

Women Political Participation in Tripura: A Study on the Role of the Scheduled Caste Women in the Panchayat Raj Institution

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Abstract: *Political empowerment is considered as the highest form of development. A nature of political participation should be developed so that all section of people can equally participate such a development process. Democratic political system granted universal adult suffrage and participation of all section. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the father of Indian constitution and leader of the disadvantage section of the society devoted his life for the betterment of the scheduled caste community and rid of from all kind of exploitation and deprivation. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Indian nation had instigated true democracy lies in the participation of common men in the political process. To keeping in mind, the ideology of father of nation, the makers of Indian constitution introduced democratic decentralization in the country. And the process further extends through the enactment of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment to recognized through constitutional provision. From Community development program to present form of the local governance has initiated to extend the political empowerment. Historically, the scheduled castes community are subjugated in various ways and placed them in a bottom rank of social hierarchy. The processes of development have been started with the advent of British rule in India. After the independence, the government of India have been incorporated various provision in the constitution to the development of disadvantage section generally and the scheduled caste particular. The condition of women in general and the scheduled caste in particular is deplorable. They were subjected to various form of exploitation i.e. caste and gender. In this study, the aim is to find out the level of political participation of scheduled caste woman in panchayat institution in Tripura.*

Keywords: Development, Women Participation, Democratic Decentralization, Discrimination

1. Introduction

Tripura is a small state in the north eastern region of India. It is located between 22 degree and 56 minutes and 24 degree and 32 minutes north latitude and between 90 degree and 09 minutes and 92 degree and 20 minutes east latitude. It is mainly a hilly state and surrounded by Bangladesh in three side and only eastern part of the state link with rest of India. Tripura is the third smallest state in India having population 36, 71,032 as per 2011 census. The decadal growth rate in the state was 14.75 in 2001-2011; the population density is 350 per sq. km. Tripura was ruled by Tripuri maharajas (kings) since fifteen centuries (H.M. Berah, 2007, p.11). It was a tribal dominated state having traditional socio-political structure. The kingdom of Tripura called the Bengalis to settle down in the state in order to modernizing the administration and economy of the state. Therefore, the learned cultivator came from neighbouring Bengal and teach the native tribal people how to do the settle cultivation in lieu of jhum cultivation (shifting cultivation). During the reign of Ratna Manikya, the Bengalis were first settled down in Tripura. Later, in various moment Bengalis arrived in the state. Tripura become a part of Indian union after the independence.

The partition of the country leads a huge migration in the state. The demographic figure of the state has drastically changed, i.e. once the state was a tribal dominated state and suddenly become a Bengali majority state. The demography of Scheduled Castes in Tripura is not confined to particular locality like some other parts of the Country. The Scheduled Caste population by and large lives inter-mingled with other communities in the same village. According to the 2011 census, the scheduled caste population of the state is 6, 54,918 which constituted 17.82% of the total population. About 70%

of the Scheduled Caste population of the State is engaged in Agricultural activities either as small and marginal farmers or share croppers or as agricultural labourers and fishermen families in the States are belongs to Scheduled Castes. In Tripura, the majority of scheduled castes are migrated from Bangladesh. Therefore, the scheduled castes have little resources to their development and they are occupying low position in the society. They remain at the lowest rung of the social ladder and almost at the bottom in the scale of poverty.

Objectives and methodology of the study:

The study has two important objectives which are as follows

- 1) To find out the level of political participation of scheduled caste women in panchayat and legislative assembly in Tripura.
- 2) To find out the development of leadership at local level of the three-tire panchayat.

The methods of data collection are mainly based on secondary source information which is collected from various sources, i.e., Tripura scheduled caste welfare department and Election commission of Tripura and Panchayat department, government of Tripura.

Theoretical perspective of political participation:

Political participation is closely connected with the political socialization and political culture. Both these characteristics have causative factor of political participation. The political socialization is an important factor which shaping the political consciousness of the individual. The main thrust of political socialization is to study the transmission of political values from one generation to another. There are many agencies of political socialization which affecting a man from childhood to until death. The term "political participation" refers to

those voluntary activities by which members of a society share in the selection of rules directly or indirectly, in the formation of public policy, these activities typically include voting, seeking information, discussing and proselytizing, attending meetings, contributing financially, and communicating with representation (P. Hussain Khan, 2009, p.30). The more active participation is enrollment in the party, speech writing, speech making and competing for public and party. Political participation is an ingredient of every polity, large or small. So, in every political system, whether it is democracy or oligarchy, the participation of general masses is required. Through the participation in political process people can affect his life, and contribute to the development of the community. Political participation does not mean only to give vote during polling, but also to participate in other activities like campaign activities, communal activity, and particularized contacts. This is the only process that the ruler can get mandate from the common man. Political participation is a complex phenomenon that depends on a great many variables originating themselves from socio-political environment of the system.

Women constitute the half of the country population but the representation of women in the politics is marginal. They were being deprived from participating in collective life by the social norms and domination by the patriarchal culture. The lack of representation impacted the overall development of women in India. And the condition of the scheduled castes women is more deplorable. They were subjected to double jeopardy being a woman and a Dalit.

Savitribhai Phule role in women empowerment:

Savitribhai Phule was a leading social activist for women rights in colonial India. Her strong will and determination help to work for the emancipation of women from violation. In India, women were facing atrocity in many fields; the prominent factors are patriarchy, gender and practicing conservative social taboo. She raises voice against practicing sati and similar other atrocities in the society. Phule was the earliest advocate of spreading education for girls and women. Along with Joytiba Phule, she opens eighteen girls' school in Pune, Maharashtra state for spreading women education. They believed the developed women can be possible by spreading the light of knowledge among the women in general and particularly the Dalit women. She also opened a home (ashram) for destitute women and widow and sought to introduce widow remarriage. She seeks to offer quality education to women of disadvantage community to establish social equality in the society. Phule faced different consequences from the higher caste who sought to maintain status-quo. She was injured in several occasions for challenging conservative taboo of the society from caste people but remain determinant to raise the consciousness of women to open a new avenue for women education and their upliftment.

Role of Dr. B.R Ambedkar to uplift the scheduled caste women:

In India, women are subjugated by social, economic and political disabilities. The scheduled caste women are too suffering from patriarchal constrain and holding a bottom rank in the society. The women movement in India has emphasized that Dalit women are the 'dust of dust' in Indian

society the thrice oppressed, brutalized, and abused not only by the upper caste and class but by Dalit men too (Sunita Arya, 2010, p.6). Women have contributed two third of world work, but it can receive only 10 percent of world income and only one percent of means of production (Sanjay Roy, 2010, p. 125). From economic point of view, women are the world largest excluded group. In India the right to vote during election have secured in the year 1921 (Roy, 2010). Despite the fact, the participation of women in politics is not appreciable.

In India from the first five-year plan to the eighties the development of women did not receive any fresh impetus and holding low position in the society. Later, the introduction of rural development program for women constitution a step to initiate the process of development. Further the process of democratic decentralization and establishment of panchayat raj help women to participate effectively in politics and the decision-making process. It helps to change their social, economic and political condition. To keep in mind the question of empowerment of women, state government has focused in general to legislate special provision for the empowerment of women.

This is a fact that before 1931 scheduled caste had no say in the government. Dr. Ambedkar was first demanded to the British government for political representative of the scheduled caste community. Though, it was severely criticized by the congress party especially by Gandhi. He exhorted that the separate electorates for scheduled caste would dismantle the unity of the society. His fasting unto death is remarkable which ended by Poona pact between Gandhi and Ambedkar in 1932. This pact heralded a new era, instead of separate electorates, reservation was granted for scheduled caste in government sector. After independence, the reservation policy for the scheduled caste was incorporated in the constitution.

Dr. B.R Ambedkar the father of Indian constitution has devised many policies for the development of scheduled caste. He emphasizes on caste system to know the nature of discrimination and its consequences on scheduled caste. He considered the traditional form of caste is involves to control social, economic and political governance of Hindu society. Ambedkar inclusive policy has four components, which include creating an egalitarian economic structure, which will provide a base for equal economic and social opportunities for the poor, including discriminated groups; equal opportunity policy in terms of reservation for discriminated groups with adequate legal safeguards against discrimination; the participation of discriminated groups in governance through a fair share in decision making process and monitoring process; and finally the responsibility of the to execute as per provision of the constitution (Sukhadeo Thorat & Narendra Kumar, 2012). After completing his education from Columbia University USA and the University of London UK, he returned to India to expand the participation of scheduled caste in various development process. Dr. Ambedkar the forerunner of Dalit had tried to develop the deprived section of our society. The Dalit are the weaker section of our society and Ambedkar rightly called them as 'Broken people'. He had been struggling all through his life to uplift the Dalit. And finally, he succeeded to incorporating

several provisions, legal rights in the constitution of India for the development of Dalit people. Dr. Ambedkar expected that with all the rights, concession, administrative assurance, social promises, the Dalit would rather soon develop to be their own, and get their recognition as being real makers of India.

Constitutional safeguards for the empowerment of Scheduled Caste:

The constitution of India incorporated various provisions for the development of women. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and M.K. Gandhi and other national leaders realized the importance of special provision for the depressed section of our society. In these respects, the first two steps were one universal adult suffrage and secondly reservation of seats for depressed classes in the representative bodies. A demand came from the depressed section of our society for adequate representation in the public services. In most cases individual attitudes and value preference generate an atmosphere of discrimination. The mischief can only be avoided by destroying the monopoly of the caste Hindu in the public services. The constitution of India made special provision for the depressed section such as SC/ST to enjoy equality in terms of job, education and representation. The important provisions have been incorporated in the constitution to uplift the status of scheduled caste. These are mention in below: Art. 14 of the constitution said that equality before law and equal protection by law within the territory of India; Art. 15 said that prohibition of discrimination on the ground of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, in the separate clauses of art, 15 (3) (4) (5) mention special provision for the development of women, children, and scheduled caste and scheduled Tribes. Art. 16 made equality of opportunity in matters of public employment, in this article clause 4 and 4 (A) make provision of reservation for disadvantage section like scheduled caste and scheduled tribes who are not adequately represented. Reservation of seats for SCs in the House of the People and in the Legislative Assemblies of the States (Article 330); Article 343D articulates reservation of seats for scheduled caste as proportion to their population in the panchayat. Also have provision one third of seats should reserve for women as well as scheduled caste women.

Panchayat raj system in Tripura:

A democratic system can be successful when there is a democratic decentralization. The history of panchayat raj system in Tripura has its own history. In these sections we tried to examine the growth and development of panchayat raj system in Tripura. During the princely state, Tripura had a unique form of local government which serves the interest of the all communities. This system is more or less similar to the panchayat system. Here, the rights of various groups and women recognized. The fact was that the kingdom does not directly control the regular activities of panchayat, they had only some indirect control over the panchayat system. Each village has a 'sardar' who is the head of the village. He has the power to administer the socio economic and political affairs of the village. Due to increase of the population in the village, the sardar alone could not manage the affairs of the tribal society. As a result, several groups were dissatisfied with the nature of headman of the village. The Reang revolt is a consequence of such dissatisfaction that took place in the state due to maharaja's involvement to appoint sardar of their

own choice. The last maharaja of Tripura, Bir Bikram Manikya had reform the administrative system to serve the interest of tribal society. The maharaja has passed a new act in the year 1929 for Tripura Kayastha society. In accordance with the act, Tripura was formed 50 Mandal to development of tribal society. Later in the year 1940 the maharaja passed 'Gramya Mandal' act which was considered first local self-government in Tripura (Nityananda Das, 2012, p. 60). The Gramya Mandal consists of nine members. The entire member was elected by the people but there was no universal adult franchise. An aged member from each family can have the right to vote.

The recommendation of Balwantray Mehta committee was adopted by the establishment of united provinces panchayat raj Act 1947. During this period, the panchayat could not effectively function under the control of the chief commissioner in Tripura. After the attainment of full fledges statehood of Tripura in the year 1972 the democratic decentralization started working effectively. In the year 1978 the first general election of gram panchayat of Tripura was held on secret ballot with effective participation of political parties, and it help democratic decentralization a new lease of life in the panchayat election in Tripura. In 1983 panchayat election was held through proper constitutional arrangement. It was the period when voting age reduced from 21 to 18 years through 61st constitution amendment, resulting huge voting turnout seized in all kinds of election. In 1983 panchayat election was held in 525-gram panchayat (Department of Panchayat, government of Tripura). A drastic change took place in the 1988 and 1992 panchayat election in Tripura when the congress (I) and the TUJS (Tripura upajati juba samiti) dissolve all the panchayat in Tripura and nominated a committee, namely, 'village Unnayan committee' to run local bodies in Tripura (Department of Panchayat, government of Tripura). The 73rd constitution amendment act 1992 heralded a new era in the history of panchayat raj system in India. As an effect, Tripura govt. enacted a new act namely 'Tripura panchayat act 1993' followed by all the local bodies elected through regular intervals upon constitutional means.

Political participation of scheduled caste women at gram panchayat:

Political participation of the scheduled caste was a challenging affair in the caste divided society. Dr. Ambedkar was a forerunner to introduce political participation of the Dalit in India. He formed the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1937 and contested in SC reserved seats as well as general seats in total 18 seats in Bombay Legislative Assembly (Ishita Banerjee & Dube, 2010, p. 207). This party won 11 reserved seats and three general seats, though Ambedkar party was successful in the election, its position a small minority in a congress dominated assembly was very weak (Banerjee & Dube, 2010, p. 207). Ambedkar formed a new political party scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) in 1942, and it is limited to the untouchable caste only in the political battle to gain political power (Banerjee & Dube, 2010, p. 207).

After the independence, the representative institution strengthens by universal adult franchise. This has led the growth of participation of different groups in politics. But the apprehension arises with the representation of dalit, the

scheduled caste community which is needed a special provision for the adequate representation in politics.

The growth of political participation of scheduled caste as well as the scheduled caste women at three tire level of panchayat has been increased since the new act passed in 1992. Tripura panchayat act is basically made by the government for political empowerment as well as democratic

decentralization for good governance in the state. This has opened a new opportunity for scheduled caste community to equally represent in the policy making process. The following Table will systematically analyze the political participation of scheduled caste women since 1994 panchayat election to 2014 election.

Three-tire Gram Panchayat Election-1994

Table 2

Gram Panchayat Election 1994								
No of GP in 2004	No of elected representatives							
	Gen	SC	ST	Women	Total Seats	% of Women Representative	% of Total SC representative	% of SC women
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
525	2485	718	415	SC-519	5427	33.3%	22.79%	9.56%
				ST-289				
				Gen-1001				
Total				1809				

After the enactment of new panchayat act in 1993, the Tripura panchayat election was held in 1994. It has total 525-gram panchayat which allotted 5427 seats. Out of the total seats, the scheduled castes are representing 22.79% of total strength. It

has opened new opportunity for the scheduled caste community in Tripura to raise their political participation. But in terms of appointment as a chairperson or Pradhan the number is decrease by 6% than their actual representation.

Table 3

Pradhan (Chairperson) of Gram Panchayat in 1994							
GEN	SC	ST	Women	Total P.S in 1994	% of Women Representative	% of Total SC representative	% of SC women
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
177	53	111	SC-34	525	35.4%	16.57%	6.47%
			ST-55				
			GEN-95				
TOTAL			184				

Table 4

Gram Panchayat Election 2004								
No of GP in 2004	No of elected representatives							
	Gen	SC	ST	Women	Total Seats	% Of Women Representative	% of Total SC representative	% of SC women
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
513	2485	844	168	SC-564	5352	34.6%	26.3%	10.5%
				ST-123				
				Gen-1165				
Total				1852				

Source: Panchayat dept. of Tripura & Election commission of Tripura.

The table no -4 shown that in 2004 panchayat election, the total no of panchayat was 513 in numbers. And the total seats were allotted 5352. Out of the total seats, 1852 women are elected, the share of the scheduled caste women was 564. The

result shows that the overall women representation was 34.6% and 10.5% of the scheduled caste women represented in the panchayat.

Table 5

Pradhan (Chairperson) of Gram Panchayat in 2004							
GEN	SC	ST	Women	Total GP in 2004	% Of Women Representative	% of Total SC representative	% of SC women
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
226	97	13	SC-46	513	34.5%	27.8%	8.9%
			ST-13				
			GEN-118				
TOTAL			177				

Source: Panchayat dept. of Tripura & Election commission of Tripura.

In terms of appointment as a chairperson (Pradhan) in 2004 panchayat election, 177 are women out of 513 chairpersons. The total Women's representation was 34.5% and 8.9% are represented by the scheduled caste women. The percentage of

women representation and the share of appointment as chairperson were more or less equal. Through the panchayat election women are empowering and strengthening their participation in local self-government in Tripura.

Table 6

Gram Panchayat election 2009								
No of GP in 2009	No of elected representatives							
	Gen	SC	ST	Women	Total Seats	% Of Women Representative	% of Total SC representative	% of SC women
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
511	2326	873	187	SC-532	5295	36.05%	26.53%	10.04%
				ST-103				
				Gen-1274				
Total				1909				

Source: Panchayat dept. of Tripura & Election commission of Tripura.

From the above table, it is predicted that in 2009 panchayat election the no of panchayat was 511 and elected total 5295 representative. It has decreased two panchayats from the previous election held in 2004 and the total no of seats also

reduced from 5352 to 5295. The prominent feature of the panchayat election is that no of seats for women has increase. Here, the data reveals that women are representing 36.05% and the scheduled caste women share are 10.04%.

Table 7

Pradhan (Chairperson) of Gram Panchayat in 2009							
GEN	SC	ST	Women	Total GP in 2009	% Of Women Representative	% of Total SC representative	% of SC women
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
227	87	19	SC-56	511	34.83%	27.98%	10.95%
			ST-7				
			GEN-115				
Total			178				

Source: Panchayat dept. of Tripura & Election commission of Tripura.

The above table shows that the appointment of chairperson (Pradhan) and the share of different category in the year 2009 panchayat election. Here, it is showing that the total representation of women chairperson is 34.83% which is 2% lower than their actual representation. But the engagement of scheduled caste women as chairperson is higher by one percent than their actual representation.

In 2014 panchayat election held in the 591-gram panchayat for 6111 seats. There was a huge turnout during election, altogether 90% percent above electorate cast their votes in the three-tier gram panchayat to deciding the political fate of 13,754 candidates and half of them are women (Department of Panchayat, Government of Tripura).

Table 8

Pradhan (Chairperson) of Gram Panchayat in 2014							
GEN	SC	ST	Women	Total GP in 2014	% Of Women Representative	% of Total SC representative	% of SC women
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
199	93	14	SC-78	591	48.22%	28.93%	13.19%
			ST-17				
			GEN-190				
TOTAL			285				

Source: Panchayat dept. of Tripura & Election commission of Tripura.

In 2014 panchayat election witness a drastic change in the panchayat election in Tripura. For the first time in the history of political participation of Tripura, women had contested half of the seats of the total representation, not only that but also the scheduled caste women also got right nearly about 50% of participation as well as appointment as a Pradhan (chairperson) in gram panchayat.

2. Conclusion

Political participation of scheduled caste community is higher than any other community in Tripura. The information which is collected from government records shows that not only Gram Panchayat but also other bodies of panchayat, the share of scheduled caste women is higher than other community. They consider it as an instrument of political development. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had realized that only participation in politics can bring change in their socio-economic and political condition of scheduled caste. In Tripura the scheduled caste in general and the scheduled caste women in particular have

been backward in their socio-economic dimension. They realized the importance of political participation and organized movement to change individual and collective of the scheduled caste community. The accumulated information from the preceding three general elections reveals that scheduled castes are actively engaged in gram panchayat as well as other local self-institution. Now a days, the government paid more concern to their demand considering their numerical strength in the political institution.

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