



## A study on the awareness level of parents of a backward community of North East India for higher education of their children

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### Abstract

In this globalised high-tech world, the importance of higher Education has been realized by the educated sections of any country. India is a developing country where a number of backward communities are lagging behind in the field of higher education in spite of the various measures taken by the government from time to time. Guwahati is considered as the gate way to the North Eastern Part of India where a socially and educationally deprived backward community, commonly known as Harijan, are residing since historical time. Even today, a large number of children of the Harijan community are not getting higher education due to various factors. Therefore, a study was done in the greater Guwahati area of North East India to find out the awareness level of the parents of Harijan community for higher education of their children. A total number of 200 parents were selected by using simple random method from greater Guwahati area. Data and information were collected from the sample parents by using self-made questionnaire and interview technique. Statistical analysis was done to evaluate the awareness level of the Harijan parents towards higher education of their children.

**Keywords:** Backward Community, Harijon, Awareness level, Higher Education

### 1. Introduction

Progress and prosperity of a democratic society depends upon all round development of each and every community. Formal education is one of the most important right of every children of our society for all round development in every sphere of their life. Education is considered as one of the most powerful means for the success of democracy. In our country priority is being given on education to achieve a higher literacy rate. The National policy of India on Education (1992) declares as— “In our national perception, education is essentially for all. This is fundamental to our all round development, material and spiritual” (Bhatia.,K.K.2013). The 86<sup>th</sup> amendment of the Indian Constitution,Dec.12,2002, has declared compulsory education as a fundamental right and has inserted new article 21 A to provide

free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the state may, by law, determine(The constitution of India). Article 51 A(k), of the Indian constitution advocates the fundamental duties of the parent or guardian to provide opportunities for education to his child or, as the case may be, ward between the age of six and fourteen years. But in our society, enrolment in the higher education sector not satisfactory due to various socioeconomic reasons especially among the under privileged sections. Therefore, mere constitutional provisions and imposition of laws are not enough to create awareness among a deprived section of our society like the Harijan community. Mahatma Gandhi first coined the term Harijan which means children of God for these underprivileged scheduled caste people

which had been traditionally occupied the lowest status in Indian society as an 'untouchable' group. The term 'Harijan' is still used widely by the Non-Scheduled Caste communities although many Scheduled Caste members do not like to use this particular term. In Greater Guwahati, Harijan community have been traditionally dependent for their livelihood on different professions including sweeping and scavenging, leather tanning, shoe making, dead body carrying etc. They mostly belong to Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and from Panjab. Bhangi, Mala, Muchi, Basfore, Balmiki, Robidas are some of sub groups of the Harijan Community working in Guwahati. On investigation, the investigator has found four Lower primary and one High school are functioning for teaching of the Harijan children of the greater Guwahati namely Harijan Buniyadi Vidyalaya, Navodaya Harijan Vidyalaya, Harijan Sishu Vidyalaya, Harijan Sishu kalyan Vidyalaya and Manik Chandra Barua High school. Some of these schools are funded by Guwahati Municipality Corporation. Teaching medium of these schools are Assamese, Hindi and also Telegu. The investigator has found that dropout rate of Harijan children increases with the advancement to the secondary stage of education. In spite of having basic educational facilities and democratic social atmosphere at Guwahati, their participation in higher education are found to be below the desired level. Therefore in this paper an attempt has been made to study the different reasons which debar the Harijan student from pursuing the higher education.

## 2. Need and Significance of the study

"Education is a liberating force, and in our age it is also a democratising force, cutting across the barriers of caste and class, smoothing out inequalities imposed by birth and other circumstances."- (Indira Gandhi). Education gives opportunity to every individual, to think rationally and to act purposefully in their life. Therefore, education is considered as one of the most powerful instrument for social change to establish a democratic atmosphere and equal rights to each community. In the words of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar- Man cannot live by bread alone, He has a mind which needs food for thought. Higher education plays its specific role for pursuit and

transmission of knowledge development as well as perfection of the individual for betterment of the society (Sarma N,2011). But the scenario of participation in higher education among a deprived section like the Harijan community in India is not satisfactory. In spite of the basic facilities provided by the government to the Harijan community, they are still lagging behind than the rest of the community especially in the higher education level. Therefore, the investigator feels the urgent need to study the awareness level of Harijan parents towards importance of higher education of their children.

## 3. Objectives of the study

1. To study the awareness level of Harijan parents towards their children's participation in higher education.
2. To study the different factors that debar higher education of the Harijan students.

## 4. Delimitation of the study

The investigation is delimited to greater Guwahati area and 200 Harijan Parents. Again in the present study only higher education has been taken as aspect of observation.

## 5. Methodology

The descriptive survey method was used for this study.

## 6. Sample

The investigator has purposively selected a large number of Harijan families and out of these families 200 Harijan Parents having school going children were selected.

## 7. Sample area

Greater Guwahati was selected as sample area because in this city maximum number of Harijan Male and Female workers working in different working places. For this study the investigator has selected Guwahati Medical College, Mohendra Mohan Choudhury Hospital, Guwahati Railway Station, Guwahati Neurological Research Institute and International Hospital.

The following table shows the sample distribution of the Harijan parents.

**Distribution of the sample**

Area	Name of the institution	Total No. of sample parents	Total no. of Men	Total no. of Women
	Guwahati Medical College	40	20	20
Guwahati City (Dist. Kamrup Metro)	Mohendra Mohan Choudhury Hospital	40	20	20
	Guwahati Railway station	40	20	20
	Guwahati Neurological Research Institute	40	20	20
	International Hospital	40	20	20
	Grand total	200	100	100

**8. Tools**

The investigator has applied interview (Koul, p.p.175-179; Best & Kahn, p.p.201-202) and questionnaire (Koul, p.146-154; Best & Kahn, p.p.181-194) techniques as the means of collecting data from Harijan parents. A total of ten structured statements were included in the questionnaire, where five are related to awareness level of Harijan parents (from 1 to 5) and next five questions are related to hurdles of academic progress of their children (from

6 to 10) to justify objective no.1 and objective no.2 respectively.

**9. Analysis and interpretation of the data:**

Collected data were compiled for statistical analysis and are presented below-

**9.1 Statement No.1-** Higher Education is necessary for upliftment of Harijan Community.

**Table-1 :**

Response	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Agree	60	56	116	58%
Undecided	11	9	20	10%
Disagree	29	35	64	32%

**Interpretation:** Table no. 1 shows that out of 200 Harijan Parents 116 parents(58%) agreed that Higher Education is necessary for upliftment of their community where as 64parents(32%) did

not agree with the statement and 20 parents(10%) are not sure whether higher Education is necessary for their upliftment or not.

**9.2 Statement No.2-** Parental care & involvement

are necessary for qualitative improvement in education.

**Table-2 :**

Response	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Agree	52	41	93	46.5%
Undecided	11	20	31	15.5%
Disagree	37	39	76	38%

**Interpretation:** On observation of the table no.2, it is found that, out of 200 Harijan parents 93(46.5%) agreed that parental care and involvement are necessary for qualitative improvement of their children's education where as 76(38%) disagreed with the statement and 31 parents(15.5%) could not decide the matter. It shows

that till today a countable portion of Harijan Parents are unable to understand the importance of parent's involvement in their children's education.

**9.3.** Statement No.3- Extracurricular books, journals and News paper are necessary for their children.

**Table-3 :**

Response	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Agree	20	25	45	22.5%
Undecided	21	29	50	25%
Disagree	59	46	105	52.5%

Interpretation: Table no.3 shows that out of 200 parents only 45 parents(22.5%) agreed with the statement where as 105 parents(52.5%) did not consider that- Extracurricular books, journals and News paper are necessary for their children, whereas 50 number of parents(25%) could not decide on the

matter. A major portion of the Harijan parents(52.5%) disagreed with the statement.

**9.4** Statement No.4- Computer and Television do play a positive role in enhancing awareness level.

**Table-4 :**

Response	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Agree	79	82	161	80.1%
Undecided	10	09	19	9.5%
Disagree	11	09	20	10%

**Interpretation:** Table no.4 shows that out of 200 parents 161 parents (80.1%) agreed that Computer and Television plays a major positive role in enhancing awareness among Harijan parents.

Only 20 parents(10%) did not agree with the statement and 19 parents(9.5%) were not sure whether Computer and Television were useful for enhancing awareness of higher education among them or not .

**9.5 Statement No. 5-Higher Education do play a special role in enhancing social status of the Harijan Children.****Table-5 :**

Response	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Agree	83	85	168	84%
Undecided	7	10	17	8.5%
Disagree	10	5	15	7.5%

**Interpretation:** From Table No.5 , it is found that out of 200 students only 15 parents(7.5%) disagreed with the statement but majority of the parents numbering 168(84%) agreed with the statement that higher education plays a major role in enhancing social status where as 17 parents(8.5%) were not sure about the matter.

**9.6 Statement No.6 Adult illiteracy is a major problem of Harijan parents for higher education of their children.**

**Table-6 :**

Response	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Agree	73	80	153	76.5%
Undecided	7	10	17	8.5%
Disagree	20	10	30	15%

**Interpretation:** From the table no. 6 it is found that majority of the parents(76.5%) agreed with the statement that their illiteracy and inadequate knowledge is the major problem for sending their children to the higher educational institutions. Although a small percentage of the parents (15%)

did not agree with the statement and a very small percentage (8.5%) of the parents were indecisive on the statement.

**9.7 Statement No.7- Telegu medium in primary stage stands as a problem of adjustment in Higher Education of their children.**

**Table-7 :**

Response	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Agree	89	83	172	86%
Undecided	7	5	12	11%
Disagree	4	12	16	8%

**Interpretation:** From the table no.7 it is found that a majority of parents (86%) agreed where as only 8% parents disagreed with the statement and 11% parents were not sure about the matter.

**9.8 Statement No.8- Alcohol abuse is a serious problem for higher education within the Harijan community.**

**Table-8 :**

Response	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Agree	83	75	158	79%
Undecided	7	10	17	8.5%
Disagree	10	15	25	12.5%

**Interpretation:** From the table no. 8, it is found that out of 200 parents 158 parents(79%) agreed with the statement that widespread alcohol abuse is a serious problem within the Harijan community which hampers their children's education. Only 25 parents(12.5%) were not ready to accept

the statement where 17 parents(8.5%) could not decide on the statement.

**9.9 Statement No.9-** Domestic and communal violence in Harijan colony is a major negative factor for conducive academic atmosphere.

**Table-9 :**

Response	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Agree	73	85	158	79%
Undecided	7	10	17	8.5%
Disagree	20	5	25	12.5%

**Interpretation:** From table no.9 it is found that out of 200 parents 158 parents(79%) agreed with the statement that domestic and communal violence in colony are the common factor which affects the academic atmosphere but 25 parents (12.5%) were not ready to accept the statement. And

a small percentage (8.5%) parents were undeceive on the statement.

**9.10 Statement No.10-** Lack of higher ambition and economic constraints are the major problems for higher education of their children.

**Table-10 :**

Response	Men	Women	Total	Percentage
Agree	63	77	140	70%
Undecided	12	10	22	11%
Disagree	25	13	38	19%

**Interpretation:** From table no. 10 it is found that out of 200 sample parents 140 parents ( i.e. 70%) agreed with the statement where as 38 parents(19%) did not agree with the statement and 22 parents (11%) left the matter as undecided.

present study it may be concluded that majority of the Harijan parents are aware of the importance of higher education for their children but due to their poor educational level, lack of educational environment and also because of the many hurdles including financial constraints, the parents cannot afford higher education to their children.

## 10. Findings of the Study

From the interpretation of the results of the

From the above study, it is found that-

1. Higher education is necessary for upliftment of Harijan community.

2. Parental care and involvement is necessary for qualitative improvement of Harijan students.

3. Television can play an important role through educational awareness programmes among Harijan parents.

4. Higher education do play a special role in enhancing social status.

5. Adult illiteracy is a major problem in Harijan community.

6. Use of alcohol is a serious problem within the Harijan Community.

## 11. Conclusion

Harijan community is a part and parcel of our society. Therefore, every effort must be made for their upliftment and special attention may be given by every responsible citizen of our country for higher education of the Harijan student community. This will

definitely create a better environment and will enhance their confidence in the larger interest of the community. The Harijan community even in today's world are indulging many deleterious habits like widespread alcohol abuse, which is one of the root causes of their problem. To overcome the problem, social activists must educate them to keep them away from alcohol abuse and this can create a favourable environment for higher education of their children. The concept of having Harijan colony perhaps may be abandoned for giving them an opportunity to mix up with the other forward classes of our society so as to enable them to inculcate good moral and social values. Government and Non-government organisations must work together with a strong positive vision and mission to address the problems of higher education among the Harijan students so as to bring this underprivileged section to the mainstream of our society which will definitely contribute for building up of a healthy nation.

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