they being on the last ladder of development even with reference to the other down trodden categories like SCs.

Economic Status

The majority of tribals constitute the labour work force though their participation in works is declining, but not steadily. More than half of

the rural tribal population is found to be below poverty line as per latest survey available with Ministry of Rural Development (1993-94). However, there is a perceptible declining trend in persons from tribal communities below poverty line.

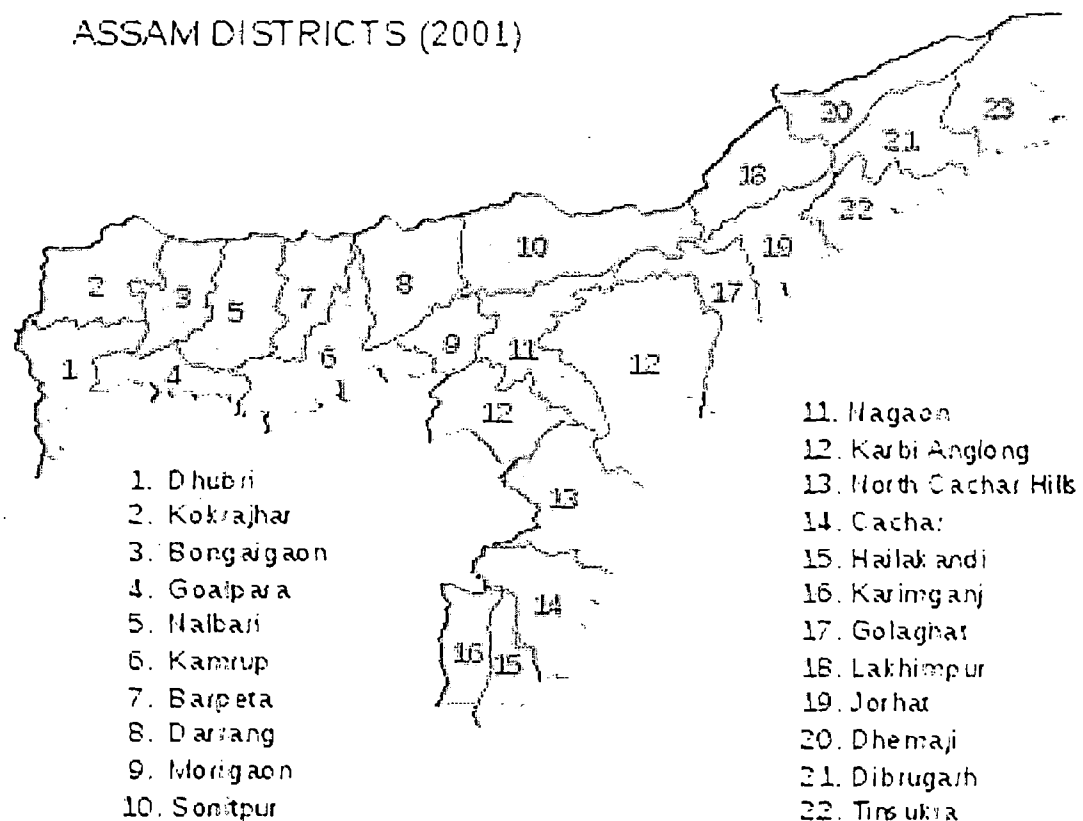
The per capita income of tribals continues to be one of the lowest in the country and their alienation from their own land continues. As on January 1999, the tribals were alienated from 9,17,590 acres of tribal land and only 5,37,610 acres of such land was restored as per latest statistics published by the Ministry of Rural Development.

Part-II

Assam - An Overview

Assam is one of the seven States of North-East India and only plains State of the region with its is the unique identity. It is the home land of about 90 ethnic groups with various socio - cultural, linguistic and racial affiliations. Assam is a northeastern state of India with its capital at Dispur, in the outskirts of the city Guwahati. Located south of the eastern Himalayas, Assam comprises the Brahmaputra and the Barak river valleys and the Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills with an area of 30,285 square miles (78,438 km), equivalent to the size of

Ireland or Austria⁵. Assam is surrounded by the other six of the Seven Sister States: Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya. These States are connected to the rest of India via a narrow strip in West Bengal called the Siliguri Corridor or “Chicken’s Neck”. Assam also shares international borders with Bhutan and Bangladesh; and cultures, peoples and climate with South-East Asia—important elements in India’s Look East policy.



Since 2001, five new districts have been created:
Baksa, Chirag, Udalguri and Kamrup

Assam. The 'town-committee' for small towns, 'municipal board' for medium towns and Municipal Corporation for the cities consists of the urban local bodies. For the revenue purposes, the districts are divided into revenue circles and mouzas; for the development projects, the districts are divided into 219 'development-blocks and for law and order these are divided into 206 police stations or thana⁸.

Demographics of Assam

Population Growth (Table-1.8) Census of india-1951-2001		
Census	Pop.	Percent
1951	8,029,000	—
1961	10,837,000	35.0 percent
1971	14,625,000	35.0 percent
1981	18,041,000	23.4 percent
1991	22,414,000	24.2 percent
2001	26,656,000	18.9 percent

Total population of Assam was 26.66 million with 4.91 million households in 2001⁹. Higher population concentration was recorded in the districts of Kamrup, Nagaon, Sonitpur, Barpeta, Dhubri, Darang and Cachar. Assam's population was estimated at 28.67 million in 2006 and at 30.57 million by 2011, 34.18 million by 2021 and 35.60 million by 2026¹⁰. In 2001, the census recorded literacy in Assam at 63.30 percent with male literacy at 71.30 and female at 54.60 percents¹¹. Urbanization

rate was recorded at 12.90 percent¹². Growth of population in Assam has experienced a very high trajectory since the mid-decades of the 20th century. Population grew steadily from 3.29 million in 1901 to 6.70 million in 1941, while it has increased unprecedented to 14.63 million in 1971 and 22.41 million in 1991 to reach the present level¹³. The growth in the western and southern districts was of extreme high in nature mostly attributable to rapid influx of population from the then East Pakistan or Bangladesh.

Literacy Rate in Percentage, 1951-2001* (Table-1.9)			
Year	Persons	Males	Females
1951	18.53	28.01	7.58
1961	32.95	44.28	18.62
1971	33.94	43.72	22.76
1981	-	-	-
1991	52.89	61.87	43.03
2001	64.28	71.93	56.03

Source: Provisional Population Totals, Census of India, 2001.

*Literacy Rates for 1951, 1961 and 1971 relate to population below five years and above. The Rates for the year 1991 and 2001 relate to the population aged seven years and above. Census for the year 1981 was not held in Assam.

Tribal Situation in Assam – An Overview

Assam is located in the extreme North East Corner of the country is blended with both hills and plains. The entire population of Assam can be categorized as tribal, non-tribal and detribalized groups. The total population of Assam as per 2001 census is 2, 66, 55,528 out of which 33,

08,570 is the tribal population which is 12.41 per cent of the total State population¹⁴. The STs (plains) population in the plain areas of the state (excluding Autonomous Districts) stands at 2,874,441 which is 12.82 per cent of the state population¹⁵. STs (hills) population in the Autonomous Districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills of the State stands at 452,963 and 128,428 which is 55.69 and 68.28 percent respectively of the district population¹⁶.

Total ST Population in Assam (Table-1.10)

Census Year	Total Pop. in Assam	Total ST Pop.	Percent of total Pop.	Total ST(P) Pop.	Percent of total Pop.	Total ST(H) Pop.	Percent of total Pop.
2001	26655528	3308570	12.41	2727179	10.23	581391	2.18
1991	22414322	2874441	12.82	2433889	10.85	440552	1.96
1971	14957542	1919947	12.84	1464590	9.97	455357	3.04
1961	11872771	2068364	17.42	11857033	15.64	211331	1.77
1951	8029505	1867113	23.25	593095	7.38	127418	15.85

Sources: Census of India- 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 2001

Unlike other States of the Indian Union, the ethnic communities of Assam have been divided into two categories viz hill tribes and plain tribes. The tribes which are scheduled in the plain areas of Assam, are not enlisted as Scheduled Tribes in the hill areas and the tribes which are scheduled in the in the hill areas not enlisted as scheduled tribes in the plain areas of Assam.

As per the 1976 Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Act, there were fourteen Hill Tribes and nine Plains Tribes. But as per Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Act of 2002, there were fifteen tribes in the list of two hill districts and eleven Plains Tribes in the plain areas of Assam¹⁷. Thus in the new list one more (Lalungs) group has been incorporated in the hill tribal list while two new ethnic groups Khamtis and Singphows have been included in the Plains Tribal list. Besides three Hills Tribal communities i.e. Dimasa, Hajong and Garo are also included in the plains tribal list.

Major Tribes in selected Districts of Assam (Table-1.11)

District	H.Qs	Main Tribes
Goalpara	Goalpara	Boro, Boro-Kachari, Rabha,
Kamrup	Guwahati	Sonowal.
Karbi	Diphu	Boro, Boro-Kachari, Rabha,
Anglong	Haflong	Sonowal.
N.C. hills	Nowgong	Karbi, Dimasa-Kachari, Rengma,
Nowgong		Naga.
Sibsagar	Sibsagar	Dimasa Kachari, Karbi, Zemi Naga,
Cachar	Silchar	Kuki
Darrang	Tezpur	Lalung, Sonowal Kachari, Miri,
		Boro,
Lakhimpur	North	Kachari.
Dibrugarh	Lakhimpur	Miri, Sonowal Kachari.
	Dibrugarh	Barman Kachari
		Sonowal Kachari, Boro
		Kachari, Miri,
		Rabha.

		Sonowal Kachari, Boro Kachari, Miri, Deuri. Miri, Sonowal Kachari, Chutoya, Moran, Mishing, Phakial, Khamyang.
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Source: Sipra Sen, 1999, 53

The total population of Assam in 2001 Census has been 26,655,528. Of them, 3,308,570 persons are STs (STs), constituting 12.4 per cent of the total population of the state. The State has registered 15.1 per cent decadal growth of ST population in 1991-2001. There are total twenty three notified STs in the State. Of these, no population of Pawi has been returned in 2001 Census. Pawi is a small community of

Population of major STs (Table-1.12)		
Name of the Scheduled Tribes	Total Population	Proportion to the Total ST Population
All STs	3,308,570	100 percent
Boro	1,352,771	40.9 percent
Miri	587,310	17.8 percent
Mikir	353,513	10.7 percent
Rabha	277,517	8.4 percent
Kachari	235,881	7.1 percent
Lalung	170,622	5.2 percent
Dimasa	110,976	3.4 percent
Deori	41,161	1.2 percent

Source: 2001 Census

percent), Rabha (8.4 percent), Kachari (i.e. Sonowal Kachari) (7.1

Mizoram.

As table-1.12 represents, among STs, Boro represents nearly half of the total ST population of the state (40.9 percent). Miri (17.8 percent), Mikir (10.7

percent), and Lalung (5.2 percent) are the other major STs each having 5 per cent or above of total STs. Along with Boro they constitute 90 per cent ST population of the state. Besides them, Dimasa constitutes 3.4 percent and Deori 1.2 per cent of the total ST population of the state. The rest of the Scheduled Tribes are very small in their population size. The ST population in Assam is predominantly rural with 95.3 percent rural and only 4.7 percent urban population. Of the eight major STs, Dimasa have recorded the highest 10.4 per cent urban population, followed by Mikir (8.3 percent). On the other hand Miri have recorded the lowest 1.8 per cent urban population.

North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong the two autonomous hill districts of Assam are predominantly tribal housing two important STs of Assam – the Dimasa and Mikir (now recognized as Karbi). As per 2001 Census, the North Cachar Hills has got the highest 68.3 per cent ST population, followed by Karbi Anglong (55.7 per cent). In absolute number Karbi Anglong is on top sharing 13.7 per cent of the total ST population of the state. Hailakandi, Karimganj, and Cachar districts have a negligible presence of ST population.

Tea Tribes and Ex-Tea Garden Tribes

In Assam, the Adivasis today can broadly be divided into two communities: tea tribes and ex-tea garden tribes. Tea tribes are the tea garden workers and ex-tea garden tribes are those who came out of the tea gardens at the end of their contracts and settled in and around the area. They are mainly present in Khokrajhar in Western and Lower Assam; Marigaon, Nagaon, Sonitpur and Darrang in Middle Assam; Golaghat, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia in eastern and upper Assam; North Cachar and Karbi Anglong in Southern Assam; as well as the Barak Valley. Specific labour-related economic disenfranchisement might be different for the tea garden and ex-tea garden Adivasi communities, however many aspects of their social and political disenfranchisement remain common.

District Wise ST Population

North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong the two autonomous hill districts of Assam are predominantly tribal housing two important STs of Assam – the Dimasas and Mikir (now recognized as Karbi). As per 2001 Census, the North Cachar Hills has got the highest 68.3 percent ST population, followed by Karbi Anglong (55.7 percent). In absolute number Karbi Anglong is on top sharing 13.7 per cent of the total ST

population of the state. Hailakandi, Karimganj, and Cachar districts have a negligible presence of ST population.

District Wise ST Population (Table-1.13)

State/ District	Percentage of Sts to total population of the State/District	Percentage of Sts to total State's ST Population
Assam	12.4	100
Kokrajhar	33.7	9.2
Dhubri	2.0	1.0
Goalpara	16.0	4.0
Bongaigaon	12.2	3.3
Barpeta	7.5	3.7
Kamrup	9.9	7.6
Nalbari	17.6	6.1
Darrang	16.6	7.6
Marigaon	15.6	3.6
Nagaon	3.9	2.7
Sonitpur	11.6	5.9
Lakhimpur	23.5	6.3
Dhemaji	47.3	8.3
Tinsukia	5.8	2.0
Dibrugarh	7.5	2.7
Sibsagar	3.9	1.3
Jorhat	12.3	3.7
Golaghat	9.9	2.9
Karbi Anglong	55.7	13.7
N C Hills	68.3	3.9
Cachar	1.3	0.1
Karimganj	0.3	0.1
Hailakandi	0.2	0.0

Sources: As per 2001 Census

Sex Ratio

As per 2001 Census, sex ratio of over all population was 933 females per 1000 male, the sex ratio of STs was somewhat more favourable i.e. 977 females per 1000 males. Sex ratio of Assam, as per 2001 Census is 935 and for STs of Assam is 972 females per 1000 males which is below the national average for STs (978). Of the eight major STs, Lalung have recorded the highest sex ratio of 985, while it is the lowest among Dimasa (951). The State has recorded child sex ratio (0-6 age group) of 962, which is again lower than the national average (973) for STs. The child sex ratio among Kachari (Sonowal) of 945 is the lowest, followed

by Lalung (949)¹⁸.

Literacy Rate among Major STs (Table-1.14)			
Name of the Scheduled Tribe	Literate Rate (7 years and above)		
	Total	Male	Female
Lalung	61.8	72.9	51.6
Miri	60.1	71.4	48.3
Rabha	66.7	76.2	57.9
All Scheduled Tribes	62.5	72.3	52.4
Dimasa	49.3	59.6	69.4
Mikir	53.7	64.1	43.0
Boro	61.3	71.4	51.1
Deori	76.2	84.8	67.5
Kachari	81.4	88.2	74.4

Literacy & Educational Level

The literacy rate for over all population, as per 1991 Census and 2001 Census was 52.2 percent and 65.38 percent respectively. Whereas literacy rate of scheduled tribe as per

1991 Census and 2001 census was 29.62 percent and 47.10 percent

respectively. Female literacy rate among the tribal as per 1991 Census and 2001 Census was 18.19 percent and 34.76 percent respectively. As per 2001 Census, total literacy rate of Assam is 63.3 percent and Scheduled Tribes is 62.5 percent.

Kachari (Sonowal) with 81.4 percent literacy rate are well ahead of others. On the other hand it is low among Mikir (53.7 percent). Among Kachari (Sonowal), the female literacy rate of 74.4 per cent is quite close to male (88.2 per cent). Gender gap in literacy among Miri,

Distribution of ST Workers (Table-1.15)			
T/M/F	Total Workers (Percentage to Total Population)	Main Workers (Percentage to Total Workers)	Marginal Workers (Percentage to Total Workers)
Total	1,430,404 (43.2)	934,217 (65.3)	496,187 (34.7)
Male	847,229 (50.5)	685,708 (80.9)	161,521 (19.1)
Female	583,175 (35.8)	248,509 (42.6)	334,666 (57.4)
Sources: Ministry of Tribal Affairs			

however, has been recorded to be the highest. With

71.4 percent male and 48.3 per cent female literacy, the Miri women are lagging way behind by as much as 23.1 per cent points.

A two third (65.4 percent) of the ST population in the age group 5-14 years has been attending schools or any other educational institutions. Of the eight major STs, it is the highest among Kachari (Sonowal) with 80.2 per cent of their population of this age group attending

educational institutions. In addition Deori (79.8 per cent), Rabha (70.2 percent), and Boro (68.2 percent) have also registered this proportion above State average for STs, while Mikir have registered below the State average (54.9 percent). Almost half of the Mikir population in the age group of 5-14 years - the category of potential students - has not been attending schools. Literates among STs who are having educational level graduation and above are 2.3 per cent only. Deori is well ahead, among the eight major STs in Assam, with 4.9 per cent graduate and above. Mikir, Rabha, and Lalung are at the bottom, each having less than two per cent of their literate population with educational level graduation and above.

Work Participation Rate

According to 2001 Census, 43.2 per cent of the STs have been registered as workers, which is below the aggregated national figure for STs (49.1 per cent). Of the total workers 65.3 per cent are main workers and 34.7 per cent marginal workers. The WPR of 35.8 per cent among females is high though lower than males (50.5 per cent). Gender wise disparity is, however, distinct in case of main workers; 80.9 per cent among males and only 42.6 per cent among females are main workers

Distribution of Main and Marginal Workers among STs

Among the major STs in the state, Deori have recorded the highest WPR of 55.5 per cent. It is lowest among Dimasa (38.9 percent). Deori have recorded almost equal participation of male and female in the workforce with 58 percent male and 52.9 percent female WPR. On the contrary the gender gap in WPR is quite significant among Rabha (male 51.2 percent, female 30.7 percent), Lalung (male 51.8 percent, female 33.1 percent), and Dimasa (male 47 per cent, female 30.4 percent).

Category of Workers

The STs of Assam are predominantly cultivators as 70.6 per cent of the total ST main workers¹⁹ have been recorded as cultivators, while merely 6.1 per cent as agricultural labourer. At the individual ST level, Miri have recorded a high of 85.6 percent of their total main workers as cultivators, closely followed by Mikir (79.3 percent) and Deori (78.2 percent). Rabha have recorded the highest percentage of agricultural laborers, which is only 9 per cent of total main workers thereby indicating that majority of the STs in Assam are not landless.

Marital Status

The distribution of ST population by marital status shows that 57.5 percent is never married, 39.1 percent currently married, 3.3 per cent widowed, and merely 0.2 percent divorced /separated. There is no conspicuous variation among the different individual STs.

Marital Status Wise Population among Major STs (Table-1.16)

Name of the Scheduled Tribe	Per cent to SL. Total Population			
	Never Married	Currently Married	Widowed	Divorced/ Separated
All Scheduled Tribes	57.5	39.1	3.3	0.2
Dimasa	59.0	37.7	3.0	0.2
Mikir	59.9	36.6	0.1	
Boro	56.5	40.0	3.3	0.2
Deori	60.2	36.6	3.1	0.1
Kachari	54.7	41.4	3.7	0.2
Lalung	54.3	41.2	4.2	0.2
Miri	60.5	36.7	2.6	0.2
Rabha	55.1	40.7	4.0	0.2

Sources: Directorate of Economic and statistics, Guwahati, Assam

As regards child marriage, 1.6 per cent of the ST female population below 18 years - the minimum legal age for marriage - has been recorded as ever married. Among the twelve major STs, Lalung have registered the highest at 2 per cent of their female population of

this age category as ever married, while it is the lowest at 1.3 per cent among Miri.

The ever married males below 21 years - the minimum legal age for marriage - constitute only 1.4 percent of the total ST population of this age category. Of the eight major STs, Lalung have registered the highest at 1.6 percent of their male population below the stipulated age as ever married, closely followed by Deori and Miri, each with 1.5 per cent. Dimasas have registered the lowest at 1.2 percent.

Religion

Each tribal community in Assam has its own customs, religion, language and way of life and as such one has a distinct ethnic identity. Their paces of development also differs from region to region and even the level of development the level of development of the people of the same community inhabiting different regions of the state differs considerably. Of the total ST population of Assam, 90.7 per cent are Hindus and 8.8 per cent Christians. Besides these two main religions, 6,267 persons are Muslims, 5,153 Buddhists, and another 3,574 persons have returned pursuing various other faiths.

Economy

Agriculture is the mainstay of the tribal communities of Assam. While in the hill areas shifting cultivation has been practice, in the plain areas people do wet paddy cultivation. In the jhums, the people raise mixed crops. Along with paddy, vegetables are also grown. In the hill areas people do wet paddy cultivation also in the low lying lands between the two ridges and in the plains portions. Due to heavy pressure of population jhum cycle has now been reduced to 4/5 years resulting in more destruction of the hills forests. Many families in the hills have taken up maize, coffee and ginger cultivation also. Oranges and pineapples are also cultivated by them to a limited extent. In the plains area the tribal people cultivate mustard, pulse, jute and vegetable besides paddy.

Sericulture is an important cottage industry among the tribal communities of Assam. Handloom is a household industry. A tribal woman without the knowledge of spinning and weaving is unthinkable. Cattle are also reared by them. As they are traditionally not habituated in drinking milk, cows and she buffalos are generally not milked. Nor this aspect has been commercially exploited fully inspire very high price of milk and milk products. Pigs and fowls are

reared mainly for domestic consumption. Manufacturing of cane and bamboo articles is also one of the important cottage industries of the tribal communities of Assam.

Most of the tribal communities are still having their traditional institutions like the village councils/panchayats, bachelors' dormitories, institutions of mutual helps and cooperation, etc. Rice is their staple food and rice beer is their favourite drink. In all traditional socio-religious festivals and family worships rice beer is a must. In Assam, there are altogether 524 forest villages and 47 percent of the inhabitants of the forest villages belong to the tribal communities²⁰.

Conclusion

Assam is known as the settling ground for many civilizations. Numerous tribal groups have traveled to Assam through different routes as the land was connected to several states and countries. Negritos, Dravidians, Alpines, Tibeto Burmese and Aryans had been the major races that came and dwelled in ancient Assam. They were considered as the aborigines of Assam and even today they are an integral part of the Assamese diaspora. The largest population in Assam is that of the Tibeto Burmese descent known as the Bodo tribe

and Mishing tribe. Major tribes of Assam make out their livelihood through agriculture and by selling their handicrafts. Different types of tribes living in Assam are famous nationwide for their wide variety of handicrafts, handloom and pottery works. The languages of the Assamese tribes too differ according to their places of origin.

Bodo Tribes are one of the earliest tribes that had settled in Assam. They are, however, not restricted to any specific area of the state and are found in almost all parts of Assam. They practice cultivation, tea plantation and poultry farming. Rabha is a scheduled tribe of Assam, belonging to the Indo Mongoloid descent and has resemblance to the Bodo tribe. Karbi tribe, also known as Mikir, usually dwells in the hilly areas of Assam, especially in the North Cachar Hills, Nagaon and Sonitpur districts of the state. On the other hand Mishing Tribe hails from Tibeto Burmese and inhabits the districts of Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Sonitpur, Jorhat and Golaghat, along the banks of River Brahmaputra. Dirugarh and Tinsukia district of Assam, along Dihing River are the settlement areas of Phake Tribes. The Dimasa Tribe lives in the Karbi

Anglong District of Assam. The Lakher tribes of Assam consist of Hawthai, Zuchnanag, Tlongsai, Heima Sabeu and Lialia groups.

One can also find a concentration of the Deori tribal community in Assam only in the nearby regions of the Brahmaputra River. Khamti Tribes, Naga Tribes and Santhals are also some of the oldest tribal groups of Assam. Lalung tribal community is one of the important tribal communities that have resided in Assam. Besides these the Singpho tribes of the Tinsukia district of Assam also form an important Assamese tribal group. The tribes of Assam are the colorful people who celebrate some of the most ethnic festivals like Bihu, Baishagu, Rongker, Ali-Ai-Ligang, Baikho and others.

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in serial no. 6, seven tribes are grouped together. Similarly in serial 7, thirty seven groups are enlisted together. Serial no. 12 also includes two Naga tribes. Thus the total number of tribes in Assam would come to 65, 9 in the plains areas and 57 in the hill areas.

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