

A Study of the Educational Status of Sonowal Kachari Girls in Panitola and Tingkhong Blocks of Dibrugarh District, Assam

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ABSTRACT

Sonowal Kachari is one of the oldest tribe of Assam. They are one of the indigenous tribes of Assam who are the third largest tribal community of Assam. Sonowal. Sonowal Kachari tribe has a very rich culture. They are a very simple and cheerful race by nature. They live mainly in Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Jorhat and Golaghat districts of Assam and parts of the state of Arunachal Pradesh in Northeast India. The Sonowal Kachari has a patriarchal society and as per the norms and values of the society the male is considered to be head of the family and the decision maker of the house. They are of Mongoloid origin, and linguistically, the Sonowal Kachari people belong to the Tibetan language family. They have their own distinct culture, customs, and traditions, which separates them from other communities. This article attempts to highlight the educational status of the sonowal Kachari girls. From Panitola block, the villages Bindhakata Gaon, Muluk Gaon, and from Tingkhong block, Ouphalia Gaon, Chakalia Pathar, have been selected as samples. The objectives of this study are-to examine the Enrollment and participation levels of Sonowal Kachari girls in different stages of education (higher secondary, undergraduate, postgraduate) and to analyze the challenges faced by Sonowal Kachari girls in pursuing education. The methodology of this study is descriptive in nature. The study concludes that the progress of education in Ouphalia Gaon and Chakalia Pathar of Tingkhong block, as well as in Bindhakata Gaon and Muluk Gaon of Panitola block, remains very slow.

Keywords: Sonowal Kachari girls, educational status, Panitola block, Tingkhong block.

INTRODUCTION

Sonowal Kachari tribe is an indigenous tribe of Assam. This is the plain tribe of Assam of Mongoloid origin and belongs to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. Presently this tribe is the inhabitants of several districts of upper Assam namely, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Jorhat and Golaghat districts of Assam. This tribe is very rich in their customs and traditions. They have their oral traditions, customs, performing arts and material culture. The Sonowal Kachari claim themselves of Kirata origin and Lord Siva whom the Sonowal Kacharis call 'Baitho', is their principal deity.

Area Of the Study

To study the educational status of the Sonowal Kacharis girls two villages from each of the two blocks of Dibrugarh district have been selected. . From Panitola block, the villages Bindhakata Gaon, Muluk Gaon, and from Tingkhong block, Ouphalia Gaon, Chakalia Pathar, form the limits of the study. Field data and related information will be collected only from these villages. Bindhakata gaon and Muluk gaon , located in the Tingkhong block of Dibrugarh district is situated approximately 38 kilometers from the district headquarters of

Dibrugarh. Ouphulia Gaon, Chakalia Pathar, located in the Panitola block of Dibrugarh district, is approximately 40-45 kilometers by road from the district headquarters of Dibrugarh. The people of these villages are primarily engaged in agricultural activities, with tea cultivation also being a significant part of their livelihood. Assamese is the local language spoken in these villages.

Objectives Of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the enrollment and participation levels of Sonowal Kachari girls in different stages of education (higher secondary, undergraduate, postgraduate)
2. To analyze the challenges faced by Sonowal Kachari girls in pursuing education.

Research Question

1. Is the development of education in the villages progressing at a very slow pace?

METHODOLOGY

This study is primarily descriptive in nature. Primary data were collected from the people of the targeted village using a semi-structured questionnaire. Secondary data were gathered from various sources, including journals, books, periodicals, census data, and other official documents. The participant observation method was also used for data collection whenever necessary.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Saikia, Juri (2019): 'A Study of Vaishnavism among the Sonowal Kacharis of Assam in Historical Perspectives.' In her study focuses on how the Sonowal Kacharis have been practicing Vaishnavism at the same time within the same society despite their own traditional religion. This work is an attempt to study the Vaishnava practices and new changes of the Sonowal Kachari society along with the similarity and dissimilarity of such social changes with other ethnic people of Assam. Hazorika, Ronjit Kumar (2020): 'Socio Political Development Of Sonowal Kacharis in Assam: The Role of Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council'. This study is intended to throw light on the origin and development of the movements for autonomy of the plains tribes of Assam in general and the Sonowal-Kacharis in particular. It also examines the role and achievements of the Sonowal-Kachari Autonomous Council (SKAC). The present study highlights the constraints and challenges before the Council in its working and a sincere effort is made to suggest for better working in the days ahead. Chetia Nilim (2020): 'Sonowal kachari folklore as folk media'. The research study is carried out to explore folklore of Sonowal Kacharis considering it as Folk media. This study is tried to appreciate the Sonowal Kachari folklore and its inherent power as folk media. The study is carried on the all the four divisions of Folklore materials that means Folk narratives, Folk social customs, Material culture and Folk performing arts of Sonowal Kachari tribe as Folk media. Duwarah, Suravi Gogain (2021): 'Social folk customs of the sonowal kacharis and thengal kacharis of assam a comparative study'. This is a comparative study between the Sonowal Kachari and Thengal Kachari communities, focusing on their social folk customs. The study aims to analyze the trend and continuity of change in the social folk customs of these tribes. It also focuses on the degree and trends of assimilation with the indigenous Assamese people.

Significance Of the Study

The study titled "A Study of the Educational Status of Sonowal Kachari Girls" is highly significant, as education is the most powerful means for proper individual development and social transformation. Historically, the condition of girls' education before independence was deplorable, and even after independence the literacy rate of girls has not reached the desired level. Among tribal communities, in particular, the literacy rate of girls remains relatively poor. For instance, among the Sonowal Kachari community, male literacy stands at 93.20%, while female literacy is 79.75%, indicating a clear gap between boys and girls.

Education plays a pivotal role not only in improving the quality of life of individuals but also in bringing about progress in society. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the educational status of Sonowal Kachari girls of Bindhakata Gaon and Muluk Gaon under Panitola block, and Ouphalia Gaon and Chakalia Pathar under Tingkhong block. It also seeks to identify the challenges faced by Sonowal Kachari girls in pursuing education.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

To study the educational status of Sonowal Kachari girls, two villages—Bindhakata Gaon and Muluk Gaon from Panitola Block, and two villages—Ouphalia Gaon and Chakalia Pathar from Tingkhong Block—were selected as samples. To know the exact position of girls' education, the researcher conducted home-to-home visits in random order. For this study, a questionnaire was prepared, and some families were selected for data collection. The data and information collected from the villages were analyzed with the help of statistical methods under the following heads:

Table No: 1 Total Number of Female Respondents

Block	Sl No	Name of the Village	Total no. of Female Respondents
Tingkhong	1	Ouphalia Gaon	65
	2	Chakalia Pathar	41
Panitola	1	Bindhakata Gaon	19
	2	Muluk Gaon	20

(Source: Primary Data)

From this table it has been seen that the total number of female respondents varies from village to village under the two selected blocks — Tingkhong and Panitola. In Tingkhong block, Ouphalia Gaon has the highest number of female respondents (65), followed by Chakalia Pathar with 41 respondents. On the other hand, in Panitola block, the number of female respondents is comparatively lower — Bindhakata Gaon has 19 respondents and Muluk Gaon has 20 respondents. It has been seen that the number of students enrolled in Bindhakata Gaon and Muluk Gaon is very low in comparison to Ouphalia Gaon and Chakalia Pathar. Thus, it can be observed that the participation of female respondents is higher in the Tingkhong block compared to the Panitola block.

Table-2 Distribution of the Age Structure of the Respondents in the Villages

Sl No	Name of the Block	Name of the village	Total number of response	16-18 Age	19-21 Age	22-24 Age
1	Tingkhong	Ouphalia Gaon	65	30	25	10
		Chakalia Pathar	41	20	15	06
		Total	106	50	40	16
		Percentage		47%	38%	15%
2	Panitola	Bindhakata Gaon	19	10	06	03
		Muluk Gaon	20	12	06	02
		Total	39	22	12	05
		Percentage		56%	31%	13%

(Source: Primary Data)

The above table reflects the age structure of the respondents of Ouphalia Gaon and Chakalia Pathar from Tingkhong block, and Bindhakata Gaon and Muluk Gaon from Panitola block. It is clear that out of 106 respondents from Tingkhong block, 47% (i.e., 50) are in the age group of 16–18 years, 38% (i.e., 40) are in the age group of 19–21 years, and 15% (i.e., 16) are in the age group of 22–24 years. From Panitola block, out of 39 respondents, 56% (i.e., 22) are in the age group of 16–18 years, 31% (i.e., 12) are in the age group of 19–21 years, and 13% (i.e., 5) are in the age group of 22–24 years.

Table-3 Educational Status of Sonowal Kachari Girls of the Ouphalia and Chakalia Pathar Village

Sl No	Name of the Block	Name of the village	Total No. of Respondents	HS	BA	MA
1	Tingkhong	Ouphalia Gaon	65	30	25	10
		Chakalia Pathar	41	20	15	06
		Total	106	50	40	16
		Percentage		47%	38%	15%

From the Table 3 it has been seen that in Ouphalia gaon, 30 students who passed Higher Secondary, 38% continues to B.A. and only 15% students went further to M.A. In Chakalia Pathar, only 20 students who passed Higher secondary, 38% pursued B.A. and very few i.e. 15% completd M.A.

Analysis of the two villages shows that although girls are pursuing education in both villages, the percentage of those continuing to higher education remains low. Moreover, Chakalia Pathar has a lower percentage of girls in higher education compared to Ouphalia gaon.

Table-4 Educational Status of Sonowal Kachari Girls of the Bindhakata and Muluk Village

Sl No	Name of the Block	Name of the village	Total No. of Respondents	HS	BA	MA
1	Panitola	Bindhakata Gaon	19	10	06	03
		Muluk Gaon	20	12	06	02
		Total	39	22	12	05
		Percentage		56%	31%	13%

(Source: Primary Data)

In Bindhakata Gaon, 10 girls who passed Higher Secondary, 31% continued their studies up to B.A. level, and 13% went further to complete M.A. This shows that although the total number of students is fewer, a fair proportion of girls are pursuing higher studies.

In Muluk Gaon, 12 girls passed Higher Secondary, among whom 30% studied up to B.A. and 10% completed M.A. Compared to Bindhakata Gaon, the percentage of girls pursuing postgraduate education is lower here.

Both villages show that a considerable number of Sonowal Kachari girls are continuing their education beyond H.S. However, Bindhakata Gaon has relatively higher percentages of girls in both B.A. and M.A. levels

compared to Muluk Gaon. This suggests that Bindhakata Gaon girls are slightly more motivated or have better opportunities for higher education than Muluk Gaon girls.

FINDINGS

In order to study the educational status of the Sonowal Kachari girls of the Bindhakata Gaon, Muluk Gaon under Panitola block and Ouphalia Gaon, Chakalia Pathar village under Tingkhong block has been studied. The data's have been collected through personal interview, observation as well as the home-to-home visit in the study area. In this regard, the collected data have been analysed using standard statistical methods. The analysis aims to assess the educational status of sonowal kachari girls.

1. The study shows that the interest in education among girls is gradually increasing within the Sonowal Kachari tribe. In both Tingkhong and Panitola blocks, educational awareness among girls is remarkable.
2. The educational qualifications of girls vary from village to village. In the Tingkhong block villages — Ouphalia Gaon *and* Chakalia Pathar — a relatively higher number of girls have completed a Bachelor's degree (B.A.), while a lower percentage have obtained a Master's degree (M.A.). In contrast, in the Panitola block villages — Bindhakata Gaon *and* Muluk Gaon — the overall educational qualifications are lower, though the number of graduates in Bindhakata Gaon is slightly higher than those who have completed a Master's degree.
3. A declining trend is observed in the number of girls continuing to higher levels of education. While many girls complete Higher Secondary, fewer pursue B.A., and an even smaller percentage continues to M.A.
4. Socio-economic factors, personal reasons, early marriage, lack of awareness, parental apathy, and the absence of higher educational institutions may be the key reasons for the declining number of girls pursuing higher education.
5. Despite these challenges, the overall educational participation of Sonowal Kachari girls has improved. This indicates a growing interest in education among Sonowal Kachari girls and a positive change in the attitudes of parents and the community toward girls' education.

Problems Of the Village

The following problems have been observed in the Bindhakata and Muluk gaon under Panitola block:

1. The economic condition of the people in these communities is not good. Most families depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Due to poor economic conditions, many parents cannot afford their children's higher education.
2. There is a lack of a proper educational environment in these villages. Possibly due to their weak financial condition, many parents have an indifferent attitude toward their children's education.
3. During interviews with the villagers and students, it was found that most students have not received any government schemes, financial assistance, or scholarships.

In this context, both government and non-government organizations have been working for the development of the educational environment in these areas.

Suggestions

Education plays a vital role in the development of any tribe. The more educated the members of a tribe are, the better they can keep pace with the changing times. Education can transform the thinking and mindset of individuals as well as society, and it can promote upward social and economic mobility among people.

The following suggestions have been put forward for the upliftment of the Sonowal Kachari tribe in the Panitola and Tingkhong blocks:

1. The government and non-government organizations should organize awareness programmes to help people understand the importance of education and create an educational environment that enables them to lead a better life in the future.

2. The government should ensure that all meritorious students receive appropriate scholarships.
3. Adult education programmes should be properly implemented and monitored.
4. The younger generation should understand the value of education and take the initiative to organize seminars and meetings in their villages to create a positive and motivating educational atmosphere.

CONCLUSION

The Sonowal Kacharis are considered to be one of the ancient tribal communities of Assam. . They are a subgroup of the Bodo community in Assam. Like the other tribe of Assam Sonowal Kachari tribe have their unique culture, traditions, language, rituals, customs etc. Generally, Sonowal Kchhari people used Assamese as their mother tongue.

From the study, it has been observed that the progress of education in Ouphalia Gaon and Chakalia Pathar of Tingkhong block, as well as in Bindhakata Gaon and Muluk Gaon of Panitola block, is very slow. The study reveals that the educational qualification of parents is very low, and the interest in higher education among students of the surveyed families is limited. Various socio-economic factors act as hindrances to achieving higher education within the community.

Education plays a major role in the development of any community. Therefore, the government, nongovernment organizations, and local individuals should take initiatives to improve the educational status of the community.

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