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"Caste, Gender and Education among the Harijans of Guwahati City"

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ABSTRACT

Caste system along with gender-based discrimination in education has deep-rooted disparities in society. Modern Indian Education system has focused on making education reach to every door of Indians. It not an easy task to make education reach to every person in a caste based society of India. Harijan, now being called as Dalits and are now under the Scheduled caste category of India's population and caste system remains as barrier or hindrance for them in pursuing higher education. The Harijan community has been facing discrimination, torture and humiliation from several decades and prevalence of untouchability system remains a major barrier for them in the path of development. Harijans were considered as impure for their work related to cleaning, washing clothes, skinning of animals etc. The condition of Harijan women is even worst in comparison to their male counterpart and non-Harijan women. Education is such a ladder through which one can change his or her life but access to education is not an easy task for them. Government has try their level best for the Harijan /Dalit community by providing various benefits through welfare schemes but it has not able to make a satisfactory result . Gender discrimination is well evident in Harijan community. Parents in their society are more interested in educating their sons rather than in their daughter. Early marriage, domestic chores, traditional and conservative thinking remains as a major barrier for Harijan women. Harijan girls in many cases have to limit her education up to school level. After schooling there are only a few fortunate one who could pursue higher education, after crossing all the hurdles. Education bring about social and economic change and acts as a powerful weapon to enforce justice, equality and fraternity among all sections including the scheduled caste in India. The paper attempts to study the changes that have occurred among the Harijans of Guwahati city in six selected colonies under the light of education and its impact on caste and gender.

INTRODUCTION

The Harijans were considered as the depressed class and comprise of 16% of Indian population. Mahatma Gandhi called these classes of people as Harijans 'children of God'. The term Dalit later came to be used but the official designation Scheduled caste is most commonly used in India. The Harijans are considered as untouchables and even Sanskritization failed to bring equilibrium in the society with regard to the Harijans. It was only during the British period with new opportunities in education, business and commerce that led to some social mobility and improved the conditions of these Harijans. The provision of the Constitution for education and economic upliftment of the Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes, outlawing of untouchability, and its practice in any form declared as criminal offence are some steps which brought about a revolutionary change in the society. However, though it is still believed that higher education remains confined to the upper classes education has mobilized people's aspirations and is one of the most significant contributor towards modernization in India.

Education and that too contemporary education have a totally different orientation with its contents being liberal. It is infused with modern scientific world-view and can be considered as an agent of modernization. Education is considered as an important factor to bring about changes in society. India is reeling under poverty and one main causes of the present state is illiteracy. Education though is made free and compulsory up to the age of 18 years according to the new rules of government but due to several problems it has not been able to reach every section of the society. Education is open to one and all. It is considered as a compulsory requirement for every child. Caste discrimination remains a major barrier behind it. Caste discrimination in education is an anathema to the constitutional spirit of fraternity. Education and caste share a very close relationship. Education brings about social and economic change and acts as a powerful weapon to enforce justice, equality and fraternity among all sections including the scheduled castes in India. Caste discrimination can be considered as a social prejudice. B.R.Ambedkar once mentioned that caste intercepts every aspect of social life (Dhumal 2018:25). If there is caste differentiation in educational institutions, it creates hurdles in the process of learning and students are deprived of equal opportunity in learning.

Objective of Study:

- 1) To study the impact of education on Harijans
- 2) To study the attitude of Harijan girls toward higher education.
- 3) To analysis the causes of educational dropouts among Harijans

Study Area:

The present study was made among the Harijans of six selected Harijan colonies of Guwahati that is in Morisali Harijan colony, Rupnagar Harijan Colony, Uzanbazar Harijan Colony, Maligaon Harijan Colony, Panbazar Harijan colony and Fatasil Ambari Harijan colony.

Methodology:

The paper presented is based on data collected in the course of fieldwork undertaken among the Harijan (Dalits) inhabiting in the six selected Harijan colonies of Guwahati city in Kamrup (metro), Assam. Mixed method approach is being applied for the present study using both qualitative and quantitative data. Primary data were collected using structured household schedules, followed by

interview method and non participant observation. Sample of 529 households were randomly selected for study purpose. Secondary source such as papers, journals were also being consulted.

The Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850 provided opportunities for social equalization within India especially for the downtrodden classes of people in India but it does not help in much benefit. Even now if we try to compare to those of non Dalits the enrolment rates of Dalits/Harijans is very low. There have been number of suggestion proposed as to why Dalits/Harijans have not yet to take advantages of open access to education. Some have suggested that Dalits/Harijans posses an apathetic attitude towards education and so the thought of attending school seem unappealing and inefficient compare to entering the workforce or doing nothing at all. Another suggestion of the cause for low access to education to Dalits is that most families are caught in a vicious cycle of illiteracy and poverty. Therefore not only parents have no incentive to have their children attend school but they frequently lack the financial means to send them to fee based schooling system of India (Nambissan1996:1011 as cited by Fraser Erik2010:3). At present the various programs has been undertaken by the government to improve the level of literacy rate among Harijans yet their literacy rate is not to that satisfactory rate if we compare with non Harijans students. The condition is even worst in case of female education of Harijan community. Even recent studies also revealed that education system in India has been benefited only to upper castes and not to the Dalits (Satyanarayana, 2002 as cited by Kumar V.S.Wesly2017:14).It is revealed that Dalits and the poor are at disadvantage in getting benefits from education (Aikara, 2004, as cited by Kumar V.S.Wesly2017:14).The female child is considered as burden on some families and they were accustomed with more and more domestic chores than going to school. Parents are more interested in educating their sons rather than their daughter as they have a mentally than their sons will look after them in their old age while their daughters will have to go their husband's house after marriage. Socioeconomic deprivation and its consequent social exclusion of Dalits/Harijan in society are continuing even today and it will continue until and unless the Harijans becomes educationally and economically sound.

Guwahati the hub of North –East India is a home of both tribal and non-tribal groups of people. Guwahati has numbers of Harijan colonies and these people have been living with full liberty and freedom since the day of their arrival in this region of India. It has been a place of migration of people from different parts of India. Guwahati is thereby a hub of different culture and tradition. The migrated people who came from other parts of India and settled in this part of region do not want to return very easily as in Assam much liberty was granted to them in case of economy, cultural practice, tradition and religion. The flow of Harijan people to this part is still at present continuing for which the population is increasing. Education is considered to be the only way through which the Harijan could improve their condition. There are only a few Harijan children who could complete their higher education smoothly. In this case the support of parents is utmost important but in most cases they are deprived from getting proper assistance as most of their parents were not properly educated and at the same time economically weaker. For this reason most children's have to left their education halfway as the pressure of earning come first than education .Thus the problem of dropout arises and it is very

common circumstances. The level of education of Harijans though has improved a lot as compared to other decades but then only it is not satisfactory. The condition of girl child education was even more worst as compared to male counterpart. There are many school dropout and many were found to left their education half way as most of them failed in class. There are also a section of people among the colony people who considered that there is no need of higher education for their children as they have to continue with their traditional cleaning jobs and in that jobs the required qualification is not very high. It was seen that there were many families those who spend liberally from their limited income for the education of their children, while it is also seen that some parents who engaged their children as child labor to earn for their family. In counterpart of these there were some parents were much conscious about their ward education. These parents made every possible effort to make their children well qualified, so that they can avail to other jobs. While collecting data regarding educational qualification we found that the level of education varies in different colonies. Some colonies have high literacy rate while in some colonies it is low. Still it was found that as compared to earlier generation the present generation has become more conscious about importance of education in their life.

Discrimination is not found to be deep rooted in Assam especially in rural areas. However, some sense of low self-esteem is experienced by some Harijan students. They have informed that now there is no difference in seating patterns inside classrooms and they are not despised by other classmates. However, some of their friends do not take food when they visit them in their colonies. On the other hand, these Harijan fellows are invited by their friends from other castes people and they are treated equally with others and served food as well. That is why; most of these Harijan youths feel reluctant to invite their friends for weddings, birthdays and other such social occasions. Though this stigma attached to the caste has lessened it is still present in a very insignificant manner. Education, thus, has been able to disperse these evils of caste discrimination, notions of pollution and untouchability, though not fully. These evils are present among some sections of people even today. The enlightened ones are free from these evils. It is the schools and colleges and the new education system which has led to the social mobility and realization of goals like equality, secularism and fraternity. Among the study colonies of the Harijans, the number of drop-outs for boys and girls is quite prominent. But girls are mainly the ones who discontinue studies at an early age. Gender disparities are noticed in the field of education among these Scheduled Caste people. Other than financial conditions, family-oriented role and responsibilities, safety and security of girls/daughters, early marriage are some causes cited for poor enrolment in schools. The incidence of drop-out and stagnation for girls is much higher than that of boys at primary and upper primary stage. Girls are found to be more susceptible to violence, especially sexual violence. There have been increased cases of sexual abuse, rape, sexual exploitation everywhere. This fear of sexual violence also forces parents to keep their daughters at home and discontinue their studies. Jain and Arora's 1995 study suggests that gender differences in the performance of students narrowed with an increase in the socio-economic status of children. Girls also tend to have to take on more household duties and sibling care than boys, potentially affecting achievement levels(as cited in Bandyopadhyay & Subrahmanian2008:25) Some studies have suggested that gender differences in achievement level can be

bridged if adequate attention is provided to girls, both within the home and the classroom(Bandyopadhyay & Subrahmanian2008:25).

Table; 1: Comparison of Causes of dropout in the six Harijan colony of Guwahati, Kamrup (metro), Assam (2017-2019)

Cause of dropouts	Morisali Harijan colony	Uzanbazar Harijan Colony	Rupnagar Harijan Colony	Fatasil Ambari Harijan Colony	Maligaon Harijan colony	Panbazar Harijan Colony
Pressure of earning	68	66	11	62	24	42
Not interested in study	20	27	3	19	12	19
Lack of financial support from parents	19	37	5	10	19	8
Lack of financial support from Government	10	18	3	7	4	3
Lack of support from parents in study	25	17	6	32	15	12
Failure in class	32	43	5	41	19	17
Lack of study environment in home	20	28	3	10	-	7
Slum environment	12	12		7	-	-
Discrimination in the class	7	15		7	-	-
Poverty issue	65	97	12	74	38	31
Household chores	40	56	10	32	26	21
Early marriage	28	56	9	29	24	14
Health issue	11	29	3	12	4	5
Total percentage	357	501	70	342	185	179

The table gives a description of comparison of six Harijan colonies of Guwahati along with the causes of various dropout percentages at different level of education (Primary, secondary and higher). It was found that dropout due to pressure of earning for the family is highest in Morisali Harijan colony next to Uzanbazar Harijan colony, Fatasil Ambari Harijan Colony, Rupnagar Harijan colony, while It is low in case of Maligaon Harijan Colony and Panbazar Harijan colony. While due to lack of interest in study category also Uzanbazar Harijan colony has highest rate of dropout's rate, while it is lowest in Rupnagar Harijan colony. Due to lack of financial support the rate of dropouts is again highest in Uzanbazar Harijan colony, while it is lowest in Panbazar Harijan colony, while in the other colonies the rate of dropouts is between moderate levels. In case of lack of support from the Government also Morisali Harijan and Uzanbazar Harijan colony have almost same level of dropouts, while there are few cases of dropouts due to lack of

support from the Government in other colonies. In respect of lack of support from parents in study matter Morisali Harijan colony and Fatasil Harijan colony have more numbers. Again due to failure in the class Uzanbazar Harijan colony and Fatasil Harijan colony have large numbers while lowest rate of failure in this category comes under Rupnagar Harijan colony. Due to lack of proper study environment at home Uzanbazar Harijan colony is in the top level while it is lowest in Maligaon Harijan colony. Slum environment does not prove to be the cause of dropouts among the Maligaon Harijan colony, Panbazar Harijan Colony and in Rupnagar Harijan colony. Again because of discrimination, the cause of dropouts is highest in Uzanbazar Harijan colony while it is absent in Rupnagar Harijan colony, Maligaon Harijan Colony and Panbazar Harijan Colony but there were cases of discrimination in Morisali Harijan colony and Fatasil Ambari Harijan colony. Poverty remains a major cause of dropouts in almost all the six colonies. Domestic chores and early marriage also hamper a child specially a girl child and in this respect almost all the colonies is equal but among them Uzanbazar Harijan colony has the highest numbers of cases. Due to various health problems many students has left their education halfway. This mainly happens for not following the basic norms of health and hygiene. In this regard Uzanbazar Harijan colony has the highest number of dropouts

Table 2: Dropouts rates of the six Harijan Colonies of Guwahati, Kamrup (Metro), Assam 2017-2019

No. of Dropouts	Rupnagar Harijan Colony Total Population Male + Female = 156		Maligaon Harijan Colony Total Population Male + Female = 749		Fatisil Ambari Harijan Colony Total Population Male + Female = 769		Morisali Harijan Colony Total Population Male + Female = 800		Panbazar Harijan Colony Total Population Male + Female = 734		Uzanbazar Harijan Colony Total Population Male + Female = 836	
	mal e	fema le	mal e	fema le	mal e	fema le	mal e	fema le	mal e	fema le	mal e	Fema le
	80	76	399	350	416	353	430	370	410	324	432	404
Dropout number	32	38	80	105	166	176	172	185	82	97	259	242
Dropout percentage	40 %	50%	20 %	30%	40 %	50%	40 %	50%	20 %	30%	60 %	60%
Total dropout male+fem ale	70		185		342		357		179		501	
Total droupout percentage male+fem	45%		25%		44%		45%		24%		60%	

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The above table shows the number and percentage of dropouts among the six Harijan colonies of Guwahati city. From the table it is seen that the number of dropouts is highest in Uzanbazar Harijan colony and lowest in Panbazar Harijan colony; while among the other colonies it is of moderate level. Among the entire six Harijan colonies it was found that the number of dropout rate is higher in case of females than in males.

Table3:Level of Education among the Harijan Students of six Harijan colonies of Guwahati city,Kamrup(metro),Assam,2017-19

Level of learning	Rupnagar Harijan colony Total students 58				Fatasil Ambari Harijan colony Total students 447				Panbazar Harijan colony Total students 250			
	ma le	%	fema le	%	ma le	%	fema le	%	ma le	%	fema le	%
In primary	5	16.13	7	25.93	38	14.73	24	12.70	22	16.18	13	11.40
In M.E. school	5	16.13	6	22.22	-	-	-	-	21	15.44	20	17.54
In High school	8	25.81	9	33.33	44	17.05	40	21.16	21	15.44	23	20.18
In Higher secondary level	6	19.35	3	11.11	38	14.73	37	19.58	26	19.12	28	24.56
In Bachelors' degree	4	12.90	2	7.41	38	14.73	24	12.70	18	13.24	18	15.79
In Masters' degree	-	-	-	-	20	7.75	18	9.52	8	5.88	4	3.51
In technical	3	9.68	-	-	21	8.14	10	5.29	9	6.62	-	-
Others(students preparing /searching for government jobs/private jobs/competitive exams)	-	-	-	-	59	22.87	36	19.05	11	8.09	8	7.02
total	31	100%	27	100%	258	100%	189	100%	136	136	114	100%
Level of learning	Morisali Harijan colony Total students 364				Maligaon Harijan colony Total students 273				Uzanbazar Harijan colony Total students 389			
	ma le	%	fema le	%	ma le	%	fema le	%	ma le	%	fema le	%
In primary	43	22.87	48	27.27	38	23.46	24	21.62	42	21.11	38	20
In M.E. school	38	20.21	42	23.86	26	14.05	20	18.01	44	22.11	46	24.22
In High school	43	22.87	43	24.43	24	14.81	21	18.92	37	18.59	39	20.53

In Higher secondary level	28	14.89	24	13.64	26	16.05	23	20.72	24	12.06	35	18.42
In Bachelors' degree	12	6.38	9	5.11	24	14.81	12	10.81	32	16.08	10	5.26
In Masters' degree	12	6.38	10	5.68	14	8.64	8	7.21	-	-	-	-
In technical	12	6.38	-	-	10	6.17	3	2.70	-	-	-	-
Others(students preparing /searching for government jobs/private jobs/competitive exams)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	10.05	22	11.58
total	188	100%	176	100%	162	100%	111	100%	199	100%	190	100%

The above table reveals the levels of learning among the six Harijan colony of Guwahati city. The table shows different picture in six different colonies. In primary to M.E. level the numbers are quite satisfactory in all the six colonies. The numbers of students pursuing H.S. are almost of same level among the six colonies. But higher the level of learning, the numbers started decreasing in all the colonies. Fatasil Ambari colony has highest numbers of students pursuing Bachelor degree while Rupnagar colony has lowest in numbers. The numbers of students in Bachelor degree level are also not quite satisfactory in other colonies. Again in Master Degree level, Fatasil Ambari have highest numbers of students while it is absent in Uzanbazar Harijan colony and in Rupnagar Harijan colony. The numbers of students pursuing Master degree in other colonies are very few in numbers. In case of technical education there are few students and in this regards also the numbers are highest in Fatasil Ambari colony while it is absent in Uzanbazar Harijan colony. There were also some students who were preparing for Government jobs exams and other competitive exam. This also shows that a new trend have been arising among the Harijan youth to get a Government jobs /crack any exam by preparing for it such as by taking coaching for it etc.

Table; 4: Families associated with their Traditional background/caste background among the six Harijan colony of Guwahati Kamrup (metro) Assam, 2017-19.

Opinion	Morisali Harijan Colony	Fatasil Ambari Harijan Colony	Uzanbazar Harijan colony	Rupnagar Harijan Colony	Maligaon Harijan colony	Panbazar Harijan Colony
Want to continue their traditional	No.of families associated with it	No.of families associated with it	No.of families associated with it	No.of families associated with it	No.of families associated with it	No.of families associated with it

work	55 families	42 families	65 families	15 families	22 families	32 families
Do not want to continue their traditional work	45 families	58 families	35 families	14 families	78 families	68 families
Did not want to expose their caste identity	32 families	36 families	38 families	8 families	35 families	34 families
Happy to live in the Harijan colony	45 families	47 families	42 families	12 families	46 families	48 families
Not happy to live in the Harijan colony	55 families	53 families	58 families	17 families	54 families	52 families

The above table reveals the number of families associated with their traditional background or caste background. In regard of continuing their traditional work Uzanbazar Harijan colony top the list while it is lowest in Maligaon Harijan colony. Panbazar Harijan colony is in highest percentage in matter of not exposing their caste identity while it is lowest in Morisali Harijan colony. While all most all the six Harijan colonies have a moderate percentage in matter of their happiness to live in the Harijan colony.

Table;5: No of families run by the income of women solely in the six Harijan colonies of Guwahati city, Kamrup (metro), Assam, 2017-2019

Fatasil Ambari Harijan colony	Morisali Harijan colony	Uzanbazar Harijan colony	Panbazar Harijan colony	Maligaon Harijan colony	Rupnagar Harijan colony
23families	25 families	22 families	31 families	24 families	7 families

The above table reveals that women can solely take the responsibility of running her family like her male counterpart. Usually in Harijan community women were found to work equally with their male counterpart but in some cases a women has to solely take the responsibility of her whole family in her hand.

The Harijan girls who are educated are not married off at a tender age. These Harijan girls are supporting the family like their brothers. This results in the change in the mindset of the people of the colony. Girls those are educated were more

welcome by other caste population. The educated girls prefer an educated husband.

Table; 6: No of families where women get share of property of six Harijan colonies of Guwahati city, Kamrup (metro), Assam, 2017-2019.

Fatasil Ambari Harijan colony	Morisali Harijan colony	Uzanbazar Harijan colony	Panbazar Harijan colony	Maligaon Harijan colony	Rupnagar Harijan colony
43 families	23 families	17 families	32 families	24 families	6 families

The above table gives information that women also get share of their parental property or their husband property though the numbers were not satisfactory. Properties were mainly named in the names of the male members of a family. Even if the man dies his property is usually transformed to his sons rather than to his wife or to his daughters. But still there were some families where properties were in the name of female members.

Conclusion

Harijans of the study colonies are found to be sending their children to schools/colleges as revealed by the literacy rate. Most of these parents are not much educated, either class VII/VIII/IX or X passed. As a result they fail to get good jobs and end up as cleaners in various government and non-government organizations. Their standard of living is not high. It is seen that most of the Harijans of Guwahati city are engaged in the manual work of cleaning from several generations and consider it to be a part of their life. They regard it to be their caste occupation. These people also lack the attitude of saving their income for securing a better future for their children. They waste their hard earned money in drinking, gambling and such other useless things which result in lots of problems not only for them but for which their whole family have to suffer. Though there has been much improvement in this regard but still many parents lack the attitude of future planning for their children's education. A country where women are given respect and honour always progress and where women were dominated, never progress. Because women are like '*mother nature*' which nourishes and care its inhabitants. By looking at the status and position of the women of a country we can estimated the socio-economic background of it. It is true that the condition of Harijans especially Harijan women have changed with the passage of time. This is evident in their increasing level of pursuing education but though the rate is slow if we compared with the non-Harijan girls of other caste population. The impact of change is uneven between rural and urban settings. Several social movements and awareness camps are organized to make women recognized her right and could raise her voice against exploitation. The impact of mass media also helps a lot in making the Harijans much aware as now-days news are at hand of people. Women can stand in a society only if she is educated. Empowering women through education can help in restraining all social evils practicing in the society such as child marriage, dowry system. A Harijan woman when she become educated can break the chain of bondage of caste discrimination can move forward in her life. A large majority of Dalits/Harijans have consciously disassociated themselves from

their ‘polluting’ occupation .This is evident among the educated Harijans.

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