



WOMEN IN POLITICS: A STUDY OF TEA GARDEN WOMEN WORKERS OF ASSAM

Phulmoni Das

Assistant Professor in Political Science, Directorate of Distance Education, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh.

Abstract

Women all over the world were kept out of the socio-political realm as a marginalized section of the society. Women at every socio and political levels situated as under represented both in parliament and state legislative assemblies and thereby kept out of the decision making level. In India the right of women to vote was given through the constitution since its inception. Women of India make up almost half of the electorates but they rarely achieve office or have equal access to political career. Women of India still face numerous obstacles in participating and representing in political affairs of the state. Therefore the present study is an attempt to analyse the political participation of tea garden women workers of Assam. Specifically belong to one of the marginalized section of the society. Tea garden workers of Assam are considered to be one of the crucial determinants of the state politics. The article also tries to provide how to promote the participation and representation of women in politics.

Keywords: *Political Participation, Tea Garden Women Workers, Decision Making, Political Culture.*

INTRODUCTION

Effective political participation is an indicator of successful democracy. In India though women constitutes half of the electorates but the participation of women in politics is not all satisfactory. In spite of equal rights conferred on them, political position of the women has not got improved. The nature and extend of political participation of women also varies in India. Though the number of factors influences on the political culture of women factors like education, socio economic condition, geographical surrounding such as urban or rural etc. and so on. Women's political participation refers to how much women actively take part in the political process that affect their lives and specifically to the assertion of their right to vote, to contest election and to gain candidacy. Political development of the nation must include active political activism of both men and women. In India, women have long been involved in many socio political movements even before the Independence of India. Unlike the other countries of the world where women have had long struggle for universal franchise, women of India are blessed with constitutional provision to exercise right to freedom.

Even after independence women have participated actively in elections as voters, campaigners and candidates. But in spite of the striking increases in women's participation their representation in decision making bodies is remarkably limited. Though a few women have occupied important political positions but even today women's representation is not get satisfactory. Moreover women's participation in politics is barred by the culture and tradition backed by patriarchal norms. The exposure of women to political debates and issues has always remained indirect and almost exclusively on the basis of what is reported to them by the males in the family. The same scenario could be seen in the context of participation of women in politics of Assam as well. Assam is a heterogeneous society comprising a large number of tribal and ethnic groups and other communities. Tea garden community of Assam is also one of the important community who were brought to Assam as indentured labour from the various parts of India during colonial period to associate them in tea plantation of Assam. Tea plantation of Assam is the beginning of systematic exploitation of natural resources of Assam by British colonialism. It is to be noted that the emigration of the labourers in the tea garden was not voluntary nor were they free labourers. They were forcibly recruited with false promises and hopes. Even after independence the condition of tea garden workers has not been satisfactory at all. Low literacy, poor socio economic condition, deplorable health condition etc. are the major hurdles of these workers for development. But inspite of this the tea garden workers of Assam have been playing an enormous deciding role in Assam's politics. In many times the votes of tea garden workers has played tremendous role in overturning the political party figures in Assam. The women workers are the integral part of the labour force engaged in the tea plantation of Assam. Owing to this, the study of political participation of women tea garden workers as voters, as campaigners, as candidate is important.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY : The present study is based on the following objectives:

1. To study about the political participation of women tea garden workers in the politics of Assam.
2. To study the factors influence them in political participation.
3. To suggest some measures to enhance and promote participation of women in politics of the nation.

METHODOLOGY

For the present study, both primary and secondary data are collected. Primary data collected by personal observation and field survey through schedules and questionnaires. Secondary data collected from various books, articles and journals.



Sample survey techniques are used in collection of primary data and simple random sampling is used.

Study Area: The study is limited with the selection of one tea estate of Assam and it is based on the responses of 100 tea garden women workers, who are chosen through simple random sampling method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: A brief description about the sample field area :

The present study is conducted on the Golaghat District of Assam, which got its district status on 15th August 1987. According to 2011 Census report, the total number of population of the district is 1,066,888. Golaghat is one of the major tourist spot of Assam & it is famous as the land of one horned rhinos. Another centre of attraction of Golaghat district is the beautiful tea gardens identifying the district as the major tea production unit of Assam.

Dolaguri Tea Estate : Dolaguri Tea Estate is 17 k.m away from Golaghat town & it is 3 k.m. south to the NH39. In the east of the Dolaguri Tea Estate is the Miripathar (village) on the west it is bounded by Bokiyal Tea Estate and on the North by Doigrung (Semi urban town) and on the south by Purajanghal (semi urban town). Dolaguri Tea Estate is one of the oldest tea gardens of Assam, which was established by a British Planter named B. Drawal in the year 1881. But presently this tea estate is owned by Arin Tea group and the name of the owner is Ms. Rakhi Saikia.

The plantation covers an area of 571 hectares and a number of 1124 worker works in the Dolaguri Tea garden. Among the total workers 763 are permanent and 361 are casual workers (See Table No.1)

Table 1

Employment Status	Male	Female	Total
Permanent	352	411	763
Temporary	154	207	361
Total	506	618	1124

Source: Tea-Garden Register

Dreyer and Rosenbaum have presented the influences of seven socio-economic variables on electoral participation viz, sex differences, age, rural/urban, income, education, social status and group membership. Therefore in this respect, the following tables are given below where the various factors which influences the political participation of tea garden women workers are examined:

Table-2: Distribution of respondents according to avail of voting rights

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	97	97%
No	3	3%
Total	100	100%

Sources: Field study

Table No 3-Factor which influence the respondents to vote for the candidate

Sl. No.	Factors	Number of respondents	Percentage
1	Decision of male members of family	47	47%
2	Influence of political party	10	10%
3	Influence of organisation like ACMS	22	22%
4	Influence of the symbol of the party	13	13%
5	Own decision	7	7%
	Total	100	100

Sources: Field study

The present study explains the trend of political participation of women tea garden workers in the politics of state. Women constitutes more than the total workforce of tea gardens of Assam. As the voters of tea garden workers became very important for the political parties as they resides in clusters in a heavy numbers which made the political parties easy to address them. Voters basically women voters played a decisive role in the results of elections in many assembly elections. Political consciousness is a necessary component of political participation. Therefore the political participation of women workers is based on the number of components: participation involves i) women as voters, ii) women as members of political parties or pressure group, iii) women's participation in electoral meetings, campaigning or other rallies. It also includes the gamut of voluntary activities with a bearing on the political processes; including voting, support of political groups, communication with legislator, dissemination of political views and opinions among the electorates and other related activities. Therefore, the above tables explain the political participation of women tea garden workers of Assam.



FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The main findings which have been drawn by analyzing the collected data of the present study are as follows:

The collected data of the study reveals that women tea garden workers of the tea estate are not much educated. Education is one of the most important factors which influence the political participation and socialization of the community. Most of the women workers are busy and working very hard to maintain their families and have less awareness about their rights and privileges.

Voting is the basic activity by which the citizens get assimilated in the political process. In the present study it is found that women are increasingly participating in the elections as voters. But yet non voting cannot be always thought as a negative parameter. Many a time physical constraints of ill-health, lack of time, lack of awareness etc. may restraints from participating in elections.

Besides voting in the elections political participation also includes other activities such as campaigning in elections, attending public meetings, joining any political party or any other political organization. Therefore in this respect the present study reveals that tea garden women workers are not very enthusiastic for join public meetings or campaigning for any particular meeting. But some of them are attending meeting conducted by Assam Cha Mazdoor Sangh(ACMS) which is are of the most important and strong trade union of tea garden workers of Assam.

The present study proves that women tea garden workers of the tea estate are not independent voters. Because majority of them are illiterate and therefore does not vote consciously or rationally. As women lack information and political awareness. Majority of them make their choice on the basis of suggestions from male members of the family. Therefore it can be said that patriarchy still dominates the women's decision making capabilities. But it is also cannot be considered that women are not politically conscious because still 7% of women have voted according to their own decision and conscience.

SUGGESTIONS

After examining the problem of ineffective participation of women tea garden workers in politics of the state the following suggestions are provided which will help in enhancing and promoting political participation of women in politics. Education is one of the measures to make tea garden women workers socio economically and politically empower. Through education women workers will not only be aware politically but it also help them to get conscious of their rights and privileges. As well as it will also help to remove problems like child labour and child marriages unawareness about health, hygiene and other issues can be solved.

Traditional and stereotype attitude and patriarchal domination over the women's decision making should be change. The male members of the family should respect the decisions of women give them proper place in the family and society. It is also the duty of the political parties and other organisations and NGOs to encourage the women workers of tea garden to actively participate in the political affairs of the state. Political parties have given less importance to women issues and not even approached, once the men are mobilised, women will merely endorse their choice of party and candidate. As a result women's exposure to political debates and issues has always remained passive and indirect.

Raising of the general standards of living of the tea garden workers of Assam is the urgent necessity. As tea garden workers of Assam are deprived of adequate living condition including standard wages, education, health etc. An individual deprived of basic needs of life can hardly be aware of any other socio economic or political issues.

CONCLUSION

It can be seen from the analysis of the above discussion that women tea garden workers are in general not very active in the political process of the state. However most of them are regular voters in the election. It also proves the fact that women tea garden workers can be willing participants and active agents in the democratic process, if given an exposure and an opportunity to develop themselves educationally and socio economically. Concept of democracy will find concrete expression when participation of women in decision making process is realized.

REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Kumari, R. Letha (2006). Women in Politics: Participation and Governance. Authors Press: New Delhi, p.64.
2. Ibid, p.64.
3. Dryer, E.C. & Rosenbaum, W. (1967). Political Opinion and Electoral Behavior. Belmont: California, p.117.
4. Panda, A.N. (2008). Situating Indian Women. Abhijit Publication: Delhi, p. 206.
5. Kaushik, Suseela (Ed.) (1993). Women Participation in Politics, Vikas Publishing house: New Delhi, pp.41-42.