

Empowerment and Socio-Economic background: A Case Study of Narayanpur Region under Lakhimpur District of Assam

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Abstract:

In simplest form Empowerment refers to as the manifestation of reallocation of power that knowingly challenged the male dominant society. Empowerment is the process that enables a woman to participate actively in any other social, cultural, economic, political decision-making process. Empowerment of women is very important for the sake of the overall development of a society. Society consists of men and women. Women are the creator of society. If we want inclusive and permanent growth and development then we have to concerned women empowerment. Scheduled castes community is a part of Subcontinent of India.

This research paper attempts to discuss the empowerment scenery of scheduled caste community women and significance in their day to day life, employment, living standard, health, and social status. The present study is conducted in the Narayanpur region under the Lakhimpur District of Assam. The study will be based on both primary and secondary data. The present study concludes that moving towards women empowerment should aim at gives immense benefits to human wellbeing.

Keyword: Women Empowerment, Scheduled Caste, Economic Growth and Development, Education, Narayanpur Region, Lakhimpur District.

1.0 Introduction:

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary Empowerment refers as to give power to (someone)/to give official authority or legal power to (someone). The word empowerment itself says about power. Power in the sense of physical (water, land, assets), mental

(knowledge, information's, ideas), financial and individuals (social, economic, and political power). The term 'empowerment' has been widely used in relation to the power. Dalit women's are most affected by gender discrimination with their counterparts. With gender discrimination they also suffer most problems which will again deteriorate them to severe situation. They specifically suffer the three forms of oppressions i.e. Caste, Class and Gender. One of the major problem which is not decreasing as government participation increases day by day is women empowerment. According to 2011 census, scheduled castes comprise 18.46 percent of the total population of India. Almost each and every socio-economic development indicator shows the backwardness of the Dalit community with compare to other communities as a whole. In many cases their situations is going to be worse. It is seen in whole over the world about the empowerment of women. Each and every government in direct and indirect way give emphasizes on the empowerment of women. Empowerment of women is not only give some financial power or some respect in the society, it is the way to achieve growth and development and sustain the economy with inclusive growth with the empower of the women. As we all believe that a empowered mother empower her society where she is living. "It is no doubt that the government of India takes initiative to tackle this worst situation". Women empowerment means to increase social status, equality with men, economic and political strength of the women. They are allowed to freely move to any places, take their decision at own level, equal opportunities to flourish, and again to fulfill their own dreams. Similarly they must have equal rights to participate any social occasions in the society. Though all this expectations in the real a sense a dalit women has not able to enjoy these freeness. The real picture is vague to these expectations. A contradictory picture could be seen with the case of women in India especially Dalit women. This paper is mainly focused on the empowerment of scheduled castes women under Narayanpur region of Lakhimpur district of Assam state and suggests measures to improve their present situations.

No doubt Dalit community has Constitutional rights and guarantee in the sense of equality before law, social justice, employment opportunities, and social conditions. But in practical they are not able to develop to the expectation. This is often happened with the dalit women of India where most of them living in pathetic conditions. From the time of later Vedic periods Dalit women have been deprived from certain privileges specifically socially, economically, politically, and educationally their position is very weak compare with others. Above all these barriers some women from scheduled castes are able to show their merits in regional as well as national levels. It is appropriate to express with the word of Andre Beteille- “Instead of dispersed inequalities, we find “caste system” an accumulative inequality where social and political power is concentrated into the hands of the same group. The best proof of descent-based discriminations is that only scheduled caste is untouchable”.

2.0 Literature Review:

We surveyed a few work:

Shakuntala Narsimhan’s study is on “Empowering Women: An Alternative Strategy from Rural India”. It specifically spotlights rural SC/ST women, who are disadvantaged as women, as rural and as dalits and tribals. She has assessed the effectiveness of an alternative strategy of development and empowerment of women that begins with awareness generation and motivation rather than economic interventions: she gave importance to psychological empowerment and awareness generation.

Batiwala Srilata’s study is entitled “Status of Rural Women in Karnataka” (1998). She conducted a survey in six districts of Karnataka, Bijapur, Chitadurga Kolar, Kodagu, and D.K., etc. she studied gender relations and problems, the social, political, economic and religio-cultural dimensions that influence women’s position in society. It found that there is a

huge gap between conceptual definitions and framework of women's status and ground reality and of how women's status is perceived and experienced by communities.

Carr Maily, Marth Chen and Renana Jhabwala's study is on "Speaking out Women's Economic Empowerment in South Asia" (1999). They have discussed specific economic strategies for empowerment of women. These are: (i) financial interventions, (ii) enterprise development, (iii) marketing strategies, (iv) bargaining and (V) socio-political strategies.

3.0 Objectives of the study:

- (i) To measure the empowerment of Dalit women in the Narayanpur Region.
- (ii) To show the Socio-Economic conditions of the sampled dalit families.
- (iii) Status of dalit women in the sample survey areas.

4.0 Significance of the Study:

The present study will help to understand and evaluate the empowerment of Dalit women and various problems faced by them in the Narayanpur region of Lakhimpur District of Assam. It will also help to understand how to tackle the problems so that mainly empowerment of scheduled caste women, employment opportunities can be generated, improvement of education and health sector can be done, and also to know the various strategies and policies which are taken up by government of India, government of Assam and the different states of India. We can get the idea about the solution which is best for solving such type of socio-economic problems and thus this will be beneficial for village people who suffer from this problem. Besides, it will be helpful for other researchers who will be interested in doing advance work on same topic.

5.0 Scope of the Study:

The scope of the study is confined only to the ways how through women empowerment, human welfare can be improved. The study mainly focuses on empowerment of dalit women and also soft infrastructure like health, education, etc. For the present study only Narayanpur Region under Lakhimpur District has been chosen, so as to know the various problems related to their socio-economic development.

6.0 Research Methodology:

6.1 Data technique collection: In this paper, the methodology which is adopted is descriptive in nature and for this purpose data and information was collected from both primary and secondary sources. A schedule has been drafted containing profile of the respondents and topic related questions. This schedule was filled by the researchers about the respondents in the study area. The data was also collected from secondary sources through different websites, journals and books.

6.2 Sample and study design: The study consisted of 90 households from Jalbhararia Gaon and Satborbori gaon under Narayanpur region in Lakhimpur District, Assam. A cross sectional study design was used and convenient sampling technique was employed for data collection.

6.3 Procedure: Villagers were invited to take part in the study after being briefed about the purpose of the study. Villagers were also assured about confidentiality of their response.

6.4 Analysis of Data: Data analysis was carried out with the help of a schedule which were tabulated and analyzed with the help of simple statistical tools like percentage and pie chart.

7.0 Women Empowerment of India:

Gender equality is dignified in Constitutions Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles of State Policy. Constitution ensures positive discrimination towards women to get gender equality as a whole. In democratic polity every person has equal rights, opportunities irrespective of gender, caste, positions etc. Therefore laws, development policies, Plans and Programmes have aimed at women empowerment in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development and then from Eighth Five Year Plan emphasis was shifted from development to empowerment. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognised as the central issue in determining the status of women. India has also ratified various International conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The Cairo conference in 1994 organised by UN on Population and Development called attention to women's empowerment as a central focus and UNDP developed the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which focuses on the three variables that reflect women's participation in society— political power or decision-making, education and health. 1995 UNDP report was devoted to women's empowerment and it declared that if human development is not engendered it is endangered. The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment.

Gender Budgeting is a powerful tool for achieving gender mainstreaming so as to ensure that benefits of development reach women as much as men. It is not an accounting exercise but an ongoing process of keeping a gender perspective in policy/ programme formulation, its implementation and review. GB entails dissection of the Government budgets to establish its gender differential impacts and to ensure that gender commitments are translated in to budgetary commitments.

In sample surveyed areas most of people belongs to AAY (below bpl). Women are partially employed. They worked as homemade, unbounded agricultural labour, other household activities. It is rare to see government employee from the surveyed Dalit community women. SHG's another important factor for their empowerment. They has SHG's but lack of proper credit facilities another reasons behind their backwardness. Due to lack of proper and skill education they are not in a position to achieved government job.

8.0 Socio-Economic Conditions of Sample Families:

Socio-economic conditions of dalit women are the product of their social system. This is conditioned to the ingredient of social institution, groups, norms, values, caste, class, gender, family, religion, education, income, ideology of purity and impurity, untouchables, etc. These caste, purity and impurity, and untouchable are the byproduct of Indian society. These are determined by their own and other society. The present focuses on religious, economic, education, family size and last not the least source of livelihood.

8.1 Religious Background:

Religion is a basic element of women. Indian society's primary and fundamental basic is Religion. It determines identity, positions, and day to day life pattern of women in our society. Position of Dalit women in Religious institution is not so good. They often faces unfavorable situation in Religious institution. Not as a women but they also faces problems as being Dalit. In field survey area, sample families are 100% people are belonging to dalit. They are living in a unhygienic situations where upper caste

8.2 Family under AAY-BPL:

Table-1

Sr. No	Family Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	AAY	57	63.33
2	BPL	33	36.67
Total		90	100.00

Source- Field Survey

Above table shows rate of AAY (Antodaya Anno Yojana) and BPL (Below Poverty Line) family members. Most of people are below BPL (AAY). They are fully dependent on Public Distribution System for nutrition's /Food under Food Security Act,2013 provided by Government of India

8.3 Education level of Women:

Table-2

Education level	No. of sampled women	Percentage
Illiterate	54	60.00
Primary	26	28.89
High School	7	7.78
Intermediate	3	3.33
Graduation	0	0.00
Post graduate	90	0.00

Source: Field Survey

Above table shows worst scenario in case of dalit women education, where most of dalit women are uneducated. Only 28.89% people are primary level, 7.78% in High School level. 0% women are graduated.

8.4 Family Size:

Table-3

Sr no.	Family Size	No. of Household	Percentage
1	Joint Family	23	25.55
2	Nuclear Family	67	74.44
	Total	90	100.00

Source- Field Survey

Above table shows family structure of surveyed dalit family. In the survey we found 25.55% families are joint and 74.44% are Nuclear family.

8.5 Age of Women Members:

Table-4

Sl. No	Age	Frequency	Percentage
1	20-30	35	38.88
2	31-40	23	25.55
3	41-50	21	23.33
4	51-60	9	10.00
5	61	2	2.22
	Total	90	100.00

Source- Field Survey

Above table reflect life expectancy of dalit women, where found only 2.22% women are 61 aged above. And 10% are 51-60 aged.

8.6 Source of livelihood of the Sample family:

Table-5

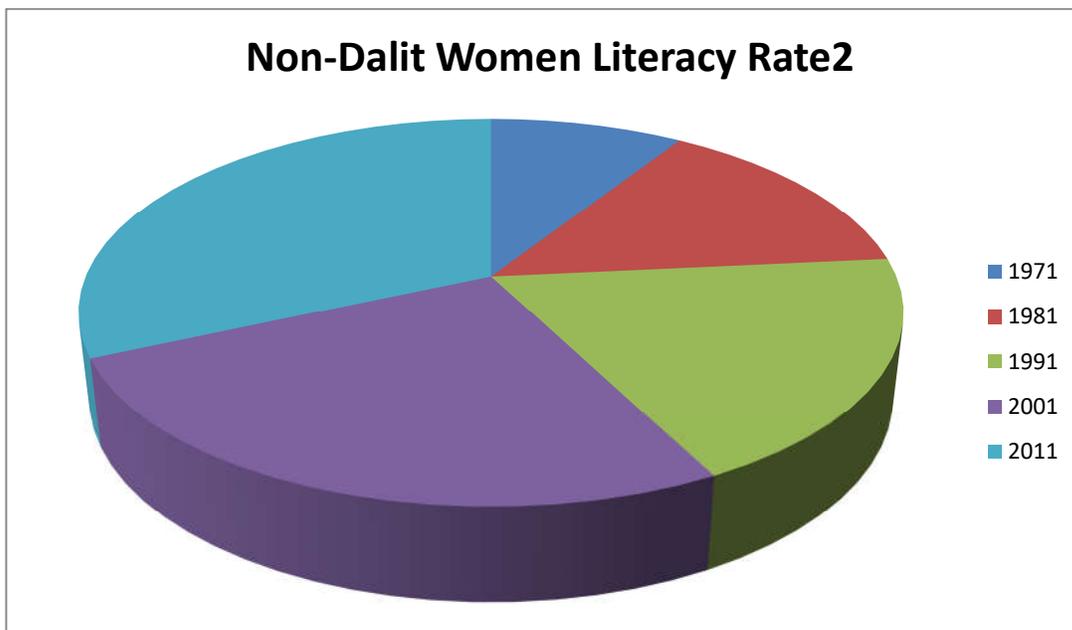
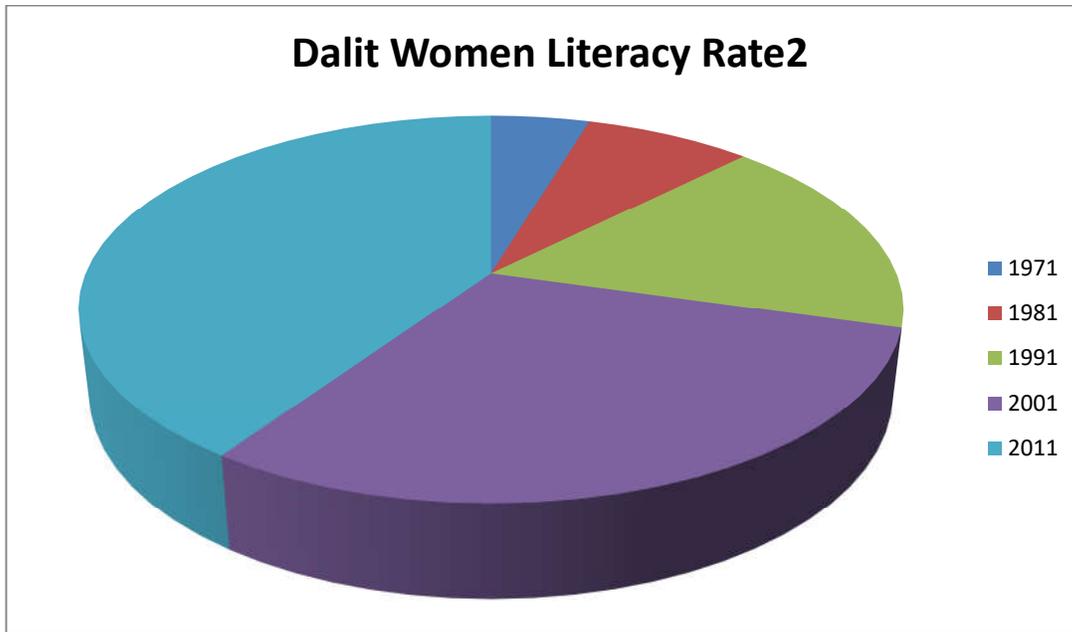
Sr. No	Source of Livelihood	Frequency	Percentage
1	Wage labour	74	82.29
2	Agriculture	5	5.71
3	Animal husbandry	4	4.26
4	Petty business and private job	7	7.74
	Total	90	100.0

Source- Field survey

Table depicts the rate of livelihood source of income of sample surveyed village. Most of people are daily wage labour, where 82.29% belong to daily wage labour. Other like agriculture share 5,71%, Animal husbandry share 4.26% and 7.74% share Petty business and private job. Share of agriculture is not so much high because of land holding size is not equal to other communities. They hold just 1 to 2 hectare land as a agricultural land.

9.0 Comparative study:

9.1 Literacy Rate of Dalit and Non-Dalit Women:



Source- Census of India, 2011

Above bar diagrams shows the literacy rate of Dalit and Non-Dalit Women Literacy rate from 1971 to 2011. . Education literacy rate of Dalit Women in 1971 was 6.44% while Non-Dalit was 18.70%. in 1991 Dalit women literacy rate was 23.76% whereas Non-Dalit women literacy rate was 39.16%.According to Census report, 2011 shows literacy rate of Dalit women is 56.5% (include both rural and urban) while Non-Dalit is 65.46%. It is common to

seen backwardness of Dalit community in every aspect of socio-economic indicators. As time passes the literacy rate of both category increases but not at satisfactory for as a whole but it is seen from the above figure that even urban women of dalit community is lacking behind with Non-Dalit community.

In sample surveyed area, the literacy rate of Dalit women is only 40% where masses are illiterate. Women from Dalit neither graduate nor post graduate in sample families.

10.0 Initiatives taken by Various Governments:

Initiatives Taken for Empowerment of Dalit Women and other Marginalised Groups are:

- a) Stand Up India: The objective of the Stand-Up India scheme is to facilitate bank loans between Rs 10lakh to Rs. 100lakh to atleast one Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe borrower and atleast one women borrower per bank branch of all scheduled commercial banks for setting up of Greenfield enterprise. It has main three pillars i.e.,
 - (i) Handholding support
 - (ii) Providing information for finance
 - (iii) Credit Guarantee
- b) National Commission for Scheduled Castes
- c) Integrated Child Development Scheme
- d) National Rural Health Mission
- e) Janani Suraksha Yojana
- f) Integrated Child Protection Scheme
- g) Swadhar—A scheme for Women in Difficult• Circumstances
- h) Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)
- i) Antyodaya Anna Yojna (AAY)
- j) Ujjawala—A Scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and• Rescue, Rehabilitation and Reintegration

- k) Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana(RSBY)
- l) Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
- m) Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)—A• Conditional Maternity Benefit Scheme Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent
- n) Girls (RGSEAG)—Sabla Swayam Siddha• Scheme for Working Women Hostel• STEP (Support to Training and Employment Programme• for Women)
- o) Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana
- p) PM-Awas Yojana
- q) Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment• Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

11.0 Major findings:

1. It has been found that most of the villagers i.e. 82.29% are daily wage labour, and only 5% are farmers. Daily wage labour are an important part of their survival because they provide food and fibre that nourishes us but still the labourers conditions are very pathetic, the main reasons is the lack of skill education, employment opportunities in formal sector jobs, other reasons like floods, lower quantity pesticides and genetically modified seeds due to less investments.
2. 40.7% of the households are not having electricity connection this is because many families of the village are not in a position to avail this facility as it is unaffordable for them. Therefore, this is one of most serious issue where the villagers are looking for cheap electricity which is a basic amenity of life.

3. Majority of the households i.e. 82.7% use firewood for cooking, they also use dung cake, kerosene, and coke and coal as a primary source of energy for cooking which means these causes deterioration of air quality, impacting the local environment and human health, especially the women and children are the ones who usually collect these fuels and they are ones whose health will be affected to a great extent. The reason is they are unable to switch to modern fuels because of their expensive infrastructure which is unaffordable for most of the households.
4. It has been found that majority of the Dalit women i.e. 36.67% are below HSLC and only 0% of the women are Graduate. But this scenario is totally difference for Non-dalit women in sample surveyed areas. This is because poverty is the root cause of the problem as majority of the villagers are living below the poverty line which leads to difficulty living conditions, poor health, unemployment and malnutrition, these are the certain problems which are stopping them to get the basic education.
5. It was observed that both the villages are not having any proper transportation and communication facilities, no hospitals was found inside the village, no banking facilities implying that the overall condition of the village was very poor

12.0 Limitation of the Study:

Scope for further Research: The study is limited to two specific villages hence; if further researchers could pay adequate attention to those limitations then more fruitful results will come and similar sort of study could be performed in wider scale and may find new ways to

enhance resource efficiency and open new opportunities for socio-economic development which may lead to better living conditions in the whole state of Assam.

13.0 Conclusion:

Women plays pivotal role for the development of nation. Empowered Women is the most vital assets for any developing country like India. Investing in them can provide benefits in multitude of ways. Human Resource Development of Dalit community is an essential component for growth and economic development of India. But this development should align with the needs of the women and men future too. By empowering the Dalit women can promote development of human resources and upliftment of resulting in eradication of poverty in a more sustainable way. The present study has aimed to throw light on the empowerment of Dalit women and various socio-economic problems faced by the sample families of Assam and suggested ways to improve the same focusing mainly on the soft and economic infrastructure through adopting the policies and strategies adopted by the government of India who are excelling in the field of empowerment, health, education, and socio-economic. The state of Assam has to take some helpful measure to improve the present status of Scheduled caste women and upliftment schemes for the permanent development of the community. Needs supports from upper castes/other communities for the permanent development of this immense potential, abundant resources and its rich culture, only we need to focus on the proper utilisation of these resources, proper guidance and support to human resources in order to make the state move towards prosperity.

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