

Electoral Politics in Tripura: A Study on the Role of the Scheduled Caste in Electoral Politics

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Abstract: *The evolution of the federal parliamentary democracy in India has heralded political participation at alarming scale before that political participation was confined to the small upper section of the society and also the British colonial rulers were not allowed mass participation in political activities. But the scenario has changed after independence, the inception of parliamentary democracy has encourage all the political parties to participate in the electoral politics though the congress party has been remains a dominant political party in the center as well as in the states for three decades due to leading role of the congress in the freedom struggle. Later, the autocratic regime of Mrs. Gandhi in the mid seventies of the twentieth century that has lead an united efforts by the opposition parties to install the first non-congress government at center as well as in many states. The scheduled caste communities also raised their participation in the electoral politics in India from the very beginning of the democratic politics. Dr. B.R Ambedkar, chairman of the drafting committee and forerunner of dalit movement in India, endorse active participation of the SCs to the electoral politics and urged adequate representation of the SCs in the legislature for furthering their interest. So, the electoral politics has been a boon for the SCs to represent proportionately in the legislature and it also strengthen their voice to rid of from existing deprivation. In addition to this, the SCs have organized several socio-economic and political movements to get due share which was confined by the upper caste sections of the society. Electoral politics in Tripura has its own history since the accession of Tripura state with Indian union. It also carries the struggle story of the SCs and how does the electoral politics empower the SCs from the deprivation.*

Keywords: Society, Politics, Political modernization, Scheduled Caste, Electoral Politics

1. Introduction

The evolution of the federal parliamentary democracy in India has heralded political participation at alarming scale before that political participation was confined to the small upper section of the society and also the British colonial rulers were not allowed mass participation in political activities. But the scenario has changed after independence, the inception of parliamentary democracy has encourage all the political parties to participate in the electoral politics though the congress party has been remains a dominant political party in the center as well as in the states for three decades due to leading role of the congress in the freedom struggle. Later, the autocratic regime of Mrs. Gandhi in the mid seventies of the twentieth century that has lead an united efforts by the opposition parties to install the first non-congress government at center as well as in many states. The scheduled caste communities also raised their participation in the electoral politics in India from the very beginning of the democratic politics. Dr. B.R Ambedkar, chairman of the drafting committee and forerunner of dalit movement in India, endorse active participation of the SCs to the electoral politics and urged adequate representation of the SCs in the legislature for furthering their interest. So, the electoral politics has been a boon for the SCs to represent proportionately in the legislature and it also strengthen their voice to rid of from existing deprivation. In addition to this, the SCs have organized several socio-economic and political movements to get due share which was confined by the upper caste sections of the society. Electoral politics in Tripura has its own history since the accession of Tripura state with Indian union. It also carries the struggle

India is the world largest democracy and the circlet is on India by virtue of having the large number of electorates. The general election is considered as a national festival in

India and it has added additional vigour by the 86th constitution Amendment which reduces voting age from twenty one years to 18 years. Universal adult franchises guarantee equal political participation irrespective of caste, class, religion, gender, ethnicity and place of birth. But the history of electoral politics in India reveals that some elements jeopardize the political spirit of the people during election or thereafter. Since seventies of the last century, election is severely affected by ragging, booth capturing, fearing electorates in different forms, money and muscles. Apart from this political parties used the tricks of caste, class, religion and ethnicity. However, people of our country have believes in the democratic spirit which could submerged all kinds of undemocratic elements of political participation.

The Scheduled castes communities are the most destitute section of our society. The ancient caste system has placed the scheduled castes at the bottom of social hierarchy whereas Brahmins are at the top. This system has been ordained by God, and nobody dares to change it. The higher caste communities uphold social distance from the untouchable caste. In India, all the states, region and parts are severely affected by the caste system. And it has covered all the way of our life. It equally impacts on the politics and other spheres of life. The Scheduled castes have no resource to develop their socio-economic and political condition. On the other hand, the lower caste tag is equally responsible to place them at the weakest condition of life. Moreover, their conditions deteriorated with the passage of time. As a consequence of such discrimination, the scheduled caste community occupied the lowest rank in the social hierarchical in the state. This study helps to predict the level of development of scheduled caste politics in Tripura as well as the role played in the electoral politics. It also highlights

Volume 10 Issue 3, March 2021

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the possible remedies of the social, economic and political disadvantage of the scheduled caste community.

Objectives of the study

The present study has two important objectives which are as following

- 1) To study the level of political development of the scheduled caste in Tripura.
- 2) To highlights the role of the scheduled caste community in the electoral politics in Tripura

2. Methodology

The methodology of the present study is based on empirical analysis and the data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The respondents were selected on the basis of purposive sampling. The size of the sampling is 30. And the secondary sources of data have been collected from Books, Journals, magazine, news papers and other relevant sources.

Demography of Scheduled Caste in Tripura: An Overview

Tripura is one of the eighth north eastern states of India. It is the third smallest state of India having people 36, 71,032 as per 2011 census. The decadal growth rate in the state was 14.75 in 2001-2011. According to the 2011 census, the scheduled caste population of the state was 6, 54,918 which constituted 17.82% of the total population. The Scheduled Caste is not confined to a particular place or locality, they are scattered in the whole state of Tripura. They also considered the disadvantaged section of our state. Government of India in the scheduled caste and scheduled Tribes order (Amendment act) 1976 notified 32 castes as scheduled castes. 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. The table below shows the 34 notified the scheduled castes and their population strength as per 2011 census.

Table 1.1: Caste wise Demographic Profile of SC in Tripura

SC Name	Total Population		
	Total	Male	Female
All Schedule Castes	654,918	334,370	320,548
Bagdi	510	243	267
Bhuimali	272	149	123
Bhunar	178	84	94
Chamar, Muchi	13,579	6,781	6,798
Dandasi	5	4	1
Dhenuar	65	33	32
Dhoba	56,513	28,853	27,660
Dhuli, Sabdakar, Badyakar	9,344	4,791	4,553
Dum	41	21	20
Ghasi	204	108	96
Gour	6,854	3,488	3,366
Gur	86	57	29
JaliaKaibarta	106,849	54,792	52,057
Kahar	357	193	164
Kalindi	135	59	76
Kan	27	15	12
Kanda	2,574	1,318	1,256
Kanugh	49	28	21
Keot	302	153	149

Khadit	18	11	7
Kharia	1,409	745	664
Koch	815	419	396
Koir	102	55	47
Kol	1,079	544	535
Kora	117	58	59
Kotal	9	7	2
Mahisyadas	153,034	78,371	74,663
Mali	55,009	28,003	27,006
Mehtor	1,851	927	924
Musahar	327	178	149
Namasudra	215,267	109,689	105,578
Natta, Nat	1,643	827	816
Patni	7,235	3,619	3,616
Sabar	4,429	2,262	2,167

Source: Census report, 2011 & Tripura scheduled caste welfare Dept., Govt. of Tripura.

The table no 1.1 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 who 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) are also the underprivileged section of our society. The partition of the country led to the excessive migration of people in the state, gradually the number of Bengali people increased in the state. The number of the scheduled caste people is also huge and this is increasing after the partition. The following table show a huge number of people who migrated to Tripura from Bangladesh in 1946 to 1957.

Table 1.2: Numbers of Migrated people in different years

Year	Total No of Refugee
1946 (riot Year)	3,327
1947 (year of Partition)	8,124
1948	1554
1949 (communal disturbance)	11575
1950 (serious communal riot)	67,151
1951	2016
1952 (serious riots)	80,000
1953	32,000
1954	4,700
1955	17,500
1956	50,700
1957	3600
Total-	282,247

Source: Bangladesh Document, No.15, chap.V, Bangla Prakash, Dhaka, 1978, P.91¹

The first stage of migration took place in the year 1946 when a riot occurred in our neighboring country. Again in the year 1947 or during the partition moment more than 8000 (Eight Thousand) people came to the state. The scenario was more terrible after the partition of the country. Life of the minority communities in both the countries was in danger due to communal disturbances and serious riots.

¹ Anindita Ghoshal, Changing Mentality of the Bengalee Refugees: The story of Tripura (1946-1971) http://www.mcrg.ac.in/rw%20files/RW39_40/2.pdf 26/11/2015.

The table no 1.2 shows detail reports that within ten years more than 2.8 lakh people migrated as refugee to the small state of Tripura. Thereafter, migration is a regular phenomenon, the Hindu minorities came to the state to seek asylum due to communal clashes in our neighbouring country. The situation aggravated during the 1971 Bangladesh liberation moment. A huge numbers of refugees arrived in the state, thereafter a good number of refugees settled down permanently in the state. This did not increase the number of population only but also it has impacted on the socio-economic and political composition of the state. The rise of Bengali population in the state led to ethnic conflicts between the native tribal groups and migrated Bengalis. Many people lost their lives due to ethnic conflicts in the state. It is a fact; the migrations of people from the neighbouring country increased population in the state.

Table 1.3: Decadal growth of SC in Tripura

Year of census	Total population	SC Population	Percentage
1961	11,42,005	1,19,725	10.48
1971	15,56,342	1,92,860	12.39
1981	20,53,053	3,10,384	15.11
1991	27,57,205	4,51,116	16.36
2001	31,99,203	5,55,724	17.37
2011	36,73,917	6,54,918	17.82

Source: Census report 2011, Govt. of India.

The accurate data of the scheduled castes in Tripura has been not available since independence. The available government record highlighted according to 1961 census to recent 2011 census the numerical strength of the scheduled caste. There are several reasons behind the growth of the scheduled caste population in the state. Firstly the partition of the country followed by communal riots in Bengal between two major religious groups i.e. Hindus and Muslims led to the migration of the Hindu Bengalis to the state, Second, during the Bangladesh liberation movement an good number of refugees came to Tripura to take asylum and some of them later permanently settled down in the state, Third, many people still today unofficially come to the state because as the Hindu majority states will protect their interest sometimes the government gave assurance to provide citizenship to the Hindu minorities who came from the neighboring countries, Fourthly, lack of proper family planning among the scheduled caste community raised the number of the scheduled caste. Though, many other reasons also are responsible for the growth of the scheduled caste population in the state.

Electoral Politics in Tripura

Political parties are ambitious to acquire power by different tactics. So, they have explored the strategy to mobilize the scheduled caste community in India as well as in Tripura. The scheduled caste communities are one of the most disadvantaged sections of our society and hardly have a representative in the political institutions. They are a huge number of untouchable castes; equally, they are barred social communication with higher caste in our society. It was Dr, B.R Ambedkar who launched various organized movement for sharing political power and provide social justice to the scheduled caste section of people. After independence, due to the substantial increase population in the scheduled castes represented the politics of India as an

important force. They are playing a dominant role in politics since two decades. Indian polity embarked on the phase of fierce competitive politics since the end of the one party domination. These competitive politics in India laid study the voting behavior of different groups. The political behaviors of deprived sections were molded by different political parties to consolidate vote bank of these groups. The continuation of reservation policy for depressed caste and other community is prominent. In Indian perspective, the gradual decline of Congress party laid rise of different political parties like the BJP, RJD, BSP, LJP, CPI, and CPI (M) used different tactics to catch the voter in different states. There were many indicators which shape the dimension of Dalit politics in India.

Election is a regular phenomenon in the parliamentary democratic political system. It provides alternatives in terms of parties and Programmes. It is the political parties stand at the center of the process of government formation in a parliamentary system of government. Indian electoral politics in the last 65 years have been changing its formation into three phases. The first phase began in 1952- 1967 with one party dominant majority party system. The congress party was dominating at center as well as states also. During this period, the political participation was low and the goal of the election is to elect the central leadership with the eyes firmly fixed on national priorities.² The reality was that there are a few leaders from the scheduled castes. In such personality cult politics the lower caste has limited opportunity to participate in politics. The second phases witness the debacles of Congress government and led the formation of different non-congress in various states. Though, Indira Gandhi backs Congress into the power in 1971 but could not restore Congress dominance as it before. Politics become unambiguously popular and it was a period of intense mobilization of people. It provided for the entry of deprived section or backward caste groups into politics.³ The lower caste community had extensively joined in politics to transform their condition. The third phase occurred in 1989 with the formation of VP Singh minority government. In the present day Indian politics, due to the existence of the number of political parties in national and state politics, no party can unitarily form govt. coalition politics is the important features of present day Indian National politics.⁴

The politics in Tripura is also shaped by a different process. It is an independent princely state merged with Indian union on 15 October 1949 as a C category state. The first election in the state was held in 1952. The 1952 Electoral College consists of thirty members and there was no scheduled caste representative. Caste factor was the important reason for not being included in the house. Later, *Tripura Scheduled Caste Association*, (TSCA) formed to secure civil and political rights of scheduled caste community in the state and congress find a platform to bought scheduled caste people under their banner. The 1957 *Tripura Territorial Council* (TTC) election, the Congress party had tie-up temporarily

²Sridharan Kripa, (2002) *Indian Politics in the 1990s: Trends and Transformations*, Asian Journal of Political science, 10:1,55-76, DOI:10.1080/02185370208434202, 13/09/2015.

³ Ibid.,

⁴ Ibid.,

with the TSCA and they offered two seats for the scheduled caste community. And at last, officially only one seat provided to the scheduled caste community. The Congress party always has been dominated by higher caste people. It is true all about the center as well as the state. On the other hand, Congress government gives rehabilitation to the migrated people in the state and subsequently they also provide citizenship of the country that attracts the scheduled castes who settled after the partition in the state.

A huge of migrated people arrived in Tripura as a refugee and later they are permanently settled down in the state. Though the number of the scheduled caste population is not specifically mentioned, there are many people belongs to scheduled caste community. All the people become vote bank of the Congress party. The scenario of migration was still continued the year of 1971. The orthodox rule of congress party in the 70 and overwhelming corruption in the government evoke country wise movement against Congress rule. Tripura was also no exception after withdrawn of emergency in 1978 a revolutionary transformation took place in the state. The election of *Tripura Legislative Assembly* (TLA) was held in the year 1978 where Congress party failed to win a single seat. For the first time, *Communist Party of India (Marxist)* (CPI-M) won an absolute majority in the election. The left party organized all the depressed section groups of Tripura through various caste and class association. These groups become the solid vote bank of CPI (M) party. It is also periodically reserved constituency for the scheduled caste community as proportionate to their total population. These had created positive sign towards the scheduled caste community is another way helped to get support from these communities. The Congress party failed to establish such caste organizational work among the scheduled caste community. It has made the gulf between the party and scheduled caste people. The Congress party could not mobilize in the same way to get support from the scheduled caste community.

The Scheduled Caste and the Electoral Politics in Tripura

The study of electoral politics may help to understand the panorama of state politics because political activities get heighten during the election moment. In Tripura, the universal adult franchise has been exercised on several occasions of election; to the Electoral College, Territorial Council, Legislative Assembly, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, Municipality, Gaon Panchayat and District Council.⁵ The first election was held in Tripura during the princely state where political parties were markedly absent. It was due to the poor political parties' awareness and the political activities were nascent and dormant.⁶ Besides these the poor socio-political condition is responsible for meager participation. After the independence, the political action of different political parties ramified across the state.

On 15th October 1949, Tripura state merged with Indian union as a C category state. The Chief Commissioner was

the head of the state with a democratic institution. The first general election was held in 1952 and an electoral college consists of 30 members. The Tripura Territorial Council Act of 1956 opened up for direct elections to a council with the same name (TTC).⁷ It has to transform the tribal state from tribal king ship to modern democracy. Hardly, anybody of tribal, non-tribal or other groups of people has the idea of modern democracy. The Tripura Territorial Council had 30 directly elected members and two members were nominated by the governor. The first TTC election was held in 1957, followed by fresh polls in 1959. The third council elected in February 1962 had 20 members.⁸ In 1967 4th council election was held and formed 30 members elected body with 6 ministerial bodies under the leadership of Sachindra Lal Singha. The democratic processes permanently established in the year 1972 when Tripura state achieved full-fledged statehood. In the same year, TLA formed 60 members Assembly and started democratic governance in the state.

The process did not come; there had been lots of hurdle, power politics and dissatisfaction culminated over the state politics in Tripura. The different political parties had particular tactics to bring people to their side: in the post independence stratagem, the communist party went to the deep hilly areas to convert tribal people to their faith, on the other hand, Congress party confined to the urban areas and gradually reached to the villages. The 1962 Electoral College election the *Communist Party of India* (CPI) won in twelve seats, the *Indian National Congress* (INC) nine and other political parties together won nine seats. The union government favored the INC and discountenanced the communist party. Tripura administration came under the direct supervision of the central government, took a stern attitude towards the communist and attempted to suppress their movement. So in four subsequent elections held in 1957, 1962, 1967 and 1972, the INC party got the majority. On the eve of the next election 1977, there was a universal and growing dissatisfaction with the Congress government and party, so the left front got as many as fifty-six seats with absolute majority formed the government and rest four seats won by the regional party *Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti* (TUJS). The Congress, Janata Dal, and other party failed to win even a single seat. Thereafter, the CPI (M) parties with their alliances continuously remain in power in all levels of democratic institution in Tripura and only for a short spell of time a coalition government was formed by the congress party. However, it is pertinent to note that all the political parties landing in politics in Tripura with numerous development policies to uplift the deprived sections of our society. It is the party that center revolving around with manifold policies to bring supporter in their fold. Though the strategies of the different political party are not uniform but the ultimate goal is to capture power. The Congress party holds the strategy as a dominant force to lead the country during the independence movement. In Tripura also the party provided rehabilitation to the migrated people which naturally attract the Bengali people approximately constitute 70% of the total population towards the party. Another dominant party is CPI (M) and its allies take the

⁵ Jagadish Gan Chaudhuri, "Politics of Election in Tripura" in P.S. Dutta (ed.), *Electoral Politics in North East India*, (New Delhi: Omsons Publication, 1986), P. 197.

⁶ . Ibid.,

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Tripura, 16/06/2016.

⁸ S.P Agarwal, *Reorganization of North East India since 1947*, (New Delhi: Concept Publ. Co, 1996), pp. 311-312.

side of the poor or deprived section of the society which naturally consolidated their place in the democratic politics in the state. The electoral politics in Tripura shows that the CPI (M) party has a strong hold of in the SC reserved constituency. The election was held from 1977 to 2013 to TLA and during all local self-government election CPIM party was the ultimate choice of the scheduled caste community. In between from 1988 to 1993 for a short spell the Congress party formed the government but in the scheduled caste reserved constituencies, the CPIM party won maximum seats. It has led a strong organizational movement for the underprivileged section to bring equality in the society. The scheduled caste communities being a lower section of society easily got attracted towards the communist party. During the Congress rule, the scheduled caste community could not find a place to bring their demand to change their life condition. Subsequently, it has made a gap between them which filled by CPIM party through various scheduled caste organization.

3. Conclusion

Thus, electoral politics has brought a new era for the scheduled caste communities in Tripura. It has provided not only an opportunity to participate in democratic politics but also to shape other aspect of life i.e. human and material well being. Since they are the most disadvantage section of the society, the government has made different programme and policies to uplift them and some punitive measures those who violate the principles of equal self restraints. In Tripura, most of the communities are living together; as a result, caste atrocities are hardly visible in the state though the government have made stringent law to punish the offenders. Now a days, the scheduled caste communities are well aware of the importance of political participation and we can perceived the overall participation of scheduled caste in three- tire Panchayati raj system where they are representing more than to their proportion. It has impacted on their overall development process. But development is a multi faced process. No uniform criteria can be entertained to define the process of development. In this process, socio-economic and political circumstances are also important to consider while measuring development. However, political participation remains important element to ameliorate their disadvantages. It is an important weapon for the scheduled caste community to shape their life on the platform democratic politics in Tripura. From the above discourse, it is clear that active political participation will definitely bring opportunities for the disadvantage section of society and especially for SCs.

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