



Political Participation Of Tribal People In Assam: A Case Study Of Sakachep Tribe Of Barak Valley In Assam (India).

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Abstract:

The Constitution of India gives various provisions for protection and promotion of tribal rights in India. There are so many ethnic groups in Assam, Sakachep are small ethnic group among them. It is believed that as narrated by older people, Sakachep originally came from China via, Myanmar-Mizoram-Tripura and from Tripura they entered into Assam. At present, the Sakachep live in different districts of Assam. They are not well-known ethnic group in the region. It is also rare to find a recorded books or documents on them. This paper mainly focuses on political involvement and development of the Sakachep people in the Barak Valley region. Schedule Tribe like Sakachep still continue to be economically and politically backward. This study also discusses how and to what extent their active and inactive involvement in politics bring changes in their life in general as a whole and particularly in the region.

Keywords: Political Participation, Sakachep tribes, Politics.

Introduction

The political participation simply we can understand that the common people play an important role in the activities of the government. The participation can be at any level from village level to centre level and it involves in policies making or implementation. Participation may be through elected representatives or common people who are actively involved in politics. The tribal people who are considered the most deprived section of the society should be a serious concern for their political participation in the country. Political participation doesn't mean only "Right to Vote" but it also included in participation of policies making process, actively involvement of politics and political awareness. Contesting in election, supporting of political groups are also a major political participation. Cook and Manor defined political participation as "Citizens active engagement with public institutions including Voting, Campaigning and pressuring either individually or through a group"

According to Myron Weiner " I shall used the concept of political participation to refer to any voluntary action, successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganized, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods intended to influence the choice of public politics, the administration of public affairs or the choice of political leaders at any level of government, local or national ". Political participation means not only for men but it is also included women involvement in politics.

Political Participation of Tribal People

The Indian Constitution has given special provisions for protection and promotion of the tribal people. As per 2011 census 8.6 percent represent the total population of the country. The Constitution of India under article 15(4) and 16(4a) give special provisions in government services belonging to tribal people and other backwards classes in the country. The National Commission for schedule tribe was formed by 89th Constitutional Amendment Act 2003. The Constitution of India under Article 330 and 332 give reservation of seats for the Schedule Tribe and Schedule Caste in the Lok Sabha and state Legislative Assemblies. Forty seven seats are reserved for Schedule Tribe in the Lok Sabha. The term Schedule Tribe first appeared in the Constitution of India. Article 366(25) of the Indian Constitution defined Schedule Tribe as " such Tribe or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Schedule Tribes for the purpose of this Constitution". The Constitution of India recognised Schedule Tribes under fifth Schedule. These recognized Tribes of the Constitution are known as " Schedule Tribes ".The North-Eastern state of India which is also known as seven Sisters, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh are known as the tribal states of India. Among these Chattisgarh is known as the Tribal heart of India.

Tribal People of Assam

Assam is one of the most enriched states of India. It bears the imprints of the past civilizations and stands tall on the location contours of the country. The dense forests of Assam make for a flourishing industry of wood. The tea estates of Assam are the biggest revenue generator and engage a major portion of the Assamese population. Assam is located on the north-eastern front of India. It is located south of the eastern Himalayas and comprises of the Brahmaputra River and

the Barak River valleys. The state boasts of a fertile agricultural land and there are quaint hills in Assam that adorn the state with their majesty. Assam has a total area of 78,550 sq km. The population of Assam represents a unique combination of various ethnic sects that inhabit the rich land from a very long time. The total number of people living in Assam is about 31,169,272 according to the 2011 census. The population growth in Assam is recorded at 16.93%. The cities of Assam represent the varied and vibrant culture of the state. Equipped with all the necessary infrastructural facilities and natural scenic beauty, the cities of Assam attract several visitors who are enthralled and enchanted with the state's bewitching beauty. Most of the cities of Assam bear resemblance to the rich cultural and traditional legacy of the bygone golden era. Endowed with the bounty of nature, the cities of Assam have turned out to favourite destinations for tourists. The major and largest cities of Assam are Guwahati, Silchar, Dibrugarh and Nagaon.

Assam is a mixture of tribes. There are so many tribal groups who live in Assam. All the tribal groups enjoyed all the constitutional rights in Assam. Though they are economically and politically weak sections but they live in a very peaceful way in their society. Their culture and lifestyle is different from other communities. Schedule Tribes are divided into two parts namely Hills Tribes and Plains Tribes. The people who live in Hill areas are considered as Hills Tribes and the people who lived in plain are considered as Plain Tribes. The Hill tribal groups are like Thadou, Hmar, Dimasa, kuki, Sakachep etc and in the plain areas Bodos, Barman etc. The tribal people in India particularly in Assam actively participate in politics before Independence and after Independence. They also have many political organizations in Assam. The formation and emergence of the Tribal League in 1933 as a common platform of all the Plains Tribes also involved a parallel process in self-representation. The numerically small, educated tribal elite attempted to define their tribal identity as a "community of the Plains Tribes"

Historical injustice for the tribal people and a feeling of deprivation, fear of extinction of entity gave birth to a tribal political party in the name style of Tribal League in 1933 to safeguard and protection of their rights and as per the Government of India Act 1935 "they managed to reserve 4 (four) seats in the Legislative Assembly and 1 (one) seat to the Legislative Council. All four seats in the Assembly and one seat in the Legislative Council bagged by the Tribal League" (Deori 1998:45) and the elected member promised to protect the rights of the tribal people. The party sometime supported Muslim League lead by Sir Sadullah and sometime to the Congress lead by Gopinath Bordoloi and could manage to create Tribal Belt and Blocks. One of the major tribal political party is the Bodoland People's Front (BPF). It was founded in 2005. It is a state political party in Assam, India. The party is headquartered in Kokrajhar Town and previously was in ruling government in the autonomous region of Bodoland.

Review of Related Literature

Samal (2023) examines the historical background, challenges, and opportunities that shape the political landscape for tribal women in Chhattisgarh. It also highlights various initiatives and strategies that have been undertaken to enhance their political representation and explores the potential impact of their participation on policy-making and social transformation. However, Empowering tribal women to actively participate in politics can foster social justice, gender equality, and sustainable development in nation.

Borghain, and Khyriem(2022). *Phonological Description of Sakachep*. The study mainly focused on surveyed of the phonology of the Sakachep language. It is not to be considered as final and conclusive in any way. The authors also revealed that there are much more phonological aspects that can be discovered in the language. The study would be of help to other students and research scholars interested in the phonology of the Sakachep language in particular and of TibetoBurman language in general.

Rongmei (2019). *Struggle for Survival: The Rongmei Nagas In Barak Valley*. In the study, the authors addresses few problems faced by the Rongmei nagas in Barak Valley. Firstly they were completely cut off from their main habitat in Manipur. As a result they found it hard to reproduce and perpetuate their traditions, religion and culture. Secondly, after the British occupation of Cachar and the Partition of India, the Bengal Hindu and Muslim population increased manifold. This tremendous explosion of non-tribal population threatened the small demographic strength of the Rongmei as well as pressure on the land resources. The Rongmei practices shifting cultivation for which they needed large amount of freely available land so that they could change their farm land every ten years. The Rongmei not only had to give their agricultural pursuit due to the non-availability of land, they began to be displaced from their traditional habitat. Thirdly, living amidst non-tribal population who were mostly Hindu practicing a Brahmanic ideology with its accompanying caste structure, the animist beef eating Rongmei were threatened of being treated as untouchables. They were social ostracized by the Muslims too as they were pork eaters. Pushed thus to the territorial as well as social margins, the Rongmei are fighting for survival as an ethnic groups as well as cultural groups. The paper revealed that the Rongmei people were lack of knowledge and foresight and by their easy-going habits later on, they fall on the hand of the land hungry competitors deprived the original tribal settlers of their land. Slowly they are squeezed out of their land holding. The Rongmei claim that in the earlier times, they had occupied a much larger area than they are holding now in the present times.

Hembrom (2017). *Political participation of Tribal people in Administration — A case study of Mayurbhanj in Odisha*. The present research work makes a modest attempted to provide an insight into the political involvement of the tribals by making a study of the political engagement of grassroots level tribal leaders of Bahalda Scheduled Area in the state of Odisha. It also examines the pattern of the political culture of the tribal leaders and presents other relevant facts about the universe of study. Political participation of tribal people should be helpful to other tribal people and their locality,

one's involvement should be a boon to the whole community, not a bane their increasing involvement have one a great change in their life and community.

Purkayastha (2015) *.Displacement, Resettlement and Rehabilitation: A Study on Oraon tribe in Barak Valley of Assam.* In the study the authors examine the Oraon--a tribal community recognised by the Government of India--inhabits mainly in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, but pronounce differently in different states namely Orang, Oram, Uram and Urang etc. In the Barak valley of Assam it is popularly known as Urang. The community--owing to its initial days of economic deprivation and socio-historical problems--created from within and imposed from outside--migrated to the different regions of the state during the British Period. A large number of Oraons came and settled down in the Barak valley during that period. But unlike other states and regions, where they are known as tribes, in the Barak valley they are enlisted as Other Backward Class (OBC). This review provides an outline of the current knowledge of Oraon people in Barak valley are undergoing change in their comprehensive life. Due to various overt and covert factors imposed from outside and partly created from inside--Oraon in particular and tea tribes in general are attaining consciousness to certain extent.

Khamu and Langstieh (2012). Tradition and adaptation : *The case of the sakachep in Meghalaya, India.* The authors observed that The Sakachep community is one of the smallest ethnic groups in North-East India. The article mainly designed to focus on their cultural life-world, identifying aspects of both tradition and adaptation to the new environment. The study also highlights the current emphasis on the problems of the Sakachep people. It also highlighted that the Sakachep people still follow patriarchy system in the sense that their traditional political organization was only headed male which is so called Kalim (head priest). In their tradition women cannot hold this "kalim" position

Narayan, Ibemhal, & Baruah (2011). *An ethnobotanical study of Chirus- A less known tribe of Assam.* The authors highlight that the Kamranga village of Cachar district of Assam has only ca 200 members, who live in quite remote hilly areas and are facing abject poverty and scarcity of basic social amenities. This tribe speaks its own Chiru language. From this study it is clear that this tribe has sound knowledge about the medicinal values of plants available in their area. Hence, there is an urgent need of their protection so that this ethnic knowledge and their bearers, who are straggling for their existence, can be saved.

Research Questions

1. How political participation play an important role for the development of the community?
2. What are the initiatives taken by the government for the upliftment of the tribal community?
3. What are the difficulties faced by the tribal people particularly Sakachep in involving politics?
4. Why the people are not yet interested in politics and do they really know their political rights?

Objectives

- (i) The study mainly focuses on how much tribal people in general and particularly Sakachep people are aware of their political rights.
- (ii) To find out the changes in the society that would be brought out by political participation of the Sakachep community.
- (iii) To understand how people are active in politics like contesting elections, decision making process or supporting political party or group.

Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. To collect the primary data regarding involvement of rural women in panchayat interview schedule is conducted and a standard questionnaire is used. Secondary data are collected through Books, newspapers, articles and other online sources.

Research Discussion:

Political Participation of Sakachep Tribe:

Sakachep is one of the small tribes in the Kuki-Chin Community under Tibeto-Burman language family (Soppitt, 1893). Sakachep, which is also known as 'Khelma' is a small ethnic group inhabiting in North East India. "Khelma" is a term given by the British during their encounter with them when they administered North Cachar Hills, Cachar and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam(Thang, 2019). Khamu and Langstieh (2009) asserted that the name Khelma is recognized only in the Dima Hasao district of Assam. In other districts of Assam and the neighbouring states of Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Tripura, the community is known as the Sakachep community.

According to SIL ethnologue (2003) the total population of this community is 25,000 (approximately) in the entire region of North East India. They live in all parts of North East India, for examples: Assam (Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong, Cachar districts), Meghalaya (Jaintia Hills district), Nagaland (Kohima district), Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura. Concerning occupation, most of the Sakachep are engaged in agriculture (Bhattacharya & Dutta, 2017). More than 60% of the Sakachep is presently involved in agriculture. Coming to the religion the Sakachep practised a fusion of naturalism and animism. The main traditional Gods and deities of Sakachep are Angera, Debi , Moka, Saichkri, Rajaram, Mokol raja, Enu Devi etc. With the advent of Christianity, majority of Sakachep became Christians. But still, some of the traditional practices are inter woven with Christian beliefs and practices. In the sphere of education, the

effective literacy rate of Sakachep community in Dima Hasao district is 46.15% (Census 2011) in which male percent age is higher than its counterpart female.

The Sakachep people have their own traditional political organization prior to the arrival of the British government in this country. The traditional political organisation was headed by a Kalim (head priest) who was guided and assisted by Uchoi (community priest), Kabur (secretary) and Palai (messenger). The selection of Kalim was hereditary in nature and only males were entitled to this post. He was expected to be acquainted with traditional customs, laws and culture, and it was his responsibility to solve cases related to divorce, marriage, disputes between clans and other matters which were related to customary laws. In spite of the powers vested in him, the consent of the community was indispensable and in serious cases, the advice of the king (Vaireng) was sought in the village court (Eitar Roeijak). The functional role of the Kalim and his associates is curbed at present; however they are still entrusted with matters related to customary laws, marriages and other matters which are settled outside the sphere of the government.

Findings and suggestions

Sakachep Community is a small tribe among the tribal groups in Assam. The complex nature of politics creates problems for the uneducated and simple-minded people. The study also finds out that less number of educated persons among the Sakachep community. The people lived in different villages with a small number of households in different districts in Assam particularly in Barak Valley. They faced problems to actively participate in politics. The study carried out seven villages of Sakachep, it is found that only few people are actively participating in politics and aware of their political rights but most of them are not actively involved in politics and unaware of their political rights. Main reasons for non- participation in politics are due to their religious beliefs, traditional institutions, economic status, education, language and the problems of communications. Their conversions into Christianity, some of the Sakachep people think that political participation or involvement in politics is against to God or Church. The study find out that, as of now most of them are Christian and their religious beliefs make them not interested in active involvement in politics. Economy and education are also the major factor for their absence in political participation. As the Sakachep people are small tribe, the majority people in their areas are Bengali speaking people, so specially the uneducated people who doesn't know Bengali, Hindi and English language faced problems to involve in politics as communication is a must in political participation. Economic status also one of the major reason for their not involvement in politics. The study also found that some of the educated men and women those don't have any communications problems are also not interested in political participation because of financial problems in their family. Some of the respondents replied instead of involving in politics, they should have to focus on their career and their work for the basic needs of their family.

The study also found that some are actively involved in politics. Among the seven villages, three GP members are found who actively involved in politics. And many other non-members are also involved in politics for the protection and promotion of their rights and society.

More involvement is needed from this community. The Christian Sakachep tribe should not neglect politics until they stay in this world because only involvement in politics can protect their rights and change their society in a developmental manner. The educated people should involve actively for the development of their society and protection of their rights. The educated people should organize awareness programmes in different villages mainly occupied by the Sakachep people related to their political rights and their importance in participation of politics. The recorded books or documents are very less to find out on this particular community. So more researchers should come forward and do more research on this particular tribe to find out the facts and solution for their problems.

Conclusions:

Political Participation of tribal people is a must for the benefits of their own tribal people in particular and the whole community in general. More involvement in politics means more aware of their political rights and more promotion of their rights. Active involvement can bring a great change in the society in a developmental manner. They can also protect and promote their own rights. Thus, from the above discussion, most of the Sakachep people are not aware of their political rights and not actively involved in support of or in opposed of their elected representatives in their respective locality. More involvement is required to change their society.

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