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## **STATUS OF SCHEDULED CASTE STUDENTS IN SECONDARY LEVEL OF EDUCATION IN KARIMGANJ DISTRICT OF ASSAM**

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### **Abstract:**

Education is considered to be an important and most vital instrument for the development of any nation. But in a caste ridden and hierarchical society like India's access to educational opportunities is unequal and unjust. Since educational developments took place within the framework of stratified social system, it has always been focused on the needs of the privileged ones. So, the "Directive Principles of State Policy" and article 15(4) of the Indian Constitution enables the state to make special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward class of citizens or for the scheduled caste and tribes. Schedule caste children because of their socio-economic conditions; find it hard to be in schools, though this group comprises about 15% of the country's total population. This study aims to find out the enrollment, retention of schedule caste students and to investigate the problem faced by them in secondary level of education in the second most scheduled caste populated district – Karimganj in the highest populated North Eastern States – Assam. The study followed the descriptive research with survey method. All the secondary schools in Karimganj district constituted the target population. Simple random sampling was followed for the study. Questionnaires were used as tools. The study found that, the scheduled castes in this district are still backward in educational development and achievements. Moreover, the study also revealed that with the increase of level of education, the dropout rate increases in case of scheduled caste students. The socio-economic and socio-familial factors, inadequate government funds and incentives, lack of proper planning and proper implementation of government policies and schemes are acting as the major barriers of schedule caste education in this area.

**Key words:** Scheduled Caste, Secondary Level, Education, Retention, Drop out, Achievements.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education is considered as a powerful catalytic agent for social change and an important instrument for the development of a nation. The role of education as an investment in human resources has been increasingly recognized in all countries. But in a caste ridden and hierarchical

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society like India's access to educational opportunities is unequal and unjust. However, after the independence the 'Directive principles of state policy' enables the state to make special provisions for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward class of citizens, like scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Articles 15(4), 29, 30, 45-46 and 350-A are the relevant provisions in the constitution pertaining to educational development of the people. Article 15(A) provides that, "Nothing in this article or in clause (2) A of Article 29 shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes." In pursuance of these constitutional provision a series of measures have been taken both by the central Government and the state governments to spread education and literacy among the scheduled castes, so that, through educational advancement the social and economic disabilities may also be over remedied. An elaborate programme of pre-matric and post matric scholarships, reservation of seats in the schools and colleges, establishment of hostels and ashrama schools, and other incentives like free text books, uniforms, etc. are in operation for the children of scheduled castes for last six decades.

Though the literacy rate among the scheduled castes has increased from 1.9 percent in 1931 to 10.27 percent in 1961, 14.67 percent in 1971, 21.38 percent in 1981, 37.41 percent in 1991 and 54.7 percent in 2001 in national level, some scheduled caste communities still continue to remain educationally backward and there are some who do not have even single literate person in their fold (census of India, 2001, RGI). Comparable statistics relating to the scheduled caste population for census 2001 shows that though the numbers of literates has surpassed the number of illiterates for the total population, the same is not true for the schedule caste population. While the number of scheduled caste literates has been exceeded the number of illiterates in urban areas, the number of illiterates in rural areas is more than double the number of scheduled castes literates (Census of India, 2001). Though an increase of almost 75 percent in the literacy rate of scheduled castes during 1981-1991 and 1991-2001 was registered on All India basis, but the rate of literacy does not necessarily indicate the level of educational attainment in modern times. Increase in enrolment and decrease in dropout are also two important indicators for measuring the educational development of the various groups in a society. but the dropout rate of scheduled castes for the year 1994-95 at the primary, middle and secondary stages have been reported as 49.03 percent, 67.62 percent and 79.42 percent. Moreover, the literacy rate of females is lower than that of the males; even there are a number of districts in India where, the literacy rate for scheduled caste girls is below 2 percent.

## **RATIONAL OF THE STUDY**

Educational problems of the scheduled castes have been studied by different researchers from time to time. Gangrade (1974), Dubey (1986) in their study argued that enrolment, retention and dropout rate of scheduled caste children in various levels of education varies from region to region and district to district. Chauhan (1975), Yadav (1983) and Shah (1989) in their study found that the most significant reason behind the scheduled caste backwardness in

education lies not in their culture but in the financial problems, poverty and non-implementation of government funds and schemes. Economic status also influences the awareness of scheduled castes about educational opportunities educational schemes, enrolment and continuation of study (Shantakumari, 1976, Yadav, 1987). The scheduled caste students do not differ from non-scheduled caste students in terms of their intelligence, creativity, academic achievements, self concept and self aspiration (Agarwal, 1992, Gaur and Thukral, 1991; Jain and Kaur, 1998) but the enrolment, retention and dropout of scheduled caste students in schools and colleges are influenced by the availability, effective administration and implementation of the programmes and schemes for the welfare of the scheduled castes provided by the government and this is likely to lead the progress of their education (Soni, 1975, George, 1976, Chauhan 1975, Shah, 1981). Education has a considerable impact on their economic conditions but due to limited aspirations, job insecurity and poverty the majority of scheduled caste students are not encouraged to opt for secondary or higher education. Singh (1989) in a study found that, the scheduled caste children differed significantly in terms of parental occupational structure as compared to non-scheduled caste children. The factor related to teachers, parents, community, economic status etc. act as barriers in scheduled caste education in many times (Elangovan, 1989, Rajyaguru, 1992, Bandyopadhyaya, 1992). Moreover, some studies have found a significant lack of awareness of people belonging to scheduled castes about educational importance, educational concessions, scholarships, reservation etc. provided for scheduled castes (Premi, 1774, Punalkar, 1975, Nautiyal, 1986).

Scheduled caste children because of their socio economic conditions, find it hard to be in schools. Though this group comprises about 15 percent of the country's total population, their proportion among poverty group is much higher (census 2001). In Assam the sixteen castes were entered in the list of scheduled castes adopted on the basis of the Poona agreement and the constitution orders 1950 (a) part (II) Assam. According to 2001 census, 85 percent of the SCs are living in rural areas in Assam. In Assam Karimganj is the second most SC populated district having 13.0 percent SC population in the state and 7.2 percent in the district, where, as much as 93 percent of the district population lives in rural areas compared to 11 percent for the state and 26 percent for the country (census, 2001). Despite a lot of progress in the field of education on post independent era, more than 45 percent of the district population is still illiterate as per census 2001. As secondary education is a link between elementary education on the one hand and tertiary and higher education, on the other, the present study attempts to make a comprehensive survey of the existing status of scheduled caste education in secondary level in Karimganj district to identify the measures which are appropriately in line with the actual situation and needs prevailing in the scheduled caste education in the district.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The study was designed with the following objectives:

1. To find out the enrolment and retention of Scheduled Caste students in secondary level of education in Karimganj district.
2. To study the problems faced by scheduled caste students in Secondary level of education in Karimganj district.

### OPERATIONAL TERM

- i. Government Schools: Schools fully financed and managed by the government.
- ii. Secondary Level: Classes VIII, IX and X are considered as secondary level.

### DELIMITATIONS

The present study has been confined to the government secondary (Classes VIII to X) schools in the Karimganj district of Assam.

### PROCEDURE

The study followed descriptive survey method, where, 10 secondary schools (approx 10%) out of 107 secondary schools in the district were selected randomly as sample. Three classes (VIII, IX and X) were selected in those schools. Head of the institutions, class teachers of concerned classes and the scheduled caste students were selected as respondents. Self developed separate questionnaires for headmasters, class teachers and scheduled caste students were used as tools. The responses on different items of the questionnaires were converted into percentages.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Table 1: Class wise comparative enrolment percentage (%) of general and scheduled caste category students**

Year	Class-VIII		Class-IX		Class-X	
	Gen	SC	Gen	SC	Gen	SC
2011	62%	38%	65%	35%	64%	36%
2012	63%	37%	73%	27%	70%	30%
2013	60%	40%	63%	37%	67%	33%

It is observed from the table that, enrolment of schedule caste students as compared to general category remained low in all the three classes. Moreover the results significantly show that, in consecutive three years the enrolment percentages of scheduled caste students go lower as the stages (classes) of education go higher.

**Table 2: Percentage of Scheduled Caste students appeared in final examination as compared to enrolment.**

Year	Class VIII		Class IX		Class X	
	Appeared	Not appeared	Appeared	Not appeared	Appeared	Not appeared
2011	63%	37%	61%	39%	57%	43%
2012	59%	41%	58%	42%	59%	41%
2013	61%	39%	59%	41%	62%	38%

The above table clearly indicates that, retention of scheduled caste students decreases as the level of education increases, because, the percentage of non-appearance in the final examination by them increases as the level (classes) of education increases. The results in the table significantly also show that, in every year in an average of 40 percent of the scheduled caste students do not appear in their final examination.

**Table 3: Teachers' opinion about the causes of backwardness in secondary level of education of scheduled caste students'**

Problems	Percentage (%) of teachers' opinion
Financial problems	68%
Illiteracy of parents	32%
Guardian unconsciousness	30%
Low attendance	72%
More number of children in family	87%
Lack of motivation	17%

The results shown in the above table indicate that, the majority of the teachers have the opinion that, financial problem, guardian unconsciousness, low attendance of the scheduled caste students and illiteracy of parents remain as the major hindrances in backwardness of scheduled caste education in the district.

**Table 4: Scheduled caste students' response on various issues**

Factors affecting education	Response	Percentage (%) of response
Availability of all the text books	Yes	26%
	No	74%
Availability of Govt. funds or incentives	Yes	6%
	No	94%

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Home tutor	Yes	32%
	No	68%
Parental guidance	Yes	9%
	No	91%
Earning for livelihood	Yes	38%
	No	62%
Availability of electricity	Yes	43%
	No	57%
Schooling of all the brother/sister	Yes	28%
	No	72%
Habitation	Rural	76%
	Urban	24%

The data shown in the above table clearly indicate that, majority of the scheduled caste students do not get the facilities like scholarships, home tutors, parental guidance in addition to improper household condition. The result most significantly reveals that, the scheduled caste students mostly reside in rural areas and they have to play a role of earning member of the family in many cases. The striking fact is that almost one third of them do not have even all the textbooks.

### **MAJOR FINDINGS**

1. The enrolment and retention of scheduled caste students goes lower and dropout rate goes higher as the level of classes goes higher.
2. In every academic year in an average of 40 percent of enrolled scheduled caste students do not appear in the final examination.
3. A large portion, almost three fourth (76 percentage) of scheduled caste families live in rural areas.
4. Guardian unconsciousness, lack of guidance, more number of children in scheduled caste families, financial problem remain as major barriers in scheduled caste education.
5. A large percentage of scheduled caste students are deprived of government funds and incentives.

### **CONCLUSION**

Analysis of the results in this study reveals some genuine and significant facts that, participation and progress of scheduled caste students in secondary level of education in Karimganj district is below the satisfactory level as compared to general category students. The major factors behind the backwardness of these students in this stage remain as guardian

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unconsciousness, lack of motivation, over population of families, low attendance of students in schools and above all financial problem and poverty along with inadequate government aids. Therefore, it may be suggested that the concerned authorities should take appropriate steps to provide proper facilities for effective participation of scheduled caste children in secondary level of education in this district.

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