



SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF SCHEDULE CASTE IN TRIPURA- A CASE STUDY OF COBBLER COMMUNITY

Suman Das¹

¹M.Phil. Scholar,
Department of Geography,
Gauhati University,
Guwahati, Assam, India

Akram Hossain²

²Research Scholar,
Department of Bengali,
Gauhati University,
Guwahati, Assam, India
akramhossainh7@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The caste structure in India is extremely complex in India. The Scheduled Castes are characterized by a low, in fact the lowest, social or ritual status in the caste hierarchy, as well as by low socio-economic conditions. An improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the Scheduled Castes would automatically raise their social status. The social and economic status of most of the castes may undergo change according to changes in their socio-economic conditions. The present study is carried out on 'Cobbler' community of Schedule Caste based on the primary data (household's survey) at Agartala Municipality Council in Tripura, India. The population of 'Cobbler' community in the study area is settled in hamlets or in pockets. The sex ratio is medium. The educational level is not so good among the people of 'Cobbler' community except the present generation. The males are more literate than females. The roof and floor materials of the houses are not so good compare with urban houses. They usually live in the kaccha houses and hardly one or two houses which are cemented. Their occupational pattern is the lowest work in the society. Their occupations are leather worker, daily laborer, casual laborer, rickshaw puller, player of musical instruments and cleaning worker under Govt. offices. Their monthly income is also not up to the mark. Whatever they income, they spent almost all the money and hardly save as their family size is also not too small. The transport network and communication system is good in the study area. So as a whole it is observed from the present study that, the socio-economic condition of 'Cobbler' community is actually not well and Govt. should give its eye on them for their development and betterment.

KEYWORDS: Cobbler, Schedule Caste, Education, Occupational pattern.

INTRODUCTION

Prevalence of caste system in India is one of the most discriminatory forms of social stratification. The stratification system and subsequent hierarchy and divisions are based on birth rather than on occupation. In fact, this ascriptive form of difference determines the life chances and entitlements of an individual in Indian society, irrespective of one's individual initiative, aptitude, educational attainment or skills acquired during the working life. As a result, beyond the boundary of individual achievements and aspirations, benefits and burdens of society are shared by groups on the basis of family and caste lines. The Government of India Act of 1935 defined Scheduled Castes for the first time. This act stated that Scheduled Castes were defined as untouchables who accepted the caste system (Gaikwad, 1999). The act of definition established by this document was the first step to opening up a dialogue on enhancing the social, economic, and political opportunities for Dalit populations. This act of definition made Dalits a unique and separate population that was worthy of individual consideration and eventual legislation. Constitutionally, this social difference was sought to be bridged through special efforts by identifying the marginalized classes as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) (Kamen, Ellen, Gale, 2004). Absence of education and lack of awareness forced the lower classes to work as manual laborers, many of them remaining working in unclean occupations for generations. With the constitutional safeguards and protection as well as better educational and economic facilities act as motivating factors for upward social mobility, these safeguards made it possible for members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to be at par with non-scheduled population and enabled them to enter into mainstream of national life (Uplaonkar; 1982). By abolishing untouchability and discrimination on the basis of caste, creed and religion, equality of access in education is considered as an important aspect of achieving equity and ensuring social justice through measures like free-ships, scholarships, incentives, attendance scholarships etc., besides affirmative action in the form of reservations in recruitment and promotion in jobs. The caste still continues to obstruct the access of scheduled caste children to school and the quality of education they receive (Nambissan, B. Geetha & Sedwal, Mona, 2002). Some of the studies (Kumar, et. al., 2000) also showed positive indications of improvement in literacy and development of Scheduled Caste children.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The caste structure in India is extremely complex (Chaube, 1997). In India the combined effects of the caste system, class inequality, and patriarchy result in the marginalization of more than half the population (Khan, 1994-b). The Scheduled Castes are characterized by a low, in fact the lowest, social or ritual status in the caste hierarchy, as well as by low socio-economic conditions. An improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the Scheduled Castes would automatically raise their social status. The social status of most of the castes may undergo change according to changes in their socio-economic conditions (D'Souza, S., Victor, 1962). A large section of the Indian population constitutes such groups, which include SCs, STs, OBCs and the Muslims, and others. There is still visible inequality among Marginalized and (Scheduled Caste and Tribes) the mainstream population in case of major human development and socio economic variables. Over the time period, the disparity between these two sections of the people was found to be decreased but at a slower pace. Apart from other factors multiple deprivation faced particularly by the scheduled castes made them most deprive group in India. It has also been accepted that the inherently institutionalized nature of the caste system hinders access to various rights to development for SCs and results in their severe economic distress (Thorat, Sukhadeo and Mahamallik, Motilal, 2013). The cobbler community is widely known as '*Muchi*' throughout the country though they like to familiar themselves as '*Hrishi*'. They also live in clusters in the rural areas most of those are located in *Khas* land and are situated in the outside of the localities. However, they are considered as 'untouchable' and thus a socially excluded class in the society and being discriminated by the society since their history. It is the main cause of their segregated living within the society (Saha, Priya and Paul, Nath, Rathindra, 2009). Due to our society's untouchable behavior, they are staying in specific pockets of any urban area (far away from main urban hub) & they can not engage in other occupation in our society. In respect of socio-economic-behavioral-political sphere they are differ from other clan of society and Indian social history has been bearing this episode with inequality status. The present day society is not exception of it & characterized by immense diversity in its non-physical realms. Indian urban centers, where a number of elite people enjoy classic life comfortably & simultaneous there is also co-existing of a few group who are socially, mentally, economically, politically and culturally backward and the touch of development they cannot receive properly .

AREA, PEOPLE AND METHOD

The study employed in-depth structured interview schedule and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Information regarding the households and nature and extent of discrimination were collected through in-depth interviews. The present study was conducted among the 'Cobbler' community of Agartala Municipality council. Agartala is located at 23°30'0" N latitude and 91°30'0" E longitude. The total geographical area of Agartala is 58.84 km². Agartala is mostly advanced and urbanized area in the state. Agartala has flourished along the banks of river Haora. 'Cobbler' community comes under the sub-types of Schedule Caste in this state. Purposive sampling method was adopted while evaluating the criteria such as availability, willingness and convenience of the respondents. To know their Socio-economic Condition, in total of 80 households has surveyed to acquire valuable information (data) regarding 'Cobbler' community to reach the goals of this present study more over it is an empirical study.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF 'COBBLE' COMMUNITY

Socio-economic status (SES) is a multidimensional concept comprising measures of resources such as income, wealth, and educational credentials, and the access to goods, services and knowledge that these resources afford those who have them. SES is a measure that allows comparisons between individuals, households, and groups (Krieger and Moss, 1997). It is most commonly measured using educational attainment, income or poverty status, and, when available, wealth, employment, and occupational status (Health, United States, 2011). Here, in this present study Socio-economic condition has plighted into two parts namely Social composition and Economic condition.

Social composition: Social composition means

Population:-

Population is the key factor for any kind of geographical study and other study too. Man is responsible for emerging issues and problems of their own difficulties. These difficulties are created by man himself. The total surveyed population of this study area is 368 persons among the 80 surveyed households. The male population is 188 persons (51.087%) and female population is 180 persons (48.913%).

Literacy:-

Literacy denotes that a person who can read, write and understand the meaning of it and expresses his/ her emotions, that person will be considered as literate person. But here, the persons those who know how to

sign, are called literate. In the present study out of 368 persons, 178 persons (48.37%) are literates and remaining are illiterates. Among the literate persons, 112 persons (62.92%) are school going children. The male literate persons are 148 (78.72%) and remaining are illiterates mainly the aged persons. The female literate persons are 123 persons (68.333%) and remaining are illiterates. The schooling of the children is carried on the nearby Govt. school which is specially made for the 'Cobbler' community. The medium of teaching is Bengali and children are taking their education from that school only as they can't afford private schools which are very expensive.

Sex ratio:-

The sex ratio means how many females are having in comparison to 1000 males. The sex ratio is 957 in the 'Cobbler' community which is lesser than the state Schedule caste sex ratio (962, 2001 Census).

Settlement and housing:-

The people of cobbler community settled their houses in the suburbs (rural-urban fringe) areas which is a bit backward from the mainstream modern urban society. They built their settlements in hamlets and live together as they knew that their unity is their power. Their settlement type is actually cluster settlement and posses in different pockets of Agartala Municipality Council and settled themselves permanently. They owned homestead jote land from the Municipality Council and settled there. All the surveyed households are having their own land and they are paying tax to their lands to the Municipality Council. In surveyed households, it was seen that their houses are 'Kaccha' (not cemented). The roofs of the houses are made with bamboo with straw and tin. The floor is 'kaccha' of all the surveyed households. The boundaries of the houses are either built with bamboo or tin and wood. All the houses are electrified. Among the surveyed households, 92.5% of households are having black and white or color TV. It was seen that 67.5% households are having 'Gas Chola' and remaining are having stove burn by kerosene. Their household's utensils are not so modern though they are using steel utensils. Among the modern gadgets, all the households are having mobile phones. The conditions of the houses are very poor and usually they rebuilt their houses once 3-4 years.

Economic Condition:-

Economic condition signifies the condition or status of resources, wealth, income and ability to perform economic activities to earn money in a specific period of time. The economic condition of 'Cobbler' community is as follows-

Occupational patterns:-

The present study reveals that the cobblers in Agartala Municipality Council (AMC) and its suburbs are not uniformly engaged in a particular occupation. Among the surveyed households, 17.5% of households are engaged as a traditional worker or leather worker which represents their community; 8.75% of households are worked as a daily laborer; 7.5% of households are worked as a casual laborer means whatever work they get, they do; 15% of households are worked as a rickshaw puller; 31.25% of households are engaged as a player of musical instruments which is most popular occupation among cobbler community and they worked in the band on occasions like marriage, birth ceremony, birth day etc. remaining 20% of households are worked as a temporary or fixed pay worker in the Municipality in cleaning works.

Monthly family income:-

Income simply defines an individual earn money by using his/ her working capacity, efficiency, skill and knowledge in a specific period of time. Among the surveyed households, 11.25% of households are earned Rs.3000 - Rs.3499 of mostly traditional workers; 17.5% of households are earned Rs.3500 - Rs.3999 of largely causal laborers; 22.5% of households are earned Rs.4000 - Rs.4499, who worked as a daily laborers; 26.25% of households are earned Rs.4500 - Rs.4999, mostly the rickshaw pullers and players of musical instruments and remaining 22.5% of households are earned Rs.5000 - Rs.5499, who are engaged in cleaning works of Government offices. These ranges of income explain the earning capacity of the cobbler community by their hard work and labor.

Monthly family expenditure:-

Expenditure denotes the money we spent to buy goods from the market to meet our needs and demands in a specific period of time. Among the surveyed households, 10% of households are spent Rs.2500 - Rs.2999 by the traditional workers; 15% of households are spent Rs.3000 - Rs.3499 by the casual laborers; 18.75% of households are spent Rs.3500 - Rs.3999 by the daily laborers; 27.5% of households are spent Rs.4000 - Rs.4499 by the rickshaw pullers and some households of players of musical instruments and remaining 28.75% of households are spent Rs.4500 - Rs.4999 by the players of musical instruments and cleaning workers of Govt. offices. These expenditure values have shown that with the increase of income, their expenditure has also increased.

Condition of Public Distribution

Shops (Ration Shops): -

The Public Distribution System (PDS) or Ration Shops are there in the study area. The ration shops are

worked as an aid from the side of Govt. Among the surveyed cobbler households, 36.25% of households are having BPL cards, 15% of households are having Adhoc BPL cards and remaining 48.75% of households are having APL cards. The households, those who are having BPL cards, get 35 kg rice at Rs. 2, kerosene 1 litter per head at Rs. 15.10 and sugar 1 kg per card at Rs. 13.50 but before sugar has been given 1 kg per head. On the other hand, APL families are getting 18 kg rice at Rs. 10.35, Kerosene 1 litter to 400 milliliter per head at Rs. 15.10, sugar 1 kg per card at Rs. 13.50. Another new scheme the State Govt. has taken for the betterment of people since 2012, August for those who are poor but don't have BPL cards, they are now getting some assistance from the Govt. in the name of Adhoc-BPL cards; under this scheme families are getting 22 kg rice at Rs. 6.15, they are also getting sugar and kerosene as like BPL card holders but the effectiveness of the distribution is doubtful due to widespread corruption. The ration shops are delivered these goods regularly to the cobbler community people and they are getting these facilities which help them to maintain and feed their family members, without these facilities it would be not possible for them to maintain their family as cost of living is very high in the urban and suburbs areas.

Transportation:-

Transportation is the key element for the economic development. Transportation tells us about the physical infrastructure of any area. Transportation basically implies the movement of people or goods or anything from one area to another area. In the study area, all the roads are metalled road. All the metalled roads are connected with the main road which is also metalled. This main road connects with a bridge over the river Haora. This bridge was a wooden bridge but now it has broken due to build a new Pakka (cemented) bridge and the work has started accordingly. This bridge again connects with a metalled road and it continues to the city centre and two big markets of the city namely Gul Bazar and Battala Bazar (market).

Communication:-

It is the most important developmental indicator in the modern world. Communication plays a vital role for developing a particular region. The socio-economic development of a region also depends on its communication network system. In this area, the most of the households are having electrification system but they are saying that power cut is too much sometimes it is beyond 5-6 hours at a time. One Post Office is there and the efficiency and sincerity of it is good for them. Mobile phones are seen in almost every household as they said;

they can afford it, which is most vital modern gadget for the people. The people of this study area usually travel 3-wheeler auto rickshaw, the only source of medium to move from one place to another and rickshaw itself. The travelling cost is also high as it is an urban area and sometimes, they can't bear it and decided to walk along the roadside to save money which will ultimately ensure their future.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the present study, it is observed that the 'Cobbler' community, a sub-caste of Schedule caste, living aside from the main stream society. The society doesn't pay any attention to this community as they are neglected from the upper caste of the society. The population of the 'Cobbler' community is not too large in the study area in comparison to other sub-castes of Schedule caste and general people as their grandfather and some of them were migrated from the Bangladesh and West Bengal in a small number but in a group. The sex ratio of the people of 'Cobbler' community is also not very high compare with the state and national level even with the Schedule caste population as a whole. The literacy rate among the surveyed area is also not good in compare with the state level as there are lots of males and females who never went to the school. But the present generation (children) used to go to the school and carry out their education from the Govt. school. The people of 'Cobbler' community usually live together in the hamlets which are owned from the Municipality Council. Their settlement type is cluster in nature because the lands they own from the Govt. are those lands which are left by the general people and doesn't make any sense even for Govt. uses. The roof and floor materials of the houses are not so good compare with urban houses. They usually live in the kaccha houses and hardly one or two houses which are cemented. The economic condition of the 'Cobbler' households is not so good enough to the general people. Their occupational pattern is the lowest work in the society. Their occupations are leather worker, daily laborer, casual laborer, rickshaw puller, player of musical instruments and cleaning worker in the Govt. offices and they are employed for this kind of works which would not done by the general people and for that they are getting fixed salary from the Govt. their income is not so well enough as their work is not standard to get much money and more over the works they do, physical fitness and disease free body is necessary which is not possible and for that reason only they don't used to go for work regularly and for that they don't earned money regularly. Whatever they income, they spent almost all the money and hardly save as their family size is also not

too small. When their income increases, their expenditure also increases to meet their needs and necessities. The ration shops are also helpful for the people of 'Cobbler' community as from ration shops they get their food grains and other household goods in less price from the market which help them to manage their family and coping up with high price rise of food items. The transportation system is also very good in the study area as all the roads are metalled and connected with the main road and vehicles (auto rickshaw and normal rickshaw) are easily available from morning to night. The communication is also very well as they are having TV and mobile phones which connects them to their family members those who are living in the other places for the work and social purposes. So as a whole it is observed from the present study that, the socio-economic condition of 'Cobbler' community is actually not well and Govt. should give its eye on them for their development and betterment which accelerates their social and economic condition and up their head in the modern society.

REFERENCES

1. Jauer et al., (2014): *Migration as an Adjustment Mechanism in the Crisis? A Comparison of Europe and the United States*, OECD Social, Employment and Migration, Working Papers No-155.
2. Panda, B.K. (2012): *Participation in Schooling and Household Work: A Study of Scheduled Caste Girls in Mewat District of Haryana*, NUEPA occasional paper-39.
3. Chowdhury, Uddin, Iftekhar (2009): *Caste-based Discrimination in South Asia: A Study of Bangladesh*, Indian Institute of Dalit studies- working paper series volume III number 07, 2009.
4. D'Souza, S. Victor, (1962): *Changing Status of Schedule Caste*, Economic and Political Weekly.
5. *Welfare of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/Backward Classes and Social Welfare*,
6. link: http://www.planning.rajasthan.gov.in/Annual%20plan_1011/chapters/pdf/chap_22.pdf.
7. Throat, Sukhadeo and Mahamallik, Motilal (2013): *Development of Marginalized Social Groups Focus on Scheduled Castes and Tribes*,
8. link: <http://www.gidr.ac.in/files/pdf/Chapter%2012.pdf>.
9. Saha, Priya and Paul, Nath, Rathindra (2009): *The Socio-Economic Situation of the Cobbler Community (an Untouchable Class of Our Society) in Dhaka City: An Overview*, SHAREE Self-Help Association for Rural People through Education and Entrepreneurship.
10. Rao, Gopal, T. Venu Gopal and Dr. Satyapal (2011): *Socio-Economic Status, Schedule Caste and Creativity*, (IJTBM) 2011, Vol. No. 1, Issue No. 4, Oct-Dec, ISSN: 2231-6868.
11. Pal, Tapas (2011): *Geography of Urban Cobblers (Muchi or Shoemaker): An Over-view in Bolpur Town, West Bengal, India*, International Journal of Business and Social Science Vol. 2 No. 3 [Special Issue - January 2011].
12. Singh, Darshan (2009): *DEVELOPMENT OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN INDIA – A REVIEW*, Journal of Rural Development, Vol. 28, No. (4), October – December: 2009, pp. 529 – 542 NIRD, Hyderabad
13. News Paper Article: *Cobblers deprived from socio-economic dev*, Tripura Times, Agartala, p- 7, Tuesday, April 17, 2013. Link: <http://www.tripuratimes.com/PDF/2013/3/17/news/pg7.pdf>
14. *Socio-Economic and Caste Census– 2011 Rural*, Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of Tripura.