

Political Awareness among Tea-Tribes Women: An Analytical Study of Biswanath District, Assam.

Dr. Bipul Das

*Associate Professor Department of Political Science
Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Assam, India*

ABSTRACT:

Political awareness is an important feature of every political system. No political system can operate without having the awareness and participation of the people in the political process. Political awareness is commonly known as a process through which people participate in the decision making or policy formulation process of the government. In other words, having interest in politics, exercising voting right, listening to political discussion, attending meetings and holding any political position is called political awareness. Political awareness is beneficial for both the citizens and the state. The stability of any given democracy depends upon awareness and active participation of the citizens. At present, it is a matter of great importance that peoples' awareness in politics is gradually increasing. Like the other parts of Assam, the awareness of the tea tribes' women community is also increasing at Biswanath district in all levels. However, this section of people working in the tea plantations of Assam is one of the marginalized groups of people who remain dominated, deprived and discriminated in various aspects of their day-to-day life. But, proper study in this regard has not recorded about the awareness and participation of the tea tribes women in politics. Therefore, the present paper attempts to study about the degree of political awareness among the tea tribes' women. The present study analyses the mindset of the tea tribes' women in the area of political awareness as well as their interest in the political process.

KEY WORDS: Political Awareness, Tea-Tribes, Community, Participation.

Date of Submission: 25-08-2020

Date of Acceptance: 09-09-2020

I. INTRODUCTION:

Political awareness is an important feature of every political system. No political system can operate without having the awareness and participation of the people in the political process. Political awareness is commonly known as a process through which people participate in the decision making or policy formulation process of the government. It is more apparent in a democratic political system where people can participate actively which also increases their awareness. Democracy and political awareness are interrelated terms which cannot be separated from one another. Thus, political awareness may be regarded as having interest in politics, exercising voting right, listening to political discussion, attending meetings and holding any political position. Both the citizens and the state are benefited from political awareness. The stability of any given democracy depends upon awareness and active participation of the citizens. Democratic system also provides room to the people for offering constructive criticism regarding various plans and programmes of the government. It provides scope to the citizens to participate in political activities. Thus, democracy and political awareness can be regarded as the two sides of the same coin.

The political awareness of the people is influenced by various factors which may vary from one society to another. Among them, socio-economic condition, psychological factor, political factor and situational factor can be of worth mentioning. Upon such factors the nature and level of political awareness and participation in every political system depend. Besides these, man's desire for power, status, recognition, responsibility, etc. play an important role. At the same time some other factors like education, income, age, religion, etc. also influence a lot in this regard.

Today people are more aware in their political affairs than before which is increasing gradually. It is also in case of the tea garden women. Like the other communities of Assam, the awareness of the tea tribes' women community is also increasing at Biswanath district in all levels. Their rate of literacy has also increased today. The tea tribes' community being conscious of their demographic composition spread all over the state also constitute an important component having significant voice in the game of power sharing in the state.

Thus, like other parts of Assam, the awareness of the tea tribes' women is also increasing at Biswanath district at all levels. But, proper study in this regard has not recorded about the awareness and participation of

the tea tribes women in politics. Therefore, the present paper attempts to study about the degree of political awareness among the tea tribes' women. The present paper analyses the mindset of the tea tribes' women in the area of political awareness as well as their interest in the political process.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

To find out the level of political awareness among the tea tribes women is concerned, the studies available on the same have been reviewed here.

Highlighting the various problems and awareness among the tea garden labourers, scholars like Sahu argues, "The political parties, which actually sponsor the trade unions, do not evince interest in taking up the cause of the workers in tea gardens. So it is high time for us to look into the rights of the labourers, so that they can enable the tea industries to survive in the globalize market. That is the only option left at the hand of the various stakeholders like the State, management of the tea industries, the political parties and the trade unions" (Sahu, 2009:130)

Explaining the importance of the tea garden workers in the Indian political system Saxena remarks that 'the working class of India did not confine itself only to the economic demands for higher wages, curtailment of working hours and better living conditions, but was also political in nature. With the growth of modern industries, the working class emerged on the political scene slowly and became conscious of the fact that colonialism was the main enemy of the people of India and the working class, a segment of Indian people, could not but become a part of National Mainstream' (Saxena, 1990).

The leaders among the tea garden people can play an important role in moulding awareness about various burning issues in the tea garden areas. Analysing the role of the tea garden leaders Rabidas opines that 'in spite of increasing number of leaders, the problems among the tea garden people have remained the same. He argues that the leaders are not so much interested and conscious about the various problems of their own community. In this regard, he has reminded the educated youths and leaders of the labourers about their responsibilities and duties to make their people conscious in various aspects of their day-to-day life' (Rabidas, 2001: 352).

Another scholar Bhadra (1992) explaining the role of tea garden women observes that the working women of tea plantations do not have any role in the decision making process in the industry, especially related to trade unions even though they are its members. Their participation in the activities of the union is very low. Besides, their low educational attachment has further perpetuated their lower status.

The living condition of the tea garden people are very miserable and they are less aware about their rights specially among the tea garden women. In this regard, scholars like Saikia (2007) observes, "To speak in true sense of term, the Tea Garden Women Labourers (TGLs) are subjected to twin domination ever since they started living and working in Assam's tea gardens. In fact, no noticeable changes among the TGLs women status are seen until today. Of course, of late with the universalisation of education, a handful of TGLs women are coming up for higher education that has enabled them to be conscious and assertive of their constitutionally ordained rights for their overall development. As a result, a number of socio-cultural organizations among the TGLs women have been formed that include Asom Chah Janajati Mahila Samiti, Adivasi Mahila Samiti, Chah Mazdoor Mahila Samiti etc. Furthermore, it also seen that a tiny section of TGLs women are coming up for contesting elections at panchayat as well as assembly levels. But despite all these, it may be concluded that the TGLs women are one of those women folk who still today remain dominated, deprived and discriminated section of the state's women population (Das, 2014:20-21).

Explaining the deplorable condition of the tea garden people Das (2014) opines, 'The tea tribes community of Assam is one of the marginalized groups who have ever remained oppressed, dominated, deprived and discriminated in various aspects of their day-to-day life. The children of these communities are deprived of quality primary education as the tea garden schools fall between the cracks with neither the garden management nor the government playing an active role. With the size of the population being significant, the community has been a constant target of vote bank politics' (Das, 2014:5).

Scholars like Banerjee (1996) argues, "The labour Community of the tea industry is largely illiterate, superstitious and untouched by modern progressive development. The fact that the wages do not match the welfare of the labour. No sincere efforts have been made by any corner say Government or management, to liberate these people from the clutches of feudalism by providing proper facilities for education. This has made them more and more dependent on the master rather than being independent."

In this way, various scholars have carried out their studies on the tea plantations of Assam and India in different ways. However, no intensive investigation has so far been made on the political awareness of the tea tribes women in the tea plantations of Assam. Therefore, the present paper analyses the mindset of the tea tribes' women in the area of political awareness as well as their interest in the political process.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The paper contains the following basic objectives:

- 1) To assess the level of political awareness among the tea tribes' women in Biswanath district.
- 2) To assess the level of political participation among the tea tribes women in Biswanath district.

IV. METHODOLOGY:

The present study is mainly an empirical one. It is based on observational and analytical method. Observation as well as interview method is also adopted for collection of data. In this regard, a questionnaire is prepared and used for this purpose. Besides these, informal discussions are also made with people associated with different tea tribes' organisations. The secondary source materials are collected from books, journals, Government reports, seminar reports and newspaper articles etc. The present paper primarily aims at making a comprehensive analysis of the perspective of the Biswanath District with special reference to Two Tea Gardens of the District, namely—*Nilpur* and *Pavoi Tea Estate* and to find a special guideline towards the development of political awareness and participation among the tea tribes' women.

V. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS:

In this section, we have analysed the data collected from our universe. As stated above, we have interviewed the respondents of our selected sample gardens. To analyse the political awareness and the level of political participation of the tea tribes' women, the following tables are taken into consideration.

Table No. 1.1: Are you a member of any organization or Political Party?

Response	Respondents		Total Respondents	Percentage
	Nilpur T.E.	Pavoi T.E.		
Yes	12	14	26	28.89
No	29	28	57	63.33
No Response	04	03	07	07.78
Total	45	45	90	100.00

For the development of political awareness among the people affiliation to socio-political organisations is very important. Therefore, the respondents are asked whether they are affiliated to any political party or not. In response, it is found in the above table that above sixty percent of the respondents are not affiliated to any political party or other organizations. Only twenty nine percent of the respondents are involved with some organisations including political parties leaving eight percent as no response. It can be assumed from this table that due to the non-involvement with any political party or organization, the majority of the respondents are not interested or conscious of the political process of the country.

Table No. 1.2: Do you think that Regional Political Parties are alternative to the National Political Parties in North-East India?

Response	Respondents		Total Respondents	Percentage
	Nilpur T.E.	Pavoi T.E.		
Yes	09	10	19	21.11
No	31	33	64	71.11
No Response	05	02	07	07.78
Total	45	45	90	100.00

Today it is seen that the regional political parties are playing a significant role in regional as well as national politics in India. To know the mindset of the tea tribes women they are asked whether they support the regional political parties as an alternative to the national political parties or not.

It is seen in the above table that a vast majority of the respondents seventy one percent do not support it. To them, the regional political parties cannot be an alternative to the national political parties. Only twenty one percent of the respondents are in favour of regional political parties while eight percent people are not interested in it. It is thus clear from the above table that the National Political Parties have a strong hold among the tea garden people.

Table No. 1.3: Do you think that there should be a separate Political Party of your Community?

Response	Respondents		Total Respondents	Percentage
	Nilpur T.E.	Pavoi T.E.		
Yes	34	36	70	77.78
No	06	07	13	14.44
No Response	05	02	07	07.78
Total	45	45	90	100.00

Political parties play an important role in every political system. To analyse the mindset of the respondents whether they want a separate political party of their own community or not, this question is asked. Among all the questions, the response of this question is very good. Near about eighty percent of the respondents are in favour of this question. Only fourteen percent respondents are against it and eight percent has given no response.

However, from their response, it can be said that the tea tribes' community wants their own political party which clearly express their political consciousness to a great extent. The respondents have given quick reply without any doubt in this question that there should be a separate political party of their own community.

Table No. 1.4: Do you feel the necessity of women's representation in the State politics of Assam?

Response	Respondents		Total Respondents	Percentage
	Nilpur T.E.	Pavoi T.E.		
Yes	07	09	16	17.78
No	35	34	69	76.67
No Response	03	02	05	05.55
Total	45	45	90	100.00

Due to the increasing empowerment of women today they have been playing a significant role in the political system of the country. In the present study, it is found in the above table that near eighty percent of the respondents aren't in favour of women's representation in political system of the country. It is worth mentioning here that only eighteen percent of them have supported women's representation in politics. They have argued that the women should involve themselves only in the household duties. Besides, they contend that women are inferior to men in various aspects. To them, women should cast their vote only as their democratic right. Thus the present study reveals that political awareness of the tea garden women is not up to the level of the women of other communities in the country. Of course, it is increasing slowly and steadily.

Table no. 1.5: What is your opinion regarding the political awareness and participation of the tea tribes' women?

Response	Respondents		Total Respondents	Percentage
	Nilpur T.E.	Pavoi T.E.		
Very High (76-100)	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
High (51-75)	05	08	13	14.44
Medium (25-50)	21	13	34	37.78
Low (Below 25)	15	21	36	40.00
No Response	04	03	07	07.78
Total	45	45	90	100.00

It is evident from the above table that only fourteen percent of the respondents have said that the political participation and awareness of the tea tribe's women are high. But, near fifty percent of the respondents have expressed that they are not politically aware like the women of other communities. Although the people of their community cast their votes in every election, yet they do not aware about the values of their votes. Even, sometimes, they are misguided by the clever politicians and their agents.

From the analysis of the above tables, the major findings of the present paper can be forwarded as follows:

1. The tea tribes' women of the sample gardens under study comparatively less politically aware than the other communities of the country.
2. Their political participation in the past was very limited and that too was as per the direction of their leaders and male members of the family. However, at present, mass media are breaking their age old isolation and as a result they are now developing contact with the outer world to some extent.

3. National political parties have strong hold among the respondents than the Regional parties. But, in case of the formation of their own political party, they supported it unanimously. It clearly reveals their political consciousness.

4. Another interesting finding noticed in the present study is that the women have to keep themselves busy in their household activities. Even those, who want to involve in politics directly or indirectly are dominated by their husbands or other male members of the family.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Thus, from the findings of the present study on “Political Awareness among Tea Tribes Women: An Analytical Study of Biswanath District, Assam”, the following recommendations may be of worth mentioning.

- The tea tribes women should be provided with proper education withadequate facilities.
- The Government should also come forward with some specific policies and legislations for the development of this section of people.
- Tea garden managements should adopt necessary steps for abolishingthe problems of poverty and illiteracy among the tea tribes women along with the government.
- To make the tea tribes womenpolitically aware, first they should make economically empowered by removing the socio-political obstacles.

VII. CONCLUSION:

It is clear from the analysis that political awareness and participation among the tea tribes’ women is very low. Their huge economic problems also hampered the development of political awarenessamong them. Majority of them are ignorant and unable to participate in political activities in real sense of the term. Even the small percentage of women who are found to involve in politics dependent to themale members of the society. They have to keep themselves busy in their household activities. Even those, who want to involve in politics directly or indirectly are dominated by their husbands or other male members of the family. From this, it can be derived that most of the tea tribes’ women are less politically aware in comparison to their male members. In conclusion, we may say that thepolitical leaders and various organisations among the tea tribes community should help the tea tribes women to increase their political awareness and influence in the political aspects of the state in an organized way.

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Dr. Bipul Das. “Political Awareness among Tea-Tribes Women: An Analytical Study of Biswanath District, Assam.” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 25(9), 2020, pp. 27-31.