Research Paper

Socio-Economic and Political Backgrounds of Women Legislators and Their Level of Participation in Tripura Legislative Assembly: A Study

Kishore Roy[1], Dr. Bikash Chandra Dash[2]

[1]Ph. D Scholar, Department of Political Science, Assam University Diphu Campus, Diphu, Karbi- Anglong, Assam.
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Assam University Diphu Campus. Diphu, Karbi-Anglong, Assam.

Corresponding Author: Kishore Roy

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes to study the relationship between socio-economic and political variables of women legislators and their level of participation and performances in legislative proceedings of Tripura Legislative Assembly. Women community, in general, marginalized and suppressed by the majority males and one of the vital cause is the presence of patriarchal culture and mindset among the people in the state. Their participation in assembly proceedings recorded very low due to their low numerical strength. Still, socio-economic and political backgrounds of women legislators affect the various levels of participation in and outside the assembly. This study reveals inter-dependence of participation of women legislators and their socio-economic status and found that women with higher socio-economic strata have participated better in the legislative proceedings. This study is based on secondary data and followed descriptive and analytical method.

Keywords: participation, legislators, socio-economic variables, representation, legislative proceeding.

INTRODUCTION

There is always been a debate over the relationship between socio-economic background and the legislative participation of legislators. Various studies reveal that there is a close proximity between these two. In case of women legislators, participation is a dependent variable and socio-economic and political factors are independent variables in this regard. Recent sociological theories have given more impetus to the study particularly on political decision makers instead of their activities. So, it is very much imperative to know about the socio-economic background of the women legislators of Tripura legislative Assembly for assessing their participation level in the legislative proceedings.

A very limited number of women legislators representing Tripura Legislative Assembly since its working. With smaller representatives they have participated in the legislative proceedings in a larger manner. Hence, it is necessary to reveal their actual participation in the assembly with having socio-economic differences. This paper proposes to find out the participation level of women legislators with having different socio-economic backgrounds.

The main objectives of the study-
1. To find out the relationship between the socio-economic variables and level of participation of women legislators of Tripura Legislative assembly.

2. To assess the role of women legislators of Tripura legislative assembly in assembly proceedings.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Both primary and secondary data have been studied for the entire study. Most of the data collected from the legislative proceedings available in the library of the Tripura Legislative Assembly. Interview method has been followed to collect data of women legislators related to their socio-economic and political status. The descriptive and analytical method has been used for the study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Mulgan 'the main type of political representation is the representing people in the legislature. As they represent a large number of electors of a region, hence they have influenced by the demographical factors of their respective constituency.' [6] Their behavior, values and opinions are to a great extent, influenced by their background and environmental factors, which include early life experiences, group memberships, identifications and affiliations. As the political power is opened for all sections of society including the marginalized, hence, it is important to study the background of representatives to know about them. Such studies would enable us to know how far electors are following

Milbrath, Goel found that 'the middle aged women are more active in political participation than the younger or aged women.' [1] 'Participation in politics is linked with the urban dwellers and people with urban setting have enough opportunities to become more active than the rural inhabitants.' [2] 'At micro level, it is revealed that educated people are more likely to care politics and vote.' [3]

'The political power is made for all sections of people in society including the marginalized and hence, it is very much essential to learn representatives' background to choose their appropriate representatives.' [4]

Almond, Verba also pointed that 'effective participation of an individual depends participation in different areas of societal life such as family, educational institution, club and other social organization.' [5]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First of all, it is very much indeed to know who the women legislators of Tripura are. In a state, where patriarchal political system prevails from a long time, womenfolk are able to secure very negligible position in decision making bodies. Male dominated order and culture restrains women from entry into the realm of higher decision making level. Thus, it is evident that percentage of women representation in the state legislature is 3.88% only.

Table 1: Women Candidates for Tripura Legislative Assembly.

Year	Candidates Contested			Candidates Elected		
	Female	Total Candidate	% of Female	Female	Total	% of Female
1972	04	234	1.70	02	60	3.33
1978	06	328	1.83	01	60	1.67
1983	11	206	5.33	03	60	5.00
1988	03	271	1.10	02	60	3.33
1993	14	407	3.44	01	60	1.67
1998	21	270	7.48	03	60	5.00
2003	19	254	7.48	01	60	1.67
2008	31	313	9.90	03	60	5.00
2013	15	249	6.02	05	60	8.33
Total	124	2532	4.89	21	540	3.88

Source: (i) Govt. of Tripura: Report on the General Elections of TCT, TLA and HPT, since 1952-1988, to the Election Commission. Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Agartala & (ii) Govt. of Tripura: list of Women MLAs. Tripura Legislative Assembly Library.

This is evident from the table that representation of women in Tripura Legislative Assembly is very negligible. The percentage of female contestants for the

entire period is only 4.89. Patriarchal mindset of political leaders and political parties irrespective of national as well as regional nature have restricted the women communities to contest higher decision making level in the state. Thus, during the long legislative period only 15 nos. women candidates have able to enter into the legislative arena. The percentage of them is only 3.88.

Generally speaking different socio-economic variables like age of legislators, marriage, caste, educational status, occupation etc. has left huge affect on participation level. Below the different socio-economic variables of women legislators of Tripura Legislative Assembly is discussed to know their participation level in the assembly.

AGE OF WOMEN LEGISLTORS: The nature and ranges of participation of each and every women legislator would be determined by some extent, by their age. 'It is a widespread concept that senior or aged legislators would dominate the leadership position in legislative proceedings.' [7] Milbrath, Goel found that 'the middle aged women are more active in political participation than the younger or aged women.' [8]

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by their Age.

Sl. No.	Age Group	Frequency	%
1	21-30 years	01	07%
2	31-40 years	05	33%
3	41-50 years	09	60%
4	51-60 years	0	0%
Total		15	100%

Sources: Interview with the respondents.

As shown in the above Table No.2 majority of women members who became MLA belong to the age group of 31-40 years (46.6%) whereas 6 women legislators belong to the age group of 41-50 years of age (40%). Most of them have young and energetic.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: Education plays a pivotal role in sharpening and acquiring knowledge and skills to the persons relate to the decision making bodies. Present day representative body has performs multi- functions and roles and the successful implementation of all these things education is a must. As per Verba, Nie 'at the micro level, strong evidences were found in favour of higher educated citizens for greater participation in decision making.' [9] 'The more highly educated are more likely to conform to other parameters of social position. Persons with higher income, higher occupational status and related to organizations have performed better in this regard.' [10]

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by their Educational Qualifications:-

Sl. No.	Education Level	Frequency	%
1	Graduate	07	47%
2	H.S (+2 Stage)	01	06%
3	Below Class-X	07	47%
Total		15	100%

Sources: Interview with the respondents.

Table No.3 reveals that almost half of the women legislators (47%) have completed their graduation degree. On the other hand, almost similar percentage of women legislators (47%) has studied below class-x. Legislators with an urban background have done their graduation degree whereas others were unable to do the same. None of them acquire any other higher educational or professional degree.

CASTE AS A MAJOR DETERMINANT: Caste system has influenced various levels of electoral politics in present day India. All major political parties of India at national level as well as regional level give impetus to caste an easy means to influence the voters in general. The caste plays an important role in even today and electorate is divided on caste lines.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by their Caste/Community.

Sl. No.	Caste/Community	Frequency	%
1	General	10	66.6%
2	S/C	02	13.3%
3	S/T	03	20%
Total		15	100%

Sources: Interview with the respondents.

As per Table 4, a large section of women MLAs belong to Un-reserved category

(66%). They are also belonging to the upper strata of the society. Almost 13% women legislators have belong to Scheduled Caste category and coming from the remote and hilly track of the state, whereas 20% women legislators belong to Scheduled Tribe category.

FAMILY BACKGROUND OF THE WOMEN LEGISLATORS: Political background plays pivotal role for participation of any individual into formal arena of politics. It is revealed that most of the parliamentarians and state legislators having sound political background. In most cases, they were influenced by the parental political background and thinking, while in few cases they were influenced by either father or mother of them. Family background plays a dominant role for the women legislators too.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by their family background.

Sl. No.	Family –Political Linkages	Frequency	%
1	Father in Politics	03	20%
2	Brother in Politics	0	0%
3	Spouse in Politics	06	47%
4	No Political linkages	06	33%
Total		15	100%

Sources: Interview with the respondents.

INCOME: Individual income of legislators have played crucial role in their performances. They enjoyed equal honorarium as an MLA with other allowances.

Table 6: Distribution of respondents by their Income.

Sl. No.	Income	Frequency	%
1	Income earned as an MLA	15	100%
2	Any other income	0	0%
3	No income	0	0%
Total		15	100%

Sources: Interview with the respondents.

It is revealed from the Table No.6 that most of the women legislators earned monthly honorarium as a legislator. They have no other individual income except the said one. Except the honorarium, they also enjoyed other packages and perks as a legislator.

PLACES OF BIRTH OF THE WOMEN LEGISLATORS:

It is evident that active participation in formal politics by the urban dwellers is better than the participation of rural inhabitants. The urban-rural background influences the style of life, personality and various other aspects of social life. Urban areas have larger population that brings forth greater degree of heterogeneity, social differentiation, social stratification and social interaction.

Table 7: Distribution of Respondents by their Place of Birth.

Sl. No.	Place of Birth	Frequency	%
1	Urban	04	27
2	Semi-Urban	04	27
3	Rural	07	47
Total		15	100%

Sources: Interview with the respondents.

As shown in above that majority of women legislators of Tripura Legislative Assembly have rural background (47%) and even belonging to very rural and remote areas. A good number of legislators (26%) have urban background and almost similar quantity of women legislators are semi-urban dwellers. Others were shifted to urban areas in their later life.

It is observed that women legislators of Tripura Legislative Assembly have various socio-economic backgrounds which changed them into a heterogeneous group. Almost half of them have higher education, urban settlers; have marital life and middle aged. On the other hand, few legislators have almost different background. These differences in socio-economic status have shown varied performances in legislative proceedings.

The inter-relationship between these variables have discussed below through various tables.

AGE AND LEGISLATIVE PARTICIPTION: Different studies have revealed that age as an important determinant of participation in decision making level at every stages. Senior members have performed better in comparison to their junior partner and they have more experience than the later.

Table 8: Distribution of Respondent's Age Group and Legislative Participation.

Sl. No.	Age Group	Frequency	Total Nos. of questions asked	%	Total Nos. of Discussions held	%	Total Nos. of Motions/ Resolutions etc. raised	%
1.	21-30 years	01	0	0%	05	10%	00	0%
2.	31-40 years	06	98	34.75%	18	36%	04	13.8%
3	41-50 years	07	148	52.48%	23	46%	24	82.8%
4	51-60 years	01	36	12.76%	04	8%	01	3.4%
4	Total	15	282	100%	50	100%	29	100%

Sources: Interviews with the legislators and content analyses of proceedings of TLA.

It is revealed women legislators having the age group of 41-50 years have participated better in the question hours. They asked questions (52%), raised motions (89%) and discussed on various issues (46%) in the legislature whereas women legislators having lower age groups participated limited in comparison to them. On the other hand, women legislators belong to 31-40 years have participated little fewer than the seniors. They participated in asking questions (35%), rising motions (14%) and have discussions with various issues (36%) only.

CASTE AND LEGISLATIVE PARTICPATION: Till date caste plays a pivotal role in political participation of the country.

Table 9: Distribution of Respondent's Caste/Community and Legislative Participation.

Sl. No.	Caste/ Community	Frequency	Total Nos. of questions asked	%	Total Nos. of Discussions held	%	Total Nos. of Motions/ Resolutions etc. raised
1.	General	10	200	70.9%		70%	22
2.	S/C	02	53	18.79%	17	14%	06
3	S/T	03	29	10.28%	08	16%	01
	Total	15	282	100%	50	100%	29

Sources: Interviews with the legislators and content analyses of proceedings of TLA

It is shown from the table that higher caste legislators have participated better in the question hours. They asked questions (71%), raised motions (76%) and discussed on various issues (70%) in the legislature whereas women legislators belong to S/C, S/T categories participated minimal in comparison to them. Scheduled caste legislators participated in asking questions (53%), rising motions (21%) and have discussions with various issues (14%) only. On the other hand, Scheduled tribe legislators participated in asking questions (10%), rising motions (3.4%) and have discussions with various issues (16%) only.

EDUCATION AND LEGISLATIVE PARTICIPATION: It is acceptable fact that candidates with higher education have better participation. Women representative with higher education have left huge impression in the decision making process and legislation.

Table 10: Distribution of Respondent's Educational Qualifications and Legislative Participation.

Sl. No.	Education Level	Frequency	Total Nos. of questions asked	%	Total Nos. of Discussions held	%	Total Nos. of Motions/ Resolutions etc. raised	%
1.	Below Class-X	07	123	43.6%	21	42%	21	72.4%
2.	H.S.(+2 Stage)	01	10	3.5%	05	10%	0	0%
3	Graduation	07	149	52.8%	24	48%	08	27.6%
4	Total	15	282	100%	50	100%	29	100%

Sources: Interviews with the legislators and content analyses of proceedings of TLA.

It is shown from the above that educated women legislators having the degree of graduation have participated better in the question hours. They asked questions (53%), raised motions (28%) and discussed on various issues (48%) in the

legislature whereas women legislators having lower education participated minimal in comparison to them. They participated in asking questions (19%), rising motions (22%) and have discussions with various issues (35%).

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATIVE PARTICPATION: family- political linkages is an important determinant of political participation. Members of the most of the women legislators have proximity with different political parties which motivate them to join formal politics.

Table 11: Distribution of respondent's family background and legislative participation.

Sl. No.		Frequency	Total Nos. of questions asked	%	Total Nos. of Discussions held	%	Total Nos. of Motions/ Resolutions etc. raised	%
1.	Political linkages	09	217	76.95%	32	64%	27	93%
2.	No linkages	06	65	23.04%	18	36%	02	7%
Total		15	282	100%	50	100%	29	100%

Sources: Interviews with the legislators and content analyses of proceedings of TLA

It is shown from the table that women legislators having family political background have participated better in the question hours. They asked questions (77%), raised motions (93%) and discussed on various issues (64%) in the legislature whereas women legislators having family with no political background participated minimal in comparison to them. They participated in asking questions (23%),

rising motions (7%) and have discussions with various issues (36%) only.

INCOME AND LEGISLATIVE PARTICIPATION: individual income helps and inspires each and every women legislator to participate in regular assembly business and legislative proceedings which enhance them and the next generation of women to join in formal political arena.

Table 12: Distribution of respondent's income and legislative participation.

Sl. No.	Income	Frequency	Total Nos. of questions asked	%	Total Nos. of Discussions held	%	Total Nos. of Motions/ Resolutions etc. raised	%
1.		15	282	100%	50	100%	29	100%
Total		15	201	100%	50	100%	29	100%

Sources: Interviews with the legislators and content analyses of proceedings of TLA.

It is shown from the Table No. 12 that women legislators have equal income mostly from the usages, honorarium, allowances etc. after becoming MLA, their socio-economic status changed to higher level. Thus income of each and every woman legislator has found no relationship to her participation in the higher decision

making bodies particularly in perspective of Tripura.

PLACE OF BIRTH AND LEGISLATIVE PARTICPATION: It is acceptable fact that urban dwellers have represented more number than the rural inhabitants which is true for the state legislature also.

Table 13: Distribution of Respondent's Place of Birth and Legislative Participation.

Sl. No.	Places of Birth	Frequency	Total Nos. of questions asked	%	Total Nos. of Discussions held	%	Total Nos. of Motions/ Resolutions etc. raised	%
1.	Urban	04	20	7.09%	09	18%	0	0%
2.	Semi-Urban	05	143	50.7%	22	44%	24	82.8%
3	Rural	06	119	42.19%	19	38%	05	17.2%
4	Total	15	282	100%	50	100%	29	100%

Sources: Interviews with the legislators and content analyses of proceedings of TLA.

It is shown from the above table that women legislators having urban and semi-urban background have better participation

than the legislators belonging to rural background in the question hours. They asked questions (58%), raised motions

(89%) and discussed on various issues (38%) in the legislature whereas women legislators having lower education participated minimal in comparison to them.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Socio-economic and political backgrounds of all women legislators help to understand a wide ranges of matters i.e. their attitudes on various issues, participation, performance, recruitment and also access their degree of representation.

It is found that women legislators with higher age have better participation in the assembly. Women legislators belong to age group of 41-50 years of age and have raised maximum questions, debates and discussions in the question hours. Women legislators with age group of 31-40 years have participated little lower in comparison to their senior colleagues.

It is said that legislators with higher education have better participation in the assembly. It is revealed from the interviews that higher educated women legislators that they have better conceptions regarding day to day business in the assembly and they have shown better performances while asking questions, raising motions/ resolutions and discussions on various issues in the house. Legislators with lower education have played insignificant role in handling women problems, proper utilization of funds than the women legislators with higher education.

Caste is also found a determining factor regarding the assessment of women legislators' participation. It is found that majority of women legislators belong to un-reserved categories (66%) whereas the remaining legislators belong to Scheduled Caste (13%) and Scheduled Tribe (20%) categories. It is revealed from the study that women belong to general category have better participation and performances in the assembly and S/C and S/T women have shown lower participation in the assembly.

Family backgrounds of women legislators play a significant role in participation and performances in the legislature. It is revealed that majority of the women legislators have family with political linkages. Either father or spouse has a connection with active politics which attract them to join in formal politics and have shown better performance in the assembly business. Women legislators have families with no political linkage shown lesser performances and participations in the assembly.

Income is another determining factor in respect of participation and performances of women legislators concerned. But here it is revealed that all women legislators have almost similar income through their wages, honorarium, allowances etc. and no division is found among them regarding their income. Instead of having similar income, their participation level varies from one another. Thus, it can be said that income as a determining factor has no relation with this study.

Women legislators having different socio-economic backgrounds have always shown their heterogonous identity. Instead of having different backgrounds, they participated in the assembly as marginalized groups.

Women legislators irrespective of their caste, class, family background, educational status, religion etc. have recorded 95% attendance approximately throughout the assembly period. But they keep silence most of the time due to their low numerical strength. They have raised very limited questions and participated in different motions and discussions for the same cause.

'Larger representation of women could enhance their participation level.' [11] In Tripura Legislative Assembly women representation is only 3.88% which is very limited for assessing their participation level.

Due to limited representation in the assembly, women legislators have unable to raise women specific and children related issues in the House. Most of the cases, they were supported by the males for raising divergent issues.

Women legislators of Tripura Legislative Assembly have given more impetus to their constituency and less impetus to women and children related issues. It is found from the legislative proceedings that women legislators raised Women and children related questions only 5.9% whereas asked 29.4% questions relate to constituency development

CONCLUSION

Finally, it can be concluded that women legislators with different socio-economic backgrounds have participated different ways in the legislative proceedings and other businesses in Tripura Legislative Assembly. Women with higher educational qualifications, higher castes and communities and ages have participated better while asking questions, raising motions or resolutions and other issues related to assembly businesses. It is relevant to mention that higher representation of women legislators is very much needed for enhancement of women related issues and priorities. But fewer women representation in Tripura Legislative Assembly unable them to raise such issues and their voices and concerns were un-touched and un-heard. The women access in higher decision making is possible with the enhancement of pro-women programme and policies in the state.

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