



MIGRANT TRIBALS AS POLITICAL MEN OR WOMEN IN BHUBANESWAR CITY

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ABSTRACT

Tribals, belonging to different parts of Odisha have migrated to Bhubaneswar, the capital city, primarily in search of livelihood, employment and better amenities of life, but in course of their stay at the city, many of them have shifted from political ignorance to political awareness. There has taken place significant increase in their participation in politics. However this has been mostly low politics characterized by routine political activities. Their presence in high politics is still low. The few tribal corporators have been elected only from those wards which were reserved for them. Further there is gender inequality in the access of migrant tribals to power structures, although the tribal culture largely reflects gender equality.

KEYWORDS : Tribal, Migrant, Culture, Gender, Politics, Efficacy

Political Man or Woman

Tribals may not be migrating to cities with a political motive, but migrant tribals are unlikely to keep themselves away from local politics. Their attitudes towards politics and expectations from it undergo change. An attempt has been made to critically study the political life of migrant tribals living in Bhubaneswar city of Odisha, India. The political life of an individual – say, 'political man' or 'political woman' – mainly consists of three attributes, namely, political awareness, political efficacy and political participation.¹ Political man is one of the key pillars of democracy. While political awareness impacts political efficacy and political participation, political awareness and political efficacy tend to influence political participation. Political participation, in its turn, may be correlated with political efficacy. Civic culture is indispensable for the success of democracy, and political efficacy is a key component of civic culture. Some of the important elements of civic culture are freedom of speech, active participation in politics, membership of political associations, expecting fair treatment from governmental authorities, self confidence in one's competence to protest, resist and fight if and when the government and other authorities are not just and fair.² political efficacy refers to citizens' beliefs that they can affect a political system.³

Political participation refers to the activities undertaken by individuals to influence the making of policies and decisions by government and the implementation of these policies and decisions by it. Political participation, on the basis of degree and intensity of participation, is classified into three types – low or spectator activities, medium or transitional activities and high or gladiatorial activities.⁴

Casting votes and attending political meetings are examples of low political participation. Contesting in local and general elections is an example of high political participation. Political activities which are not routine and which do not involve very hard work, a lot of resources, and high risk are included in the category of medium political participation.

Push and Pull factors cause migration.⁵ Migration from villages to cities is influenced by distances and difficulties at the native place, and attraction of the place of destination. Though migrants move to a city primarily for economic and social reasons, their political attitudes, beliefs and involvement may undergo significant change as a result of urbanization. I have tried to find out how tribal migrants in Bhubaneswar city have fared as political men and women. In this connection, I have analysed their political awareness, political efficacy and political participation. I have included four representative slums for my study: these are Salia Sahi, Jali Munda Sahi, Nilakantha Nagar Munda Sahi and

Virsa Munda Sahi.

In some slums in which tribals form majority, there are also general caste and scheduled caste people in smaller numbers. In some other slums, tribals constitute a vast majority. Salia Sahi is the largest slum in Odisha. Two sahis or streets of this slum have been included in the sample. One street is dominated by Santals, while the other is dominated by Oraons. In other three selected slums, there are more than one tribal groups. They are inhabited by Hos, Santals and Kondhas.

In Odisha, there are 62 tribes out of which 13 are most primitive groups or "particularly vulnerable tribal groups". There is tribal concentration in South Odisha and Western Odisha. In coastal Odisha, their number is small.⁶ However, in Bhubaneswar city, the number of tribals is not negligible. As per the 2011 census, the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe people constitute 8.7 per cent and 5.0 per cent of the population of Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation respectively. A big majority of migrant tribals in Bhubaneswar have come from Sundargarh, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanja districts of Odisha.

My sample includes two tribes of Salia Sahi, namely Santals and Oraons. Santals are more numerous, but Oraons are better in education and employment. In respect of political awareness and political efficacy, Oraons, being more educated and employed, enjoy an edge, but they lag behind Santals in regard to political participation.

Those Santals who possess low political awareness constitute 37 per cent while the corresponding figure for Oraons is 24.44 per cent. In other words, 63 per cent of Santals as against 75.46 per cent of Oraons possess upper medium and high combined political awareness. The trend is similar in regard to political efficacy. About 44 per cent of the Santals possess low political efficacy as against 31 per cent Oraons of that slum. 32 per cent and 24 per cent of Santals possess medium and high amount of political efficacy respectively. The corresponding figures for Oraons of that slum are 35.5 per cent and 33.3 per cent respectively. On the contrary, in respect of political participation, the Santals have better scores than the Oraons of Salia Sahi. 45 per cent of Santals of Salia Sahi are low in political participation while the corresponding figure of Oraons of same slum is 64.4 per cent. Similarly, in respect of medium political participation, the scores of Santals and Oraons of the same Sahi are 53.2 per cent and 35.5 per cent respectively. However both of them score zero in high political participation. This shows that Oraons, though better-off than Santals in education and employment, do not score more in all aspects of political life. They are ahead of Santals in political

awareness and political efficacy, but lag behind them in political participation.

The Santals of Salia Sahi also score higher points than those of other slums of the city in respect of all three aspects of political life, though not by the same margin. Their score in medium and high political awareness combinedly is 62 per cent while those of Santals living in Jalimunda, Nilakantha Nagar Munda Sahi and Virsha Munda are 44 per cent, 45 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. About 57 per cent of Santals of Salia Sahi possess medium and high political efficacy combinedly, but the related scores of Santals residing in Jalimunda, Nilakantha Nagar Munda Sahi and Virsha Munda are 50 per cent, 55 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. In political participation, the Santals of Salia Sahi are relatively more active than those living in other slums. The category of upper (high and medium) political participation includes 55 per cent of Santals of Salia Sahi, 33 per cent of Santals of Jalimunda, 40 per cent of Santals of Nilakantha Nagar Munda Sahi and 0 per cent of Santals of Virsha Munda. Except in Salia Sahi, the Santals of no other slum are high in political participation. It is thus apparent that the continued exposure to political activities has significantly helped the Santals of Salia Sahi gain in political awareness, political efficacy and political participation.

The political profile of the Santals of Munda Sahi is good, though not as good as those of Salia Sahi. Nilakantha Nagar Munda Sahi, the slum in the C.R.P.F. area being located in a developed area and by the side of the national highway (NH 5), is significantly advantaged in several respects. It is inhabited by the members of two tribes, namely, Santals and Hos. The Hos outnumber Santals by a small margin. General caste people reside in an adjacent street. Several important government and private institutions including educational and medical ones are located in the C.R.P.F. area. The tribals-Hos and Santals of Munda Sahi have a distinct advantage, but are also disadvantaged. Urbanisation has helped, to some extent, increase their modernization coupled with awareness, efficacy and participation. But at the same time, they are handicapped by the dominating-even, domineering-attitude of general caste people who would not accept Hos and Santals as equals. The Hos and Santals have several times gone for road blockade in support of their various demands. But in general and urban elections, they are not quite active, nor do they act independently. The political space is dominated by the general caste leaders residing in the adjacent street. As 'political men', the Santals and Hos of C.R.P.F. slum stand slightly lower than the Santals living in Salia Sahi which has the advantage of being a site of regular political activities. For example, the Santals of Salia Sahi and the Santals of C.R.P.F. slum belonging to the group of low political awareness are 37.09 per cent and 55.0 per cent respectively. Further, the Hos of the C.R.P.F. belonging to this group are 46.42 per cent. In respect of low political efficacy, the figures of the Santals of Salia Sahi, the Santals of CRPF slum and the Hos of the CRPF slum are 43.05 per cent, 45.0 per cent and 46.42 per cent respectively. In so far as political participation is concerned, 45.16 per cent of Santals of Salia Sahi, 60.0 per cent of Santals of CRPF slum and 64.28 per cent of Hos of the CRPF slum belong to the low category. In other words, in the combined category of upper (medium and high) political participation, the Santals of Salia Sahi with 54.84 per cent outnumber the Santals and Hos of the CRPF slum with 40.0 per cent and 35.7 per cent.

As compared to several other migrant tribes in the city, the Kandhas of Virsa Munda slum are economically better-off. Out of 15 Kandha houses included in the sample, eight are engaged in income-earning activities. While some of them are auto-rickshaw drivers and raj-mistris (Masons), a few others are small shop owners. Some Kandha women are engaged as

domestic-helps. The better economic condition of Kandhas seems to have given them some leverage and confidence. They possess a fair degree of political efficacy. Only 20 per cent of them have low political efficacy. By contrast, those who possess medium or high sense of efficacy together constitute 80 per cent. But this is not reflected in their political awareness and political participation, especially in the latter. About 40 per cent of Kandhas are low in political awareness and 66.66 per cent of them are low in political participation.

This is due to two factors. Being engaged otherwise, they are neither inclined nor do they have time to take active part in politics. Further, the politics in the slum is dominated by the youth of general castes. Virsa Munda is a multi-caste slum in which the general caste people are dominant.

Narrow gender gap

India, by and large, is patriarchal, but the tribal society in India is, to a great extent, egalitarian. Among tribals, gender discrimination is minimal, especially in social and economic spheres. However, in politics, there is male domination. This duality is less among the migrant tribals in Bhubaneswar. Exceptions are found only in limited respects. In Jail Munda, Santal women are more politically aware than Santal men. Similarly, in Virsa Munda Sahi, Kandha women possess more political awareness than Kandha men. In the Christian Street of Salia Sahi, Oraon women are virtually as good as Oraon men in this respect. The Santal women of Nilakantha Nagar Munda Sahi and Kandha women of Virsha Munda Sahi possess more political efficacy than their male counterparts. In respect of political participation, the Kandha women of Virsa Munda Sahi and the Oraon women of Salia Sahi do better than their male counterparts. Oraon men work in government offices, while Oraon women do private jobs. Oraon men, being government servants, cannot take active part in politics. Oraon women are not subject to this restriction. Good economic condition has made Kandha men as well as women of Virsa Munda Sahi good political men and women. The tribal women of Munda Sahi, like their men-folk, are oriented towards politics mainly because of their participation in CPI(M)-led trade union activities.

CONCLUSION

Migration and urbanisation, through their interaction, affect each other, and, to some extent, each of them undergoes some change, though not necessarily to equal degree. The tribals who have migrated to Bhubaneswar city have, to some extent, experienced modernization with significant changes in their attitudes, orientations, expectations and behaviours. In the process, the culture of the city has come in active contact with the 'slum culture' which is predominantly a fusion of the cultures of different migrant tribals settled in the slums of the city.

The tribal in his native village and the tribal who has migrated to the city are both 'political men' because they both are aware of the happenings in the world of politics, and engaged in some political activity-routine or more important and challenging. But they are not the same as 'political man'. The migrant tribal settled in the city, because of modernization and contact with political communication and activities, is more politically aware, efficacious and active. However, there are variances among migrant tribals in this respect due to ethnicity, education, gender, occupation and location in the city. Regular exposure to political activities injects political awareness and efficacy in migrant tribals and increases their political participation. Education and occupation have a bearing on their political awareness and efficacy, and to a lesser extent, on political participation. In other words, increase in political awareness and political efficacy may or may not be accompanied by political participation. While tribal women, in general, lag behind tribal men in all the three attributes of

political man-political awareness, political efficacy and political participation-there are important differences. In several slums, female tribal leadership has grown, but its impact on urban politics is yet to be credibly felt.

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