EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF NAMASUDRA IN ASSAM AND WEST BENGAL: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

DR. NIL RATAN ROY*

*Assistant Professor, Dept. of Education, Assam University, Assam, India

ABSTRACT

In the present paper attempt has been made to give a description about the status of Namasudra in education in Assam and West Bengal in various years. Then the development of Namasudra in the field of education in various census reports of the both states. Again attempt is made to show the comparative development of education of the group in both the states thoroughly.

INTRODUCTION

Namasudra is a Hindu community residing in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan. Their population is around 8 million (2010). Nearly 4.8 million people are living in India (mostly in the State of West Bengal and Assam) as per the Joshua Project (2010). The Namasudra is a major scheduled caste group found in Assam, West Bengal, Orissa, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh of India and six eastern districts of Faridpur, Dacca, Mymensingh, Jessore and Khulna of Bangladesh which contained, in 1901, more than 75% of this caste population. This group of people are recognized as the socio-economically backward and enlisted in a schedule under the scheduled caste category in our Indian constitution. At the very ancient time the Namasudra people were known as the ‘Chandal’ because their social status was very low in the social scale, so they were considered to be clean untouchable group. The different synonymous for Namasudra are- Chandal, Chansal, Namasud and Nama. According to M.M. Das (AS. 81) the word “Namasudra” is a combination of two words- Namh (blessing) and the Sudra (Lower caste). Namasudra are the progeny of a Brahman male and a Shudra woman. They say that their original mother was Matshawgondha (woman having the smell of fish) who was a low caste woman. According to another version Namasudra originated from the Kashyapa Brahmans by gradual association with Nishadar, Chandal etc., one section of the descendent of the Brahmin lost some traits and discarded even the sacred thread. After that they came to be known as Namasudra. The term Namasudra is seldom found in any authentic Sanskrit Literature. This term is mentioned in Shyamcharan Sarkar’s Vyasastha Darpan as a subdivision of Sudra caste
(Lahiri & Dev: 1982: 155). Etymologically this term means a group of respected Sudra. Namah,- names respected, and Sudra, is a classified section of people who holds the lower strata in the caste society. The Namasudra are a traditional agricultural community. Besides agriculture, navigating a boat is also a traditional occupation among them. They are the follower of Sam Veda. They observe all the existing religious festivals in the year like other caste group. They engage Brahmin each and every worships, such as- puja, marriage ceremony and other social functions. In Sardha ceremony, they pay homage to their forefather on the 10\textsuperscript{th} day after death. They are permitted to offer rice panda (funeral cake) in Gaya Pitha. It may be added here that “The Brahmin that served them were classed as a degraded Brahmin group” (Ghurya: 1969:317).

According to Bhakta Das, the Namasudra community had migrated to Assam from Uttar Pradesh. But according to the other authors like Shekhar Bondhapodhyaya, A.K Biswas, Gourpriya Sakar and Skukhamay Sarkar and others, Namasudra originated in Bengal presently in Bangladesh and migrated to Assam, West Bengal and other states of India due to some social changes took place long back in the society.

**Objective:** The objective of the present study is to analyze and compare the growth and development of education among Namasudra in Assam and West Bengal.

**Educational Development of Namasudra in Assam:**

The Namasudra is the dominant scheduled caste group of Assam, which holds the second position in population rank among scheduled caste in Assam. In all the census reports revealed that this dominant group of scheduled caste is taking the lion’s share in making the scheduled caste population larger in the state. According to the census report 1971, their total population was 300,843, which is 32.97\%, in 1991 their total population was 505,384, which is 30.45\%, and in 2001, total population is 555,621, which is 30.4\% of the total scheduled caste population of the state. Development of education among Namasudra people may be scrutinized from their literary percentage shown in various censuses of the state. In the following table the literary rate of Namasudra people in various years is shown

**Table 1 : Literacy rate of Namasudra population in Assam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>All SC population</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>53.94</td>
<td>66.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Namasudra</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>21.32</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>46.79</td>
<td>60.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census reports of Assam from 1961-2001
As per table 1 it is found that the Namasudra people are more educationally backward than all scheduled caste people reported in the census reports mentioned above. So far their history is concerned, they are migrated people from East Bengal and they settled in very remote areas of the state which is far from the urban areas. As a result they were deprived from various facilities of the government such as education, social, economical and cultural aspects etc. Though the government has taken up some policies/initiatives to abolish the gap between various community groups and provide education to all, still due to certain reasons this group of people are still deprived from those facilities which are quite necessary for their life.

**Development of Namasudra in Education in West Bengal:**

The Namasudra are very strong scheduled caste group in West Bengal. They stood second position in the scheduled caste population of West Bengal; they share 17.40% to the total scheduled caste of the state according to the census 2001 of West Bengal. Namasudra are the indigenous group of the state. As it is mentioned earlier that Namasudra in West Bengal are very strong among the scheduled caste of the state; so they are very sound in education in comparison to the other group of scheduled caste. In the following table literacy percentages of Namasudra people are shown from 1961-2001 census of West Bengal.

**Table 2 : Literacy of Namasudra and Scheduled Caste people in West Bengal**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Scheduled Castes</td>
<td>13.58</td>
<td>17.80</td>
<td>24.42</td>
<td>42.21</td>
<td>59.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Namasudra</td>
<td>21.03</td>
<td>26.86</td>
<td>35.87</td>
<td>56.18</td>
<td>71.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census reports of West Bengal from 1961-2001

The Namasudra people in West Bengal are to some extent developed in the field of education in comparison to the other community group among scheduled caste of the state. The present literacy rate of Scheduled Caste is 71.93%, according to the census 2001. In the census 1961 of West Bengal their literacy rate was 21.03%, 26.86% in 1971, 35.87% in 1981, 56.18% in 1991 and 71.93% in 2001. The above table reveals that the literacy rate of the Namasudra people is higher than the scheduled caste all census reports in West Bengal, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001. This progress in the field of education reveals that the Namasudra people in West Bengal are very conscious about their rights, duties and responsibilities towards their life, society and to the country as well.
They lived in villages divided by canals, creeks and streams, they reach the village by rowing boats, by hand-poled ferries, by rope, log or bamboo bridges swaying dangerously over the rushing waters which poured through the region. “The Namasudra are not inconsiderable in number in the districts like Faridpur, Bakherganj, Khulna and Jessore, there are large areas with extensive Namasudra settlements” (Bose:1975:158).

Comparative analysis of development and participation of Namasudra in Education in Assam and West Bengal

The report reveals that the Namasudra in West Bengal are very strong and dominant in all sides of development of the state; but Namasudra in Assam are not having dominant position in all sides of development. The Namasudra living in Assam belongs to language minority, and they always feel that they are the migrated people, this feeling acts as a force which make them weaker than other people, and which impacts in their development; not only in education but in other field also. But in case of West Bengal these groups do not have this kind of problem, and as a result they do not find any obstacle in their way of development in all aspects. Literacy rate of both the state is given below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>ASSAM</th>
<th>WEST BENGAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>21.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>21.32</td>
<td>26.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>35.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>46.79</td>
<td>56.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>71.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census reports of Assam and West Bengal from 1961-2001

The above mentioned table-3 shows that the growth rates of Namasudra people in education in both the states are not equal, so far as their literacy percentage is concerned. Namasudra in West Bengal are playing a dominant role than other scheduled caste community.

From the table-3 it is observed that literacy percentage of this group of people in the state Assam is lower than West Bengal in all the census reports. Again, it has already been mentioned that participation of Namasudra people in education is poorer than the state level scheduled caste’s participation in education according to various census reports. But in case of West Bengal participation of Namasudra in education is higher than the state level scheduled caste’s participation in education according to the census reports.

The above table-3 also reveals that literacy percentage of Namasudra in Assam was 19.5% in 1961 whereas 21.03% was in West Bengal. Again 21.32% in Assam and 26.86% in West Bengal in the census 1971, in 1981 there was no census for the Assam, so, no literacy
percentage was found for the same, but in West Bengal it was found 35.87%. The census 1991 shows the literacy percentage of Namasudra in Assam is 46.79% and in a West Bengal 56.18%. And, finally in 2001 census of India shows the percentage of literacy among Namasudra in Assam is 60.2% and in West Bengal 71.93%.

CONCLUSION
Although the constitutional commitment is there to provide safe guard to the schedule caste people still that safe guard is hardly implemented and executed. The Government of India is making lot of efforts to implement it but, at the same time the politics is initiating counterproductive caste system by way of creating other backward class, which leads to half of the population of the country to become backward and schedule. Thus, attempt should be made to overcome these barriers by way of creating consciousness among the people in general through education and the schedule caste or the other backward communities to have education and become conscious to utilize the opportunities equally among themselves without becoming creamy layer, for which only government effort is not sufficient rather, public involvement is indispensable.

REFERENCES