



Research Paper

Political Participation of the Scheduled Caste Community in Tripura: A Case Study of Bagma- 30 Assembly Constituencies in Tripura.

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ABSTRACT

Political participation refers to those voluntary activities by which members of a society show active interest and play a role in the selection of rulers. It includes voting, seeking information, discussing, attending meetings, contributing financially, and communicating with the representatives, enrolment in a party, canvassing and registering voters and working in campaigns. It is clear that the term political participation draws our attention to political activities rather than attitude and behaviour of private citizen to those who are professionally involved in public affairs. The constitution of India has assured equal political rights of political participation irrespective of caste, class, religion, gender and place of birth. However, the scheduled caste communities are lagging behind in respect of political participation. There are multiple factors are present in our society which threatening them in politics, and one of the factor is caste. In India, the scheduled caste communities have different sorts of disadvantage to affective political participation, in this paper, an attempt has been made to explore the level of political participation and political awareness of the SCs in Tripura.

KEY WORDS: Scheduled Caste, Political participation, Political awareness, voting, public affairs,

Received 16 Feb, 2021; Revised: 28 Feb, 2021; Accepted 02 Mar, 2021 © The author(s) 2021.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Political participation refers to those voluntary activities by which members of a society show active interest and play a role in the selection of rulers. It includes voting, seeking information, discussing, attending meetings, contributing financially, and communicating with the representatives, enrolment in a party, canvassing and registering voters and working in campaigns. It is clear that the term political participation draws our attention to political activities rather than attitude and behaviour of private citizen to those who are professionally involved in public affairs. The constitution of India has assured equal political rights of political participation irrespective of caste, class, religion, gender and place of birth. However, the scheduled caste communities are lagging behind in respect of political participation. There are multiple factors are present in our society which threatening them in politics, and one of the factor is caste. In India, the scheduled caste communities have different sorts of disadvantage to affective political participation, in this paper, an attempt has been made to explore the level of political participation and political awareness of the SCs in Tripura.

The purpose of this study is to examine the political activities and political participation of scheduled castes in Tripura. Since, independence, India has been making continuous efforts to develop its rural areas. The community development programme was the first to tackle the problems of rural India in a comprehensive manner. But the community development programme, as it has been observed by Balwant Rai Mehta committee could not deliver the desired results. Consequently Mehta committee reached the conclusion that unless people's own representatives at the local level are associated with the administration of community development programme and without people's enthusiasm and cooperation it would not be successful.

The political participation of SCs is responsible for their caste development, village development, keeping the transformation of social and economic life of rural areas as its goal of development. It says that the rural progress depends entirely upon the existence of an active organisation in villages, which can bring all the people including the weaker sections into common programmes with the help of administration.

SCHEDULED CASTE

In Indian society virtually the higher echelons of power are dominated by the upper castes. Despite the prominence of a few Scheduled Castes who have gained high political positions in our country, the political status of Scheduled Castes has changed much less than what the individual successes show. Discrimination on the grounds of caste is morally, legally and democratically wrong. But caste equality can come about only when Scheduled Castes make use of the full array of political weapons available to them to achieve it, that is political activity is essential to the struggle for Scheduled Castes liberation.

Caste is the important social structure element of the Hindu society, this is decided by birth. At the same time it is the fine exhibition of diagram of high and low ranking of human beings, since its origin. "The word "Caste" itself has been derived from the Spanish and Portuguese word *casta*, which means "race, lineage, tribe or breed; it has a historical origin known as *jati* in Sanskrit."¹ According to most of the prevalent beliefs, the history of the origin of the caste is the "Varna-theory" which accounts of the Varna system of social stratification of the Hindu society.

Mahatma Gandhi in 1933 named Scheduled Caste people as Harijan meaning "Children of God" keeping in view "The man of Brahma" conception of upper caste. Unfortunately the meaning man of God has been interpreted wrongly as the term of result the term of abuse for the depressed classless; as a result Harijan was resented by Ambedkar and his followers. It was recommended to secretary of state in the same year of state for India by the Viceroy for use at an all India level preference to other term than current.

The term of Scheduled caste was also adopted by the British Government, in the government of India Act 1935, it is significant fact that the word Scheduled Castes first coined by Simmon commission and incorporated in the government of India Act 1935 section 279 during a celebrated temple entry campaign in 1933 Gandhi bestowed on the untouchable the new name of Harijan and Scheduled Caste. According to the proposal of the government of Bengal the caste so protected should be simply described as "Scheduled Caste" which do not have specific connotation of their actual social status.

This proposal was accepted by the same members of the depressed classes and certain member of the Bengal legislature council. The member of the council said that the term scheduled caste or caste put under a schedule, though this term has been used as nomenclatures in the present constitution of the republic of India. It does not contain any definition except the procedure in Article 341 according to which scheduled caste means such castes, rule or tribe parts of group within such castes, race of tribes as are deemed under Act 341 to be the Scheduled Caste for the purpose of the constitution of India. It is the powers to the president of India to issue the list of the scheduled caste as has been published in the "Scheduled Caste" in the order of 1950 after constitution with the governor of any state. Though the term scheduled caste has remained undefined until now. But it is the term that has been chosen after so many controversies. The word scheduled caste gave definite, distinct identity to the caste so clubbed without necessitating any interference with the social structure of the Hindu society.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- i. To study the level of political participation of Scheduled Castes in the 30-Bagma (ST) Assembly Constituency.
- ii. To highlight the political awareness of the Scheduled Castes in the 30-Bagma (ST) Assembly Constituency.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Depending on the nature of the study empirical technique has been used which consists of Purposive Sampling and two types of data, primary as well as secondary data. The respondents of the present study belong to scheduled castes in the 30-Bagma (ST) Assembly Constituency.

DATA COLLECTION

Data have been collected from two sources, they were:

Primary Sources

The primary data is based upon firsthand information from the respondents. For this purpose an interview questionnaire was prepared in beforehand and then approached to the respondents. The respondents have been selected from different villages under the 30-Bagma (ST) Assembly Constituency. The researcher has been selected 20 respondents purposively from the constituency.

Secondary Sources

Secondary data was collected from census reports, district census handbook, journals, books and other relevant reports.

¹ Nariender Kumar Dutt, "*Origin and Growth of Caste in India*", (Calcutta: K.L. Mukhopodhyay, 1968), P.33.

As part of the present study, analysis on socio-economic characteristics of the respondents has been done in the first part and the analysis on political awareness and participation in the second. Details have been given below: District wise Scheduled Castes Population in Tripura as of Census 2011:

SN	Name of Districts	Scheduled Castes population			% of SC
		Population	Male	Female	2011
1	West Tripura	192475	97687	94788	20.96
2	Sepahijala District	82558	42526	40032	17.07
3	Khowai District	63062	32310	30752	19.25
4	South District	65737	33705	32032	15.26
5	Gomati District	74430	38306	36124	16.86
6	North Tripura	60554	60554	29596	14.51
7	Unakati District	54414	27417	26997	19.98
8	Dhalai District	61688	31461	30227	16.31
Tripura		654918	334370	320548	17.82

The SCs are scattered in the whole state, so we cannot find them in a particular area, however the highest concentration of the SCs are in the west Tripura district.

LIST OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN THE STATE

The following 34 communities are recognized as Scheduled Castes in the State as per presidential order: The Government of India in the scheduled caste and scheduled Tribes order (Amendment act) 1976 notified 32 castes as scheduled castes. In the Constitution scheduled caste order (Amendment act) 2002 added 2 new castes as scheduled caste to the list. At present 34 notified scheduled caste groups are living.

It also shows that some scheduled caste groups are the majority caste while others are minority scheduled caste. The majority scheduled castes are basically Bengali scheduled castes those who are migrated from East Pakistan (presently Bangladesh). The minority scheduled castes are not Bengali who came in the state from the rest of India as workers for their livelihood. Again the minority scheduled castes are socio-economically more underprivileged than the Bengali scheduled castes. The Bengali scheduled castes migrated from the then East Bengal (presently Bangladesh). They are also the underprivileged section of our society.

1) Bagdi	18) Keot
2) Bhuimali	19) Khadit
3) Bhunar	20) Kharia
4) Chamar, Muchi	21) Koch
5) Dandashi	22) Kaor
6) Denuer	23) Kel
7) Dhupi	24) Kora
8) Dum	25) Kotal
9) Ghasi	26) Mahishyadas
10) Gour	27) Mali
11) Gur	28) Methar
12) Jalia Kalibarta	29) Mushahar
13) Kahar	30) Namasudra
14) Kalindi	31) Patni
15) Kan	32) Sabar
16) Kanda	33) Sabdakar, Baidyakar, Dhuli
17) Kanugh	34) Nat, Natta

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation plays a significant role in the survival of an ongoing democratic political system. Lack of political awareness and passivity of the general masses make the political system irresponsible and ultimately non-functioning. It is political consciousness and political awareness which brings the sense of interest articulation among the general masses. When the interest is articulated as a result of political consciousness, it leads to interest aggregation. When the interest is aggregated, the resultant is mass mobilization. When the masses are mobilized the outcome is effective participation of the masses in the affairs of the political system. In this framework the significance of political participation acquires a paramount importance.

The process of political participation refers to those voluntary activities by which members of a society show active interest and play a role in the selection of rulers. It includes voting, seeking information, discussing, attending meetings, contributing financially, and communicating with the representatives, enrolment in a party, canvassing and registering voters and working in campaigns. It is clear that the term political participation draws our attention to political activities rather than attitude and behaviour of private citizen to those who are professionally involved in public affairs. There are many scholars who argue that caste politicization is never a one-sided affair. If the caste orientation implies politics, politics, in turn, leaves its effect upon caste solidarity and hierarchy.² As each political party looks at the caste composition of each constituency before nominating candidates for the constituency though they were vocal in public gathering caste does not play any role in politics but reality is something else.

Again, man is a power seeking animal, almost always longing for power. If any individual holds power, he has a satisfaction that he is powerful. This longing for power mostly operates at the unconscious level and this sentiment leads an individual to be politically engaged. Man is the slave of his own ego or self-esteem. Sometimes they fulfil this desire, i.e. ego feelings through political participation. But the extent of influence of the psychological variables greatly depends upon the social atmosphere. The proper social environment inspires or encourages the people by which they can involve themselves politically.

In political participation, we do not confine ourselves to the act of voting alone, since there are other political activities which are important indicators of political participation. The participation covers a wide range of activities like participation in rallies, becoming members of different political parties or the other pressure groups, forming their own political party or raising issues of political importance through different mediums- radio, television, newspapers etc. or participating in elections at all levels-voting, campaigning or contesting.

The political awareness and level of participation of Scheduled Castes in these activities in Tripura with special reference to 30-Bagma Assembly Constituency has not yet been explored by any of the researchers. Therefore, considering the importance of these facts a systematic attempt has been made to understand and analyze the political participation of the Scheduled Castes in Tripura with special reference to 30-Bagma Assembly Constituency.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Age composition, occupation, educational qualification, family size and annual income of the respondents have been taken for analysis on Socio-economic characteristics.

Age composition of the respondents

The respondents were from various age groups and the table 1.1 shows that maximum number of respondents is from the age group 18-30 years consisting 40 percent. The maximum number of age group is followed by age group 30-40 years (30%) and 40-50 years (30%) respectively. The table shows zero percent for the age group 50-60 years and above.

Table- 1.1

SN	Variables	No of Respondents	% of respondents
1	18-30 years	8	40.00
2	30-40 years	6	30.00
3	40-50 years	6	30.00
4	50-60 years and above	0	0.00

² Ramashray Roy, *Caste and Political Recruitment in Bihar*, in Rajni Kothari, (ed.), "*Caste in Indian Politics*", (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1972) P.288.

Total	20	100.00
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Educational qualification of the respondents

The table 1.2 shows that 80% respondents studied class VI to XII and 20% studied primary level. It is clear from the table that no one is there as illiterate and none of them have studied up to graduation and above. It is to note that the relation between the education and democracy is the source of political participation in modern time. And it helps to understand the complexities of the democratic politics and guide the people of their rights and duties. On the other side educated people are likely to be more aware of political activities.

Table- 1.2

SN	Category	No of Respondents	% of respondents
1	Illiterate	0	0.00
2	I-V	4	20.00
3	VI - XII	16	80.00
4	Graduate and Above	0	0.00
Total		20	100.00

Occupation of the respondents

As shown in the table 1.3, maximum numbers of respondent are in the occupation like agriculture consisting 60%. Agriculture is followed by labor (20%), others (15%) and horticulture (5%) respectively. The occupation of the respondents who were in the other category included small scale business at the local level.

Table- 1.3

SN	Category	No of Respondents	% of respondents
1	Agriculture	12	60.00
2	Horticulture	1	5.00
3	Labor	4	20.00
4	Others	3	15.00
Total		20	100.00

Annual income of the respondents

As the table 1.4 shows that 65% respondents are in „below Rs. 10,000“ level of annual income which is followed by 30% in the level of „below Rs. 5,000“ and 5% in the level of „below Rs. 30,000 and above“ respectively. No number of respondents is seen in the level of below Rs. 25,000. The table makes it clear that all the respondents were below the poverty line. It is notable that the economy of Tripura is basically agrarian and characterized by high rate of poverty, low per-capita income and more than 42 percent of its population now directly depends on agriculture & allied activities.

Table- 1.4

SN	Variables	No of Respondents	% of respondents
1	Below Rs.5,000	6	30.00
2	Below Rs.10,000	13	65.00
3	Below Rs. 25,000	0	0.00
4	Below Rs. 30,000 and above	1	5.00

Total	20	100.00
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Numbers of family members of the respondents

It is important to know the family size of the respondents in a study to know the socio-economic characteristics of a particular community or a group of people. In this study, as shown in the table 1.5, family size category of 4-5 members consists the maximum 55% which is followed by the category 2-3 members with 25% and the category 6-7 members with 20%. The table contains zero percent of number of the category 8 and above.

Table- 1.5

SN	Category	No of Respondents	% of respondents
1	2-3 members	5	25.00
2	4-5 members	11	55.00
3	6-7 members	4	20.00
4	8 members and above	0	0.00
Total		20	100.00

ANALYSIS ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF RESPONDENTS

This part includes analysis on Political Awareness and level of Participation of the Respondents. Relevant questions from the interview schedule have been taken for the analysis.

1. Do you know the voting age of the electorates who has a right to vote?

The respondents were questioned to respond whether they knew that in our country that attained the age of 18 years has a right to vote. The table 1.6 shows that 90% respondents said Yes and only 10% respondents said No.

Table 1.6

Variables	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	18	90.00
No	2	10.00
Total	20	100.00

2. Do you cast your vote during election?

The respondents were asked to respond to the question whether they casted vote. The table 1.7 shows that 100% respondents said that they casted vote in the elections. It is definitely good for a democracy.

Table 1.7

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	20	100.00
No	0	0.00
Total	20	100.00

3. How did you cast your vote in elections?

The table 1.8 shows that 55% respondents casted their votes for respective party candidate, 35% responded that they casted their votes for the person of choice not on the basis of party line and 10% casted vote on the ground of leadership quality.

Table 1.8

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1) Person	7	35.00
2) Leadership	2	10.00
3) Party	11	55.00
4) Caste	0	0.00
5) Religion	0	0.00
6) Sex	0	0.00
7) Language	0	0.00
Total	20	100.00

4. Did you take part in the elections as per your wish?

The respondents were asked whether they took part in election as per their wishes. All the respondents said that they used to take part in election as per their wishes. In the table 1.9 it is clear that 100% respondents responded Yes. It has been observed that females are somehow influenced by the head of family.

Table 1.9

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	20	100.00
No	0	0.00
Total	20	100.00

5. What is the nature of your participation in political activities?

The respondents were asked about the nature of their participation in different political activities. Their responses have been showed in the table 1.10 where it is clear that 75% respondents said that they did nothing in this regard. 15% respondents participated in election campaigns and 10% respondents provided financial aids.

Table 1.10

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1) Election Meetings	0	0.00
2) Election Campaign	3	15.00
3) By Financial Aid	2	10.00
4) Making Speech	0	0.00
5) Nothing	15	75.00
Total	20	100.00

6. Do you think that caste system is still playing an important role in the elections?

The respondents were asked the question whether they think the caste system is still playing an important role in the election. Table 1.11 shows that 65% respondents said NO and 35% respondents still think that caste system is still playing important role in elections.

Table 1.11

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	7	35.00
No	13	65.00
Total	20	100.00

7. Are you participating in different political activities?

In response to this question almost all the respondents said that they did not participate in any political activities. The table no 1.12 shows that 95% respondents responded NO and only 5% responded Yes. It has been observed that the respondent actually did not want to expose their political affairs.

Table 1.12

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	1	5.00
No	19	95.00
Total	20	100.00

8. Do you think that higher caste has monopoly in the rural power structure?

The respondents were questioned whether they think that higher caste has monopoly in the rural power structure. Table 1.13 shows that 75% respondents did not think the higher caste has monopoly in the rural power structure. But 25% respondents still think that higher caste has monopoly in the rural power structure.

Table 1.13

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	5	25.00
No	15	75.00
Total	20	100.00

II. CONCLUSION

The present study has been an attempt to know the political participation of Scheduled Castes in Tripura with special reference to 30- Bagma (ST). The researcher has taken due care to assess multiple aspect which is responsible for the political participation of the SC, so at beginning an overview of socio economic conditions of the respondents with the help of some indicators such as Age, Educational Status, Family Size, Occupation and Annual Income have outline which are primary indication of political participation . The 2nd part provides political awareness and political barriers of the Scheduled castes respondents with relevant indicators. The study shows that political awareness of the scheduled castes in the 30-Bangma Assembly Constituency and the political awareness level of the Schedule Castes is very impressive. Majority of the respondents were found aware about basic political affairs. They cast their vote as per their wishes and even some of them participate in different political activities. The respondents were informed the caste system was playing a marginal role in the election, 65% respondents opined that there was no role of caste system in the election in the contemporary age. However, 35% respondents opined that the caste system did play an important role in the election. Finally, the respondents were acknowledging the higher caste has subsidiary monopoly in the rural power structure where it was seen that 95% of the respondents opined that the higher caste had no monopoly in the rural power structure. They further opined that the caste hierarchy in the rural power structure has been subsided by education, leadership quality etc.

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