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ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SCHEDULED CASTE IN ASSAM AND
SUGGESTION FOR UPLIFT THE POOR ECONOMIC CONDITION OF
THE SCHEDULED CASTE.

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ABSTRACT

Caste has been an enigma to the modern thinkers. According to the Chambers Dictionary, it is a social in India and exclusive social class. It means that it is limited to India and to the Hindu religion only and to no other country or religion, in the world. It is a hoary institution and infraclass is very complex. Caste is a system of social organization found in old India and continuing to the present day. The membership in a caste is hereditary and this is fixed for life. The scheduled caste is characterized by the lowest social status. From time immemorial the scheduled castes suffered from social injustice and exploitation so as to prevent them from rising above. They were denied entry in to several occupations which were well paid and the field of their activities was restricted to unclean and mental jobs. They had no access to education. The road to knowledge was closed for them. Thus they remained socially, educationally and economically backward. This paper tries to analyse the origin and development of scheduled caste of Assam and suggestion for development of scheduled caste households of Assam.

Keywords: scheduled caste, Assam, social, economic, Hindu.

INTRODUCTION: In Assam there are different caste and communities. The Scheduled Caste is the major communities of the State. In the category of Scheduled Caste there are sixteen sub castes. There are various problems of scheduled castes of Assam such as, land holding, poverty, unemployment etc. Moreover, most of the scheduled caste people are busy in agriculture, fishery, goldsmith, pottery etc.

METHODOLOGY: This study has been conducted based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Secondary sources of data have been collected from published books, journals, newspapers, magazines etc.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SCHEDULED CASTE OF ASSAM : Castes in Assam have begun to be recognized in official records since 1872. Even prior to that we find names so some castes in histories, Chronicles and descriptive accounts describing their status in the Hindu society. "Assam Buranji." By Gunabhiram Barua, cait's "History of Assam, "Descriptive Accounts of Assam" by Rabinson, Mill's Report on Assam. District Gazetteer Kamrup Assam etc). In the District Gazetter of Kamrup various castes prevalent in Assam have been described and their status in society criticized, while the Brahmins in Assam, the torah bearers of caste system and the Kalitas have been kept high in one scale, the rest have been attributed with some sort of stigma. The difference is only in degree. The following castes in Assam are generally

considered low in the Hindu society- Brittil-Bania, Kaibarta, Namosudra and Hira in the Assam valley and patnis, Malis, sutradhar and Namosudra in the surma valley.

In the District Gazetter of Kamrup (B.C. Allen,-1905) mention has been made of Nadiyals, Doms, Jaliya Kaibartas , Namosudra, Chandal, Hira, Brittil-Baniya Who are described to be low in the Hindu society because their profession has been looked down upon by the upper caste Hindu such as Brahnins and Kalitas. They are ranked very low in the social scale and are despised by their Hindu brethren as they have to do some menia or unclean jobs. Those upper caste Hindu do not for a moment realize that the so-called depressed classes do this job no for their pleasure, on the other hand, the upper caste Hindu feels extremely comforting that the Hindu society is so providentially arranged that all the menial jobs of life have never to be done by himself but by a separate set of propel they again advance the queer theory that the Hinduism is an organic whole and the classes of people doing the menial unclean jobs are inseparable components of this organic whole, though they do not accord them equal treatment. It is a small comfort for them to be told that they are still part of that organic whole of the Hindu society. The sort of discomfoting and unenviable situation stifled their progress in all directions. They were deficient in education, in wealth and they could wield no influence whatsoever in the society in which they were moving. The few aspirants for higher education were the worst sufferers. They had to face great social barricades not only in Assam but also outside.

Scheduled Caste : It was in the wake of the Indian political reforms during the thirties that there depressed classes get an effective opportunity of ventilating their grievances against the social injustice from which they were suffering and the social tyrannies to which they had been subjected. They organized a vigorous movement for their emancipation and a share of political rights in the new dispensation. By then they realized fully that political power was the only panacea against, their odds and a means to improve their social economic conditions. By then only it was realized by them that society, economics and politics were complementary to each other and political power was the strongest of them and from this focal emanated social and economic strength. Their original demand before Royal commission (headed by Lord Simon) was for separate electorate for them. This demand was however compromised under what is known as Poona pact in 1932. This pact conceded to the depressed classes certain specific political and administrative privileges in lieu of separate electorates and the depressed classes were renamed scheduled castes by a political arrangement. Tribes and projecting them from social injustice and all form of exploitation” (Article 46)

Articles 330 and 332 of the constitution conferred political right on the scheduled castes in the form of reservation of a specified number of seats in the various state assemblies and the parliament on the basis of population. Article 335 ensures reservation of services and post for the scheduled castes in the affairs of the states. By a presidential order, in pursuance of Article 341, a number of castes were specified as scheduled castes for the purpose of the constitution in general and the above Articles in particular.

Accordingly, by the constitution (scheduled castes), order, 1950, the following sixteen castes were specified as scheduled castes for Assam along with one thousand and odd such castes for the whole of the Republic of India.

1. Kaibarta or Jaliya, 2. Namosudra. 3. Baniyas 4. Hira 5. Patnis 6. The sutrodhar, 7. The Malo, 8. The Dhoba, 9. The Maharas , 10. The Dholis ,11. Muchi, 12. Bhangi Bansfor Lalbegi 13. Bhuimali or Mali, 14. JalKeot or Jalla Keot 15. Jhalo, Malo or Jhalo-Malo. 16. Mehtar or Bhangi

Now I discuss one by one in the following:

Kaibarta:

Kaibartas are the aboriginal inhabitants of Assam. They are one of the sixteen scheduled caste communities of the state as per constitution (Scheduled Castes) order, 1950. According to 1971 census the total population of Assam is 1,46,25,152 out of which the number of scheduled caste population is 9,12,557.

Opines differ regarding the origin of the term Kaibarta. In Assam this term is used mainly to indicate the people whose main profession is fish trade. Thus Doms and Nadiyals come within the fold of the Kaibartas some. Authors try to include the Keots in the fold of the Kaibartas. William Robinson traces the Kaibarta origin among the Keots who are no longer treated as Kaibartas. "The Nadiyals or Doms are on the whole the most numerous tribes in Assam. That they originally emigrated from Bengal, there can be little doubt. Their original employment is that of fishermen. There are good many Keyots or some please to call themselves, Kaibartas. They are divided into several classes, the two principal are called the Haloya Keots and the jaluya Keots. The former class are chiefly cultivators of the ground. These retain the worship of Krishna. The jaliya Keots are fishermen and without having relinquished their name or profession; have in many points followed the tenets of Mahomed. Yet they keep themselves district as a caste and will not mix with the Moslems".

Although Doms and Nadiyals of Assam are categorised as Kaibartas, yet traditionally there are clear cut distinctions between the Kaibartas and Keots on the one hand and Doms and Nadiyals on the other B.C. Allen observes " The names Kewat and Kaibartta are used more or less indiscriminately for the same caste in Assam. Owing to the comparative scarcity of the higher castes, the cultivating Kewats occupy a higher position in this province than in Bengal, but some of them have taken to styling themselves Mahisya Vaishya, as they resent the attempt on the part of the Nadiyals or Doms to assume the name Kaibartta . The Nadiyals or Doms are a fishing Caste and in Assam have never performed any of the degrading officers assigned to them in Bengal.

The term Kaibarta has got currency for the fishing communities like Doms, Nadiyals and Jaluwa Keots. In the early writings of the historians and ethnographers no serious attempt was made to trace the origin of the Kaibartas.

On the whole, we may come to the conclusion that Kaibartas are the earliest settlers of Assam and they are as found to-day, a scheduled caste community following both fishing and agriculture as professions.

Namasudras :

The Namasudras are the aborigines 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 1971 census stood at 300818 which is 32.97% of the total Scheduled Caste population in Assam. Their literacy percentage is 21.32%.

The Namasudra people are found all over Assam and specially in the following regions.

1. All over Nowgaon district. In Barpeta sub Division and in Rangia, Nagrijuli region upto Bhutan border. Nalbari, Chaygaon, Panikhaiti, Nagar Bera, Palash Bari, Guwahati and Goalpara District.

Namasudra is the little under which the chandals try to hide their true caste. In the Brahmaputra valley they call themselves CHARAL, Mr. RISLEY suggested that chandal may have been tribal name of one of the aboriginal of the soil. 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 during the reign of Raja Ballov Sen, who was a strong supporter of Brahmins and caste distinction, forced the Namasudras to accept some inhuman rules.

Banias :

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 were their primary occupation. But in the course of time as a 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 i.e. Silchar and Karimganj. But majority of them are found in Darrang, Sonitpur, Nogaon, Abhayapuri. They live in most cases in clusters unlike other scheduled castes the BANIAS are not backward in respect of education. Their percentage of literacy is 38.95% which tops the literacy rate of all the scheduled castes of Assam. They have a bonafide Assamese heredity and the traditional Goldsmith occupation. But due to the enforcement of the Gold control Act their Goldsmithy occupation stopped. They have not been provided with alternative profession. The poor BANIAS can not take to cultivation also as only a very few percentage of them have cultivable lands.

Hira :

One pilgrim from orissa Shri Mohendra Mahapatra who came with his family to visit Kamakhya temple about 500/600 years back. He died in Kamakhya and his wife Hira Devi with her two minor sons had to face untold miseries because she could not go back to orissa also with here minor sons as in those days there was no such communication and the only mode of communication was boat and foot. One fine morning while she was going by the bank of Brahmaputra in search of livelihood. She found a piece of shining clay. She took a lump there of and found it very flexible without any crack. Necessity inspired her to mould the clay in to various form of earthen pots and used to burn them with help of her sons.

These earthen pots were easily marketable as people could cook their foods in these pots and the pots did not crack while cooking. Hence this particular clay is called Hiramati after the name of Hira Devi.

But the Brahmins did not allow her two sons to put on sacred treads 'Lagun', although they were vaidic Brahmin in origin. They were not allowed because they followed the 'KUMAR' profession. Subsequently Hira Devi died and her two sons were with their pottery making profession. The Brahmins made them outcaste. Ultimately from a place near PANDU they were compelled to migrate to village BAHATI in Goalpara to earn their livelihood with Hira potteries. Their progenies are the present Hiras spread throughout Assam and acquired the little 'HIRAS' after the name of the revered mother Hira Devi.

In course of time this Brahmin origin community has become untouchables and presently it is a scheduled caste in Assam. It is strange that the earthen pots are considered pure and used almost in all religious ceremonies. But the man who makes the pots in deemed to be an untouchable in society. This is due to lack of education and their economic backwardness. The economic backwardness resulted in hard hit livelihood which prevented their children from proper

education and culture, and thus their social status came down and ultimately became untouchable.

The Hira differ from potters of other castes in that, their women are engaged in the work, and that they shape their pots by hand instead of by the aid of a wheel. They make them in four layers each of which is partially dried before the next is added. When the whole is complete they pile the vessels in a heap, with grass between each, to which they then set fire and thus backed the clay.

Patinis :

PATNIS who were known as PATAUNI, NADIALS and (adi) Mahishya had different trades like boating, finishing, basket making trading and cultivation in the early 19th and 20th centuries. They have not switched over to cultivation while fishing is their secondary occupation. PATNIS claim to be the off spring of Madhab patni who ferried Rama chandra across the Ganges. Patni and KAIBARTA originally belonged to the same stock. In the history they were referred as Samudra putra Ganga putra etc. In the census of 1901 the patnis were recorded as patnis or Nadiyahal with a view to maintain their separate identity from 'DOMS'. The patnis on the eve of the census of 1921 succeeded in establishing their support from the 'DIHING SATRADHIKAR' of 'NOGORA' SATRA of Golaghat in support of their claim to be designated as Kaibartas, and the Govt. of Assam allowed the Nadiyahals to be recorded as KAIBARTS. At present PATNI as a caste is found only in KARIMGANJ and Silchar districts of Cachar.

In the census report of 1921 patni community of cachar was shown as 'Mahishya' But in the end of the census of 1931 some caste Hindu people and enumerators made efforts to dub them as patnis. The census Superintendent of Assam in one place of his report of 1931 wrote. 'The patnis in cachar have assumed the Nomenclature of Mahishya Das. Patnis are making all endeavour to life themselves up socially and educationally. Out of the total scheduled caste population in Assam, Patni Community have got 85910 which accounts for 9.41 percent of the scheduled caste population in Assam. Their percentage of literacy 31.87 percent within the scheduled caste of Assam. Few families have come up economically, but majority are poverty stricken.

The Sutrodhar:

The sutrodhar is the carpenter caste of cachar District, Goalpara and Dhubri District. The people of 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. As per census report of 1971 the population of sutrodhar community was 32703 which was 3.58% of the total scheduled caste population in Assam. Their literacy percentage within the scheduled caste is 20.26%.

The 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 Kaibartas, are representatives of pre-historic. Dwellers in the Gangatic delta. The MALOS are inhabitants of the cachar district of Assam. A few families are living in Goalpara and Dhubri district. Their population as per 1971 census was 32978 which was 3.61% of the total scheduled caste people in Assam. Their literacy percentage within the scheduled caste was 15.25%.

The Dhobi or Dhoba :

They are not original inhabitants of Assam. In Assam they have come from Bengal, Bihar and orissa. They are not from the indigenous people of Assam and

a great controverse 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 district castes. DHOBA being the washerman from Bengal and orissa and the DHOBI of Bihar. In Assam however both these words are used indircrimintely.

The Musalman washerman is called usually DHOBI in Assam, while the term DHOBA is generally applied to the Hindu who follows the washerman occupation. As per 1971 census report the DHOBI population strength in Assam stood at 20,801 which is 2.28% of the total schedule castes in Assam. Their percentage of literacy is 30.08% amongst the scheduled castes.

The Maharas :

In the census of 1961 vol.III Assam, part V-A we find that Maharas are chiefly employed as zamindars poens, Mandals etc. their traditional occupation is palki bearing. The legend is that they are the decedents of palki bearers engaged by the zamindars in Bengal. In order to avoid the inconvenience which the zamindars experience is not being able to employ the palki bearers to prepare their 'HOOKAH' as they could not touch their water. They engaged other SUDRAS for this work. The sudras thus employed were degraded and the caste Hindus do not touch their water, although the smoke the HOOKAH prepared by MAHARS. This caste is peculiar to cachar district only. Before partition they were seen only in SYLHET, but after partition of the coutry few families migrated to cachar district. They are from the indigenous group of Bengal and not of Assam. The census report of 1971 reveals that in 1971 their population was 899 only and their percentage was 0.09% of the total Scheduled Caste population in Assam and their percentage of literacy 13.79% amongst the scheduled caste.

The Dholis :

The DHOLIS or DHOLAS are called drummers. They are immigrants from Bengal and settled in Cachar district of Assam. Some of them are cultivators and reared of animals. This caste in said to be much degraded one. They have no Brahmin. Its priest is chosen from amongst the members of the caste itself. According to 1971 census report their population in 1971 was 4013 which is 0.44% of the total scheduled caste population. Their literacy percentage amongst the scheduled caste people is 15.02%.

Muchi:

The MUCHI is leather working class and they mainly found in cachar. They are however available in other district also. They are immigrants from Bihar, Orissa. MUCHI is a cobbler and leather dresser. They are an offshoot of the chamar caste. As per 1971 census their population was 40774 which are 4.47% of total scheduled caste population in Assam. Their literacy percentage within the scheduled caste is 12.77 %.

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 Musalman is his custom and belief and is supposed to have come originally from upper India. In Assam sweepers and Scavenges mostly come from Bihar followed by panjabi speaking people. All of them live in quarters allotted to them by the Municipal Boards and Municipal corporation. As per 1971 census report the population of BHANGI community stood at 7296 which is 0.79% of the total S.C. population percentage of literacy is 14.48%.

The population of BANSFOR community stood at 6093 which is 0.67% of the total S.C population and the percentage of literacy stood at 15.16% . The population of LALBEGI community stood at 45 only.

Bhuimali or Mali:

They comprise 2.43% of the total scheduled caste population in Assam. Total population as per 1971 census was 22175. Literacy percentage within the scheduled caste is 26.94% Their main occupation now is gardening of flowers to sell in the temples and cultivation. Though they are present in surma vally, but a section of them settled near Hojo Haigrig Temple, Palasbari and other places. Their main occupation now is agriculture.

Jal Keot or Jalla Keot:

Selling of fish was confined to the Kaibartas and JAL KEOT in Assam. But the JAL KEOTs 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 1971 census report, their population in Assam was 2537 which is 0.28% of the total scheduled caste population. Their literacy percentage within the scheduled caste is 26.33%.

(Source : Bhakta Das, A Glimpse of the Scheduled castes and their socio economic Development in Assam, 1986).

From the above discussion it is clear that there are sixteen sub castes of scheduled castes. Now let us discuss the scheduled caste population in Assam, census 2011.

TABLE : I
DISTRIBUTION OF SCHEDULED CASTE POPULATION IN ASSAM,
CENSUS 2011.

District	Total SC	Female	Sex Ratio
Kokrajhar	29570	14184	922
Dhubri	62628	30266	935
Goalpara	45094	22095	961
Barpeta	95320	46155	939
Morigaon	117841	57647	958
Nagaon	156913	77258	970
Sonitpur	65367	31893	953
Lakhimpur	81840	40151	963
Dhemaji	44225	21219	922
Tinsukia	37688	18245	938
Dibrugarh	58876	28359	929
Sivasagar	34847	17094	963
Jorhat	64787	31856	967
Golaghat	62298	30491	959
Karbi Anglong	33523	16021	915
Dima Hasao	4337	1997	853
Cachar	264897	128846	947
Karimganj	157890	76506	940
Hailakandi	70659	34290	943
Bongaigaon	82784	40271	947
Chirang	35135	17030	941
Kamrup	107827	52590	952
Kamrup Metro	101789	49683	953

Nalbari	60216	29562	964
Baksa	73083	35549	947
Darrang	40260	19694	958
Udalguri	37844	18442	951
Biswanath	43763	21420	959
Charaideo	7500	3685	966
Hojai	109437	52619	926
Majuli	23878	11615	947
South Salmara	7767	3770	943
West k. Anglong	11438	5504	928
Assam	2231321	1086007	948

Source : Statistical hand book 2019.

From the above discussion it is clear that according to census 2011, there were total 2231321 populations were Scheduled caste in Assam. Out of 2231321 persons 1086007 were female. Cachar has the highest scheduled caste population in Assam, which has 264897 persons. Out of 264897, 128846 were female and the highest female in Assam. Dima Hasao has the lowest scheduled caste population which has 4337 persons. Out of 4337, 1997 were female.

TABLE : II
POPULATION OF INDIVIDUAL SCHEDULED CASTE
IN ASSAM, CENSUS 2011.

Scheduled caste name	Number of household	Total population	Male population	Female population
All scheduled caste	495475	2231321	1145314	1086007
Bansphor	3343	16359	8189	8170
Mali	15738	69535	35621	33914
Bania	11733	50598	25777	24821
Dhupi, Dhobi	11910	52431	27029	25402
Dugla, Dholi	2050	7991	4091	3900
Hira	12829	55300	27860	27440
Jalkeot	5598	24774	12626	12148
Jhalo, Malo	17385	80376	41620	38756
Kaibarta, Jaliya	153413	693219	353177	340042
Lalbegi	333	790	404	386
Mahara	414	1822	1020	802
Mehtar, Bhangi	2111	8835	4489	4346
Muchi, Rishi	18651	77643	39875	37768
Namasudra	133858	631542	326753	304789
Patni	41491	181904	93599	88305
Sutradhar	14764	66303	34121	32182

Source: Statistical hand book 2019.

From the table – ii , it is clear that in Assam there are total SC population are 2231321. Out of 2231321, total numbers of household are 495475. Total male populations are 1145314 and female populations are 1086007. The kaibarta/Jaliya has the highest 153413 household. According to census 2011, the sub caste of Kaibarta/Jalaya has the largest population of 693219 among the all sub castes of Assam. Lalbegi is the lowest sub caste of Assam. It has total number of population are

790.

On the basis of the study, I would like to offer the following suggestions in order to uplift the poor economic condition of the scheduled castes households-

1. There should be compulsory free education up to matriculation introduced to cover all children of the urban and rural area.
2. Reservation of seats in the institutions of higher education for S.C should be increased.
3. Caste and Tribe certificate should be recorded in the School and Colleges.
4. Vocation oriented education should be introduced to cover all children in urban and rural area.
5. Educational institutions in the scheduled caste households inhabited areas should be developed.
6. Small scale and large scale industries should be started in rural parts, small towns and certain percentage of jobs can be reserved for scheduled caste household.
7. Scheduled caste candidates seeking election through reserved constituencies should be given just two terms in any political party.

CONCLUSION:- From the above discussion it is clear that the scheduled caste populations of Assam are facing some problems. Therefore, the Government will take some special steps for development of scheduled caste in Assam.

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