

Tribal Women of Assam

Madhushree Das

EASTERN

A Social Geographic Perspective

About the book

Women studies are now emerging as a vital frontier in the field of Social Geography. The women which represent nearly half of the world's population are lagging far behind the male segment in many ways. The situation is even more discouraging among the tribal women and it is no less true with the tribal women of Assam. It is obvious that without a parallel upliftment of women along with that of men, no real development can take place in a society. This book entitled *Tribal Women of Assam: A Social Geographic Perspective* is a detailed treatment of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics and socio-cultural practices among the tribal women in relation to their social structure and the pattern of social change and development in the state. The entire study is based on a judicious mix of both secondary and primary data, and application of appropriate quantitative techniques.

The book contains as many as seven chapters. Apart from the first two chapters dealing with introduction of research problem and geographical background of the study area the remaining five chapters discuss various issues of tribal women in the state. As such, while the third chapter presents the demographic characteristics and socio-cultural practices among the major tribal groups, the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters deal with literacy and education pattern, occupational pattern and the pattern of social change and development among the tribal women. The final chapter, i.e. seventh chapter, presents the major findings that emerge through the entire study with respect to the patterns of socio-economic change and development among the tribal women in the state. The book intends to draw attention of the geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, social workers, policy makers and all those concerned with the issues relating to social change and development among the tribal women in Assam.



Madhushree Das, M.Phil., Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in Geography, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam. Before joining the University in 2010 she served as Assistant Professor in Cotton College, Guwahati for more than 11 years. Having uniformly brilliant academic career she obtained two gold medals from Gauhati University for her academic excellence. Her field of interest includes social, gender and tribal geography. She has presented papers in a number of national and international seminars and has published two other books and a number of research papers.

Tribal Women of Assam

A Social Geographic Perspective

Madhubree Das



EBH Publishers (India)
Guwahati-1

Madhushree Das

Tribal Women of Assam : A Social Geographic Perspective

305.420954162

DAS

7B13
19/10/11

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner and the publisher.

ISBN : 978-93-80261-30-0

© Author, 2012

First Published in 2012 by
EBH Publishers (India)
an imprint of Eastern Book House
136, M.L. Nehru Road, Panbazar
Guwahati-781 001 (India)

Phone : +91 361 2513876, 2519231, 92070 45352

Fax : +91 361 2519231

Email : info@easternbookhouse.in/easternbookhouse@gmail.com.

www.easternbookhouse.in

Content

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xi</i>
Chapter 1 : Introduction	1–7
Chapter 2 : Geographical Background of the Study Area	8–31
Chapter 3 : Demographic Characteristics and Socio-Cultural Practices among the Major Tribal Groups : Some Perspective	32–77
Chapter 4 : Literacy and Educational Pattern among Tribal Women	78–116
Chapter 5 : Occupational Structure among the Tribal Women	117–153
Chapter 6 : Pattern of Social Change and Development	154–209
Chapter 7 : Summing Up	210–224
<i>Appendix</i>	<i>225–237</i>
<i>Bibliography</i>	<i>239–248</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>249–251</i>

Introduction

In a society, change comes in the natural course of social evolution. It is associate with transformation of socio-cultural practices in a community or society. The degree and direction of this change may of course vary depending on the socio-spatial context. Its process – which also speaks about the trend of social development in a society – is greatly influenced by variation in the pattern of social composition of population, educational attainment, occupational structure, social interaction, and a host of other factors including degree of urbanization.

However, it is generally observed that within a particular community, factors like education and occupation, besides many others, prove to be quite significant in bringing about social change in an area. Even though this phenomenon holds good in the case of the tribal people in India, the social change among them is still very slow. Living mostly in the interior rural areas of the country, this section of population traditionally occupies a marginal position within the mainstream of Indian society. In terms of socio-economic conditions also, their position has been quite discouraging. With a view to improve the conditions of the socio-economically backward tribal communities in the country, the government of India has recognized them as 'Scheduled Tribes' under Article 342 of the Constitution in its modification order, 1956. Unfortunately, despite the constitutional safeguards and regular planning endeavour to uplift their condition for more than five decades, socio-economic progress among them has been far from satisfactory compared to

the non-tribal counterparts. The significantly low urban population (8.29 per cent) and literacy rate (47.1 per cent) among this segment of population as compared to the scene in the non-tribal counterparts (urban: 29.56 per cent and literacy rate: 66.37 per cent), among many other factors, are indicative of their prevailing socio-economic backwardness.

When the whole situation in respect of social development and change is looked at from gender perspective among this section of population, it is even more discouraging. For instance, the literacy rate among the tribal females is as low as 34.8 per cent as against that of tribal males (59.2 per cent) and more so against the literacy rate of the non-tribal females (55.35 per cent) and non-tribal males (76.62 per cent). Similarly, the female participation rate among them in the non-primary sector is significantly low (6.46 per cent) as against that of male (11.88 per cent) and the non-tribal counterpart (21.07 per cent). All these along with many other factors have pervasive impact upon the overall demographic and socio-economic structure of the tribal communities in the country. Undoubtedly, the prevalence of high growth rate of population among them in the country during 1971-2001 (121.82 per cent) as compared to the non-tribal segment (85.13 per cent) has further compounded the problem.

In the case of Assam, which contains 12.41 per cent of tribal population as against 8.19 per cent for the country, the situation of social change and for that matter social development among the tribes is greatly disappointing. In addition, the tribal groups with diverse ethnic origin representing racial stocks from Proto-Australoids to Mongoloids with a distinctive socio-cultural ethos and system, with an ability to get themselves adopted to different ecological niches seem to respond to social change process quite differently. This gets reflected in their existing socio-cultural characteristics and is more noticeable in the case of the female segment. The prevalence of low female literacy rate (52.4 per cent), low female participation rate in non-primary sector (6.81 per cent) and low proportion of urban female population (4.55 per

cent) as compared to the tribal males (literacy rate 72.3 per cent; participation rate in non-primary sector 12.17 per cent; and urban population 4.76 per cent) and non-tribal female counterparts (54.93 per cent; 15.26 per cent; and 14.07 per cent respectively) give testimony to this situation. Further, variation among the social groups as in terms of location of places has also resulted in varying degrees of social change and socio-political scenario. Thus, the pace of social change among the tribal women in the state significantly from one area to another and also socially from one group to another. The above phenomena are largely associated with factors like the variation in the level of development, pace of urbanization and industrialization, tribal-non tribal interactions, political awareness, and as such. Interestingly, however, no detailed study, that is, up to micro spatial unit level, has been done so far about the spatial pattern of social change and development among the tribal women in the state in terms of demographic, socio-cultural and economic parameters and their impact on the social character of women in different areas of the state. And importantly, the role of education and occupation is vital towards understanding the degree of social change among the tribal women in the state. Besides, the patterns of inter and intra tribal variation in social change among them and the processes operating behind it are also not clearly known. It is in the above background, the present work, is taken up to investigate objectively the prevailing linkages among education, occupation and social change in the context of tribal women in Assam.

The Study Area :

There are 3,308,570 tribal people in Assam, accounting for 12.41 per cent of the state's total population (2001 Census) living in the hills and plains. The state is the home of as many as 23 tribal groups. They are Chakma, Dimasa, Garo, Hajong, Hmar, Lusai, Karbi, Naga, Deori, Pawi, Hojai, Synteng, Barman, Boro, Khasi-Jaintia, Kuki, Lakher, Man, Sonowal- Kachari, Tiwa, Mech, Miri, and Rabha. Of the 23 tribal groups only 8 groups which have more than 1 per cent tribal population each, have been considered

in the present study. They include Boro (40.09 per cent), Mising (17.80 per cent), Karbi (10.70 per cent), Rabha (8.14 per cent), Sonowal-Kachari (7.01 per cent), Tiwa (5.02 per cent), Dimasa (3.40 per cent) and Deori (1.20 per cent) (2001 Census) (Table 1.1). All these tribal groups together account for 93.36 per cent of the state's total tribal population. It may be mentioned here that except the hill tribes like the Karbis of Karbi Anglong and the Dimasas of N.C. Hills district the rest are plain tribes occupying distinct plain areas of the state. The areas of concentration of these tribal groups include Kokrajhar for Boros; Dhemaji for Misings; Karbi Anglong for Karbis; Goalpara for Rabhas; Dibrugarh for Sonowal-Kacharis; Morigaon for Tiwas; N. C. Hills for Dimasas; and Lakhimpur for Deoris. In view of such a spatial pattern of tribal population in Assam, the entire state is taken as the study area to get an overall picture of the tribal women in its different parts (Table 1.1). Further, in order to assess the intra and inter tribal variations in the pattern of education, occupation and social change among them, three villages – one each in the core, periphery and transition – in the most dominant areas inhabited by the major tribes have been selected for primary survey. In each village thus selected, a minimum of 20 per cent of households has been considered for survey through stratified random sampling method with the help of a well designed schedule-cum-questionnaire prepared for the purpose (Appendix II). Care has been taken here to include the households of different economic conditions. While filling up the schedules, informal discussions with the local people were also made.

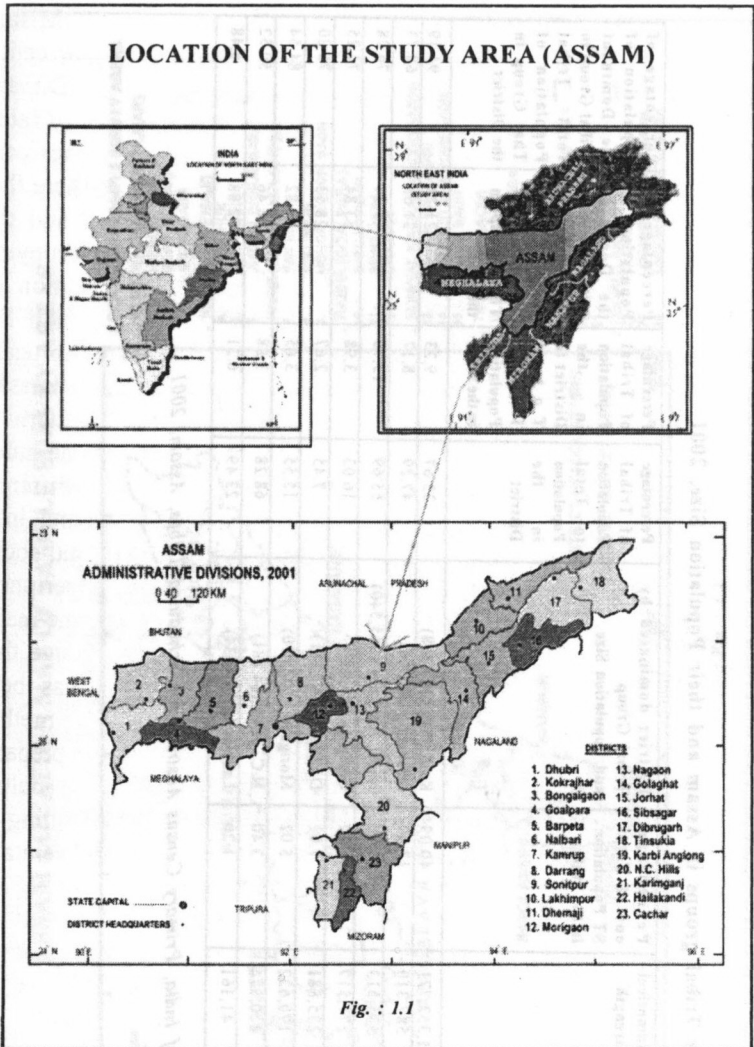


Fig. : 1.1

Table 1.1 : Major Tribal groups in Assam and their Population Size, 2001

Dominant Tribal Groups	Numerical Strength	Percentage out of Total ST Population in the State	District dominated by Tribal Group and Population Size	Percentage of Tribal Population to Total Population in the District	Percentage of Tribal Population in the District to Total Tribal Population in the State	Percentage of Population of the Dominant Tribal Group to Total Tribal Population of That Group in the District	Percentage of Population of the Dominant Tribal Group to Total Tribal Population of That Group in the State
Boro	1,352,771	40.09	Kokrajhar (287,268)	33.67	9.23	21.23	94.19
Mising	587,310	17.80	Dhemaji (185,906)	47.29	8.17	31.65	68.73
Karbi	535,513	10.70	Karbi Anglong (345,540)	55.69	13.70	9.74	76.28
Rabha	277,517	8.40	Goalpara (93,912)	16.03	3.98	33.84	71.25
Sonowal-Kachari	235,881	7.01	Dibrugarh (67,311)	7.45	2.67	28.53	76.20
Tiwa	170,622	5.02	Morigaon (102,070)	15.55	3.65	59.82	84.54
Dimasas	110,976	3.40	N.C. Hills (64,881)	68.28	3.88	58.46	50.52
Deori	41,161	1.20	Lakhimpur (13,534)	23.49	6.31	32.88	6.48

Source : Census of India, Primary Census Abstract for Scheduled Tribes, Assam, 2001

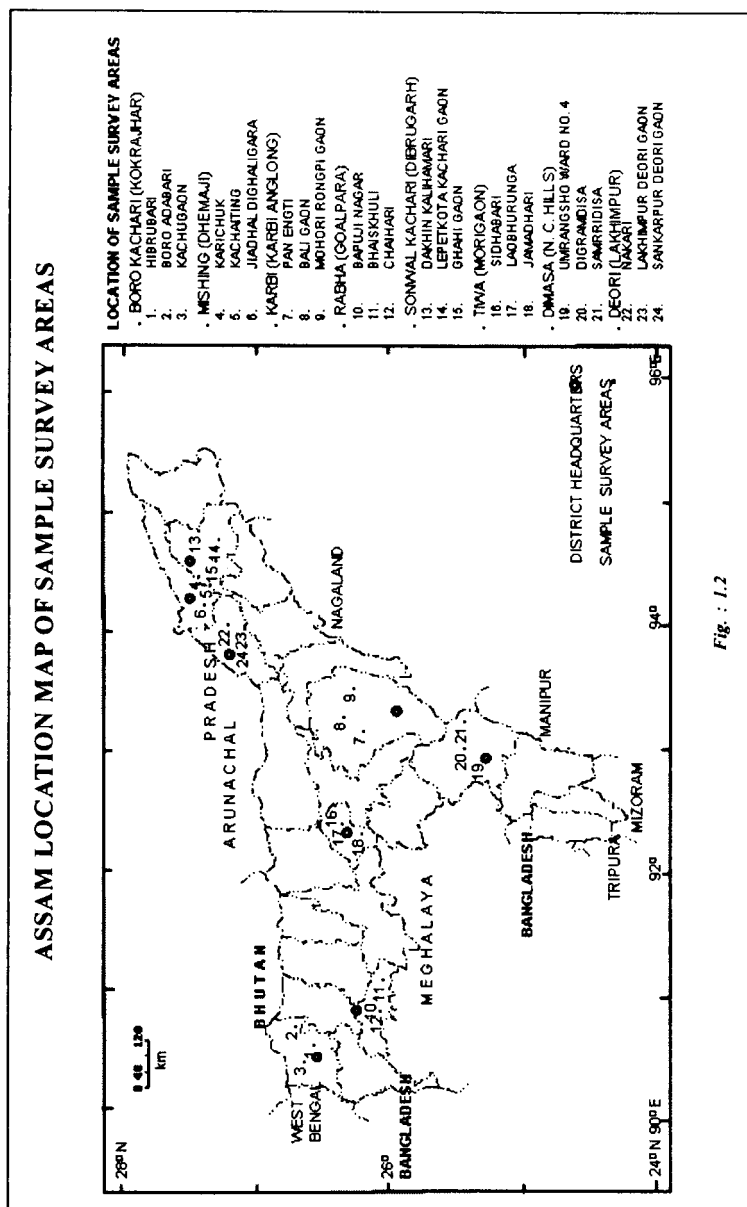


Fig. 1.2