



Impact of Education and Economic Status of Malis of Greater Hajo, Kamrup District of Assam

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Abstract:

Among the sixteen Scheduled Castes of Assam, Malis are also ones who are dependent on floriculture for their livelihood. Traditionally, individuals associated with the occupation of crafting flower garden, flower trading, takes the responsibility for the maintenance of flower gardens are known as Malis. They are also known as Bhui Mali. According to the census 2011, the total population of Malis was 69,535. The Malis are found in many of the states in India. However, they are recognized as Scheduled Castes only in six states, namely, West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and Assam. Hajo, which is located in Hajo revenue circle of Kamrup District of Assam is known as *Panchatirtha* because of five famous shrines located here. Traditionally, Malis are associated with these temples and their responsibility is to prepare garlands to be offered to the deities. With the passage of time, they take up the profession of making garlands and selling them to the devotees. This paper is an attempt to study the economic status of the Malis doing business of flowers and garlands in temple premises of greater Hajo area.

Keywords: Scheduled Castes, Malis, Economic status, Education.

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Introduction:

Assam is a land inhabited by different castes and communities. A major part of the total population is occupied by sixteen Scheduled Castes. According to the census report 2011, 7.15% percent of total population belong to the Scheduled Castes and in the Kamrup district the percentage is 9.39. In greater Hajo area, people belonging to General Castes, Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes are living peacefully. Apart from these Hindu communities, Muslim form a major part of the population. Thus, demographically, the society of Hajo is a heterogeneous society so also socio-economically. Education is the most important factor for economic growth of a society and through education proper socialization along with economic development is possible. Literacy is an important indicator of socio-economic, cultural and social development. Better literacy and education level have a positive impact on economic status of an individual as well as of a society. Especially, for the weaker sections of the society like the Scheduled Castes, education has a special significance which can uplift their social status.

Hajo is located 33 kms away from Guwahati, the capital city of Assam towards the north western side of mighty Brahmaputra River. It is an ancient place full of ancient temples. It is popularly known as *Panchatirtha*, as five famous and ancient temples are located here. These five temples are Hayagriba Madhaba temple, Kedar temple, Kameswar temple, Ganesh temple and Kamaleswar temple. Besides the five shrines, other temples such as Durga temple, Siddheswar Devalaya, Dharieswar Devalaya, Bhringeswar Devalaya, Har-Gauri Temple, Sri Har-Parbati Than, Pakhamela than are located in greater Hajo area. Hajo is also famous for Poa Mecca, a holy pilgrimage for the Muslims. It is a beautiful place with a number of hills and hillocks and water bodies. Some of the temples of Hajo, including the five shrines are located on hilltops.

As a beautiful temple town, Hajo attracts so many devotees and tourists every year not only from Assam but from all over the country. Once a devotee visits Hajo, s/he visits and offers prayers at all the major shrines located here. As such, there is a huge demand for flowers, *tulsi* leaves (holy basil), flower garlands and *tulsi* garlands in front of the temples. To cater to the need of flowers and *tulsi* leaves, the Malis in Hajo area engage themselves in floriculture, garland making and selling them in the temple premises. Consequently, the business of producing and marketing of flowers has flourished. However, socio-economic status of the Malis engaged in the business has not changed much, particularly for those who make and sell garlands in front of the temples. One reason of this low socio-economic status can be attributed to lack of education. Another reason is that they are not involved in the production of flowers due to the lack of agricultural land, rather they buy flowers from the floriculturists to weave garlands to sell in the temple premises.

Objective of the study:

The objective of the paper is to study the role of education in the development economic status of the Malis who weave and sell garlands and flowers in temple premises of Hajo area.

Sample and methodology of the study:

The garland makers and sellers in front of the temples in greater Hajo were selected as the primary samples for the study. From each of the five shrines, ten garland makers and sellers were taken as samples. Other six temples were also covered by the investigator and from each of them, five samples were taken up for the study. Looking into the need of the present investigation and considering different methods of research, sample survey method was used for the study.

Meaning of the term:

To mark economic status the following indicators were selected by the investigator:

- occupation
- sources of income
- yearly income of the family

Literate upto HSLC level also includes the illiterate samples

Analysis and Interpretation:

As per the objective of the study, the data collected through interview schedule were divided into two categories: literate (education above HSLC level) and literate (education upto HSLC level). In the second stage, yearly income (above and below Rs. 50,000/-) of both the groups were computed and presented in tabular forms.

Table No. 1: Education and income of the garland makers and sellers from the five shrines: Panchatirtha

Names of temples	No. of Malis as garland makers and sellers	No. of literate Malis (above HSLC)	No. of literate Malis (up to HSLC)	No. of Malis with Yearly income (above Rs. 50,000/-)		No. of Malis with Yearly income (below Rs. 50,000/-)
				Literate(above HSLC)	Literate(up to HSLC)	
Hayagriba Madhaba	10	5	5	5	1	4
Kedar temple	10	4	6	4	0	6
Ganesh temple	10	5	5	5	1	4

Kameswar temple	10	2	8	2	0	8
Kamaleswar temple	10	3	7	3	0	7
Total	50	19	31	19	2	29

From the above table, it was observed that out of 50 (fifty) Mali garland makers and sellers, 19 (nineteen), that is, 38% were literate whose education level was above HSLC and 31 (thirty-one), that is, 62% had education upto HSLC level. It was also clear from the table that yearly income of the literate (above HSLC) samples was higher than the samples whose education level was upto HSLC. That is, annual income of all the literate samples (above HSLC) was above Rs. 50,000/- whereas only 2 (two) of the literate samples (up to HSLC) had annual income of above Rs. 50,000/-.

Table No. 2: Education and income of the garland makers and sellers from six other temples

Names of temples	No. of Malis as garland makers and sellers	No. of literate Malis (above HSLC)	No. of Literate Malis (up to HSLC)	No. of Malis with Yearly income (above Rs. 50,000/-)		No. of Malis with Yearly income (below Rs. 50,000/-)
				Literate(above HSLC)	Literate(up to HSLC)	
Durga temple	5	1	4	1	0	4
Sidheswar devalaya	5	2	3	2	0	3
Dhareswar devalaya	5	2	3	2	1	2
Bhringeswar devalaya	5	1	4	1	1	3
Sri Har-Parboti than	5	1	4	1	0	4
Pakhamela than	5	2	3	2	1	2
Total	30	9	21	9	3	18

In table No. 2, the data of Mali garland makers and sellers from other temples which are not clubbed together as Panchatirtha were presented. From the table, it was found that out of 30 (thirty) Mali garland makers and sellers, 9 (nine) were literate whose education level was above HSLC and 21 (twenty-one), were literate whose education level was up to HSLC. It was also clear from the table that yearly income of the literate samples (above HSLC) was higher than the literate samples (up to HSLC). That is, annual income of all the literate samples (above HSLC) was above Rs. 50,000/- whereas only 2 (two) of the literate samples (up to HSLC) had annual income of above Rs. 50,000/-.

Findings:

- The Mali community is not upgraded socio-economically, and also educationally.
- The main cause of their backwardness can be attributed to lack of education. Those who are educated are reluctant to be in the profession of their forefathers. Only the illiterate and semi-literate Malis

are engaged in the profession. There is a huge demand for flowers and garlands all over Assam. Proper education and training could have helped the Malis of Hajo area to capture the market.

- In the investigation, it was seen that among the samples of the study, only the educated Malis fair well in their business even though it was in front of the temples of the Hajo area.
- Another reason of their backwardness can be attributed to the old method used by them in their profession. Threading garlands to be offered to the deities is an intricate skill and very time consuming. Some innovative modern techniques of threading might help them.
- The family head is only trained for the profession hereditarily, but the new generation is reluctant to learn and adopt the profession. Rather, they look for jobs or other professions.
- They do not have adequate land for floriculture and they have to collect flowers from other cultivators. Consequently, they can not meet the demands for garlands.
- Another cause of economic backwardness of the Malis is the intrusion of other caste people in the same profession. In the course of study, the investigator found people who were not Malis, selling flowers and garlands in the temple premises.

Suggestions and Conclusion:

- The skilled persons can train the new generation so that they can fulfill the needs of the devotees.
- Garlands are generally made by hands. More skilled hands can produce more according to the demands. As such, reluctant young generation can be trained and motivated to join the traditional family profession.
- Educational institutions can introduce skill development courses on garland making which would train the young learners which would have an impact on productivity and marketing.
- Farmers producing the raw materials, that is flowers, should be trained and incentivized to increase the production so that garland makers can get the raw materials at a lower cost and in abundance.
- Above all, everyone involved in the trade should be educated. Only education can help improving every aspect associated with the trade and uplift the socio-economic status of all the stakeholders.

Assam is a land of so many holy places which attract a huge number of devotees and tourists every year. Apart from temples, flowers and garlands are used in many occasions in Assam. In religious rituals, marriages, decorations of any sort, flowers and garlands are a must. Cultivation and production of flowers, threading garlands and marketing the same have a very big scope in Assam. As such, the Malis of Assam in general, who are traditionally associated with the trade may take advantage of the growing demand and uplift their economic status by involving wholeheartedly with the process. Young population should, instead of running after government jobs of other professions, take part in their traditional profession and try to capture the market all over Assam. It will not only uplift their economic as well as social status, but boost the economy of the state.

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