

Electoral Participation of the Tea Tribe Community in Assam: Special Reference to Lok Sabha Election of 2019

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Abstract: *In a democracy Election plays a major role. Election is a means for the masses to choose their representatives freely. In India all the adult citizens irrespective of their caste, class, creed, sex and religion can take part in the electoral process. But in recent period participatory democracy has been immensely criticized on the ground that it gives less opportunity to its citizens for any significant participation in the decision making process. Consequently, under the prevailing system it is seen that the electorates have very little knowledge and understanding of political problems, corruption and misuse of power, use of money and muscle power are so rampant. If people get better opportunities of political participation they will be inclined to discuss public issues elaborately which will lead to the development of the society. Hence citizen participation is an ultimate condition for a good democracy. Tea tribe community is one of the most important ethnic groups of North-East India. In this paper, we examine and analyze the electoral participation of the tea tribe community of North-east India. We use field survey method for the study and both primary and secondary sources of data are used. The study is significant in the present day context in view of the emerging trends in the electoral politics in India in recent period.*

Keywords: *Election, Political participation, Development, Voting, Tea-tribe*

I. INTRODUCTION

Election is an essential feature of parliamentary democracy. In our democracy election plays a significant role in selecting the representative of the Government through a proper electoral procedure. If we look at the level of participation in last few elections, we can see that it has been increased immensely in recent period. In the initial stages of Indian elections the voter turnout and participation level was very low [1]. But in the latest Lok Sabha election of 2019, India has experienced the highest voter turn out. It indicates that Indian democracy is going stronger day by day. Electoral participation generally includes voting, contesting election, taking part in electoral campaign, volunteering for any political party and the like [2]. Electoral participation can be seen as an empowerment of the deprived and the vulnerable group of people.

The political importance of the tea tribe community in Assam is very significant. The votes of the tea tribe community play a major role in deciding the result of the various elections of Assam.

Of all the tribal and ethnic groups of the state, the electoral role of the tea tribe community has become the most crucial. They comprise of 35 lakh voters which is enough to play a decisive role in any election. The present study aims to understand and explain the electoral participation of the tea tribe community of Assam. It focuses on political participation of the tea tribe voters which is being analyzed in order to find out the significance of the tea tribe community in the electoral politics of Assam. Attempt is being made to study the electoral activity of the tea tribe community through participatory theory of democracy which advocates participation from all sides and tries to uplift the people through participation in the decision making process.

Our main objective is to examine the electoral participation of the tea tribe community in the latest Lok Sabha election of 2019. We will also assess the electoral behavior of tea tribe community in Assam.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on field survey which is conducted in Kondoli tea garden in Nagaon district of Assam. The information is collected from both primary and secondary sources of data. Personal interviews are conducted through interview schedule to know their participation level in electoral politics, their awareness and interest, electoral activities etc. Secondary data have been collected from articles, books, newspapers, journals and other literature.

III. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Our study area is Kondoli Tea Estate which is situated in Nagaon district of Assam. Kondoli tea estate was established in the year 1932 by the Britishers themselves. Kondoli tea garden comprises of four divisions which are Kondoli, Sukimbari, Rengbeng and Tapitjuri. Kondoli tea estate is 11 km. away from Kampur Railway Station and located approximately between 26°29'N latitude and 92°90'E longitude; area under tea 608.05 hec, Gross 1,077.08 hec. At present the ownership of Kondoli tea estate is in the hands of Assam Company India Limited. According to the census 2011, the total population of the Kondoli tea garden estate is 6502, where male are 3901 and female are 2601. The number of permanent laborer is 1217 and temporary laborer is 1803.

We are trying to study the electoral participation of the tea tribe community of the study area through the various criteria of electoral participation like voting, campaigning, mobilizing, contesting elections, attending meetings, party affiliation etc.

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The electoral participation of the tea tribe community is discussed with the help of the responses of the respondents of the study area i.e. Kondoli tea estate. The socio-economic conditions of the tea tribe community are almost same in every tea gardens of Assam. Therefore, I have taken only a small area to represent them all. In order to assess the electoral participation few questions have been asked to the people of the sample garden. It is discussed with the help of the following tables. For the study we have taken 60 respondents (30 male and 30 female) from the Kondoli tea estate. An interview schedule has been used for the interview with the respondents.

Table 1:

	Male		Female		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	24	40%	21	35%	45	75%
No	6	10%	9	15%	15	25%
Total	30	50%	30	50%	60	100%

In table 1, we have found the voting percentage of the tea garden laborers. To understand and analyze the electoral participation, I have at first asked the sample respondents whether they voted in 2019 election or not. Most of the sample respondents constituting 75% responded positively. Only 25% of the sample respondents stated that they did not vote this time (2019 Lok Sabha election). So this is a good sign for a democratic country like India. It is to be mentioned that the voter turn out of this community is higher than before in the latest Loksabha election of 2019.

Table 2:

Kondoli T.E.	Male %		Female %		Total %	
i. Election campaign	8	13.3%	3	5%	11	18.3%
i. Organizing party meetings	2	3.3%	0	0%	2	3.3%
ii. Volunteering in election meeting	5	8.3%	2	3.3%	7	11.6%
iii. Helped during election as an election agent	2	3.3%	0	0%	2	3.3%
iv. Attend election meetings	8	13.3%	19	31.6%	27	44.9%
v. None	5	8.3%	6	10%	11	18.3%
Total	30	50%	30	50%	60	100%

In the Figure 2, we have analyzed how tea garden laborers participate in elections except voting. One can participate in the electoral affairs in various ways i.e. through election campaign, organizing party meetings, volunteering in election meetings, by attending election

meetings etc. So in order to assess their electoral participation it is necessary to know if they fulfill these criteria. The question was put forward how they participate in election except voting. Interesting fact is that 18.3% of the respondents do not go for electoral activities. They have shown an indifferent type of attitude towards election by saying that political parties approach them only for votes and they forget them after election.

Table 3:

T.E	Male %		Female %		Total %	
i. Personal interest	8	13.3%	2	3.3%	10	16.6%
ii. Social service	7	11.6%	5	8.3%	12	19.9%
iii. Profit making	3	5%	2	3.3%	5	8.3%
iv. Political party interest	9	15%	4	6.6%	13	21.6%
v. No respond	3	5%	7	23.3%	10	33.3%
Tota l	30	50%	30	50%	60	100%

Table 3 illustrates the reasons for participating in the election campaign. Election campaigning is one of the most important criteria of electoral participation. The respondents have given various reasons like- personal interest, social service, profit making, political party interest etc. 16.6% have given the credit to personal interest behind the campaign for particular party. Political party interest is another factor; where 21.6% of them said that because of a particular political party they have participated in the election campaign. Interestingly, 8.3% of the respondents have said that they campaign for the sake of money or profit making and they are least bothered about which party wins and forms the government. 33.3% have responded negatively as they showed no interest at all.

Table 4:

	Female		Male		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	12	20%	22	36.7%	34	56.7%
No	18	30%	8	13.4%	26	43.4%
Total	30	50%	30	50%	60	100%

Table 4 is finding out if the tea garden laborers participate in the meetings and workshops organized by any political party in the garden. Participating in the election meetings and workshops are a part of electoral participation.

In this table it is seen that 56.7% respondents of Kondoli tea garden have participated in the meetings and workshops organized by various political parties. It actually reflects their interest in the whole process of electoral politics. In Kondoli tea garden the election meetings and workshops are mainly organized by BJP and Congress since decades. But in the latest election the newly emerged ANPA (Adivashi National Party of Assam) also organized different levels of meetings in the tea garden. Here it is a good sign that most of the people belonging to tea tribe community have shown their interest to politics by attending those meetings.

Table 5:

	Male		Female		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	21	35%	18	30%	39	65%
No	9	15%	12	20%	21	35%
Total	30	50	30	50%	60	100%

In Table 5, we have analyzed how often the tea garden laborers discuss politics and public affairs with others. Political socialization is a process by which a citizen politically socialized or the voter becomes familiar with the political surroundings and there by determine their political perception [3]. Our family, friends, peer groups can be regarded as some important agencies of political socialization. While asking the respondents how often they discuss politics and public affairs with others, 65% have responded positively and a total 35% of responded replied negatively. It means the interest for election or electoral politics of this group of people has been gradually increasing.

Electoral Participation is a vast concept and it encompasses many things other than voting or joining a political party. As the tea tribe community constitutes 20% of the total population of Assam so the importance was felt to assess their electoral participation. It has been many years that this community has been playing a significant role in the electoral politics of Assam [4]. However, it is important to mention here that the mind set of the people belonging to this community is changing gradually and they are realizing the importance of political participation for their better future.

It is to be mentioned here that the Lok Sabha election of 2019 was held in three phases in Assam on April 11, April 18 and April 23. This time in Nagaon constituency there are a total of 17,81,182 voters out of which 9,11,198 are males and 8,63,217 are female voters and 49 of the third gender. As per the data released by the Election Commission of India, a total turnout of 83.24% was recorded in Nagaon, which saw a polling percentage of 82.90 among the male electors and 83.60 among the female. The overall Lok Sabha poll turn out in Assam stood at an all time high of 81.52%. The polling percentage this time is the highest ever recorded in the state in any parliamentary election so far.

IV. CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion it is seen that the tea tribe community is gradually becoming active in electoral politics. Although their voter turn out in the latest lok sabha election is higher than the earlier election but they have very much less aware about the whole political scenario of the state. A huge amount of votes has been coming from this community in every election but it is seen that the fruit of real democracy has not been swallowed by them. They are often used as a 'vote bank'. So it is a dilemma.

The tea tribe community in every tea garden is leading a very hard life and therefore they are expecting lot more from the Government, the management, trade unions and different tea tribe organizations with the hope to end their miseries. Besides, the tea garden laborers are gradually taking interest in political activities which will enhance their participation in political field. This is a good sign in a democratic process. We have seen the level of electoral participation of the tea tribe community and we can say that this community plays a massive role in the electoral politics of Assam.

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Pranami Laskar is the daughter of Sri Tridiv Laskar and Riju Laskar, resident of Kachalukhowa, Nagaon- 782001, Assam. She did M.A. in Political Science from Gauhati University in 2013. She is presently doing PhD on 'Voting Pattern of the Tea tribe community of Assam: A study on Kondoli and Borpani tea estates of Assam', under the supervision of Dr. K. C. Das, HOD, Department of Political Science, Assam University (Diphu Campus). She is also a guest faculty of Kampur College, Kampur-782426, Nagaon. She has presented

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