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ETHNIC COMMUNITIES PARTICIPATION LEVEL IN POLITICS: A STUDY ON BIRAMPUR UPAZILA IN DINAJPUR DISTRICT

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Abstract: Nobody is out of politics. State has given fundamental rights to every citizen from anti natal to death. Political participation is an important part of our society in many ways because it directly affects our lives and the ways in which we are able to live them. Political participation allows people to support and elect leaders that they feel will do the best job running the state and local government. Although state has given equal rights, citizen awareness, religion, social customs but all citizen could not enjoy the rights. That creates a bar/prevent/obstruct to participation in politics. In Birampur Upazila, there are about 9%-10% people are ethnic and in some area ethnics are majority. The ethnic community have own rules and customs. Basically, they are ruling by own social and customary rules and regulations. This community is most vulnerable, introverted and less empower. For many reason they are behind the development trends. Less political participation may make them underdeveloped. For, measure the political participation level of ethnic community this study has conducted.

Introduction

In Birampur, a good number of ethnic (Sanatal, Orao, Pahan etc.) are living here. They have some social organizations. They mainly ruled by own customary rules and regulations. Their political participation level is very poor. According to the online Webster's Dictionary "*political participation is the active engagement by individuals and groups with the governmental*

processes that affect their lives."¹ Political participation is a process by which people should become more involved in because it is what is going to truly determine the way in which our future and current generations will function.

In the political system of the Bangladesh there are two forms of political participation that we as Bangladeshi citizens can participate in it. The first form is the conventional form of political participation. It is the most common form in which we participate in. According to ASIS.org "*conventional form of communications consists of Voting, letter writing, contact with representatives, working on campaigns, and campaign contributions.*" (Gregson 1997) Conventional participation's is the most productive and effective way for the every Bangladeshi to participate in our political system. Unfortunately, very low numbers of ethnic communities are participating in conventional political participation. Conventional political participation is also important because if no one participates in our political system than it can 'cause instability and complete system failure.' (Gregson 1997)

The next form of political participation is the unconventional way in which people participate. Unconventional forms of communication consist of marching, demonstrations, boycotts, sit-ins and the use of violence. These "*Unconventional activities might be legal but are not considered appropriate, such as participating in a protest march. Illegal unconventional means of participation include burning draft cards, bombing government buildings, and repressing other people's participation.*"² Although this form of political participation is not as effective as the conventional form, but many people still choose to use this unconventional method to express their views and opinions. Both conventional and unconventional forms of political participation can be limited by the economic and social needs of the participants and this often dictates the amount for political participation that ethnic people in Birampur are participating in.

There are three models of political participation a) democratic elitism model b) rational choice theory and c) participatory theories of democracy.³ These theory helps to "strengthening local government, and extending democratic practice into the institutions of civil society, as well as increasing opportunities for the use of national referendums and citizen-led policy initiatives." (Richards 2009). ⁴Overall this theory not only helps our political system as a whole but it also provides citizens with the proper ideas and political competence to cast a strong vote for what they believe in.

Participation in electoral processes involves much more than just voting. Political participation derives from the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate; the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs; and the opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government. Under international standards, men and women have an equal right to participate fully in all aspects of the political

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process. In practice, however, it is often harder for women to exercise this right. In contest of local communities special care is required to ensure their rights are respected in this regard. In Birampur area, ethnic people are missing above forms of participations.

Birampur Upazila

Birampur is an Upazila of Dinajpur District which is located at 25.3778°N 88.9833°E and total area 211.81 km². Birampur has a population of 170806. Males constitute are 50.57% of the populations and females 49.37%.⁵ Among the population 7855 are ethnic. This is 4.60% of the total population in the area.⁶ In fact, the ethnic population might be more than the figure given in the Census Report. There are reasons for supposing so. It has been observed that the ethnic people who were converted to Christianity are often listed in the Government official documents under the category 'Christian', while those who use Bengali names similar to the typical Hindu names are often grouped under the category 'Hindu' in both cases, ethnic people are excluded from the groups where they belong to. The Munda, Oraon, and Santals are the ethnic people of Chhota Nagpur and Santal Parganas of India and they came to this area during the British period.⁷

Objectives

The main objective of the study is to measure political participation of ethnic minority community. Specific objectives are

- I. To measure the participation level of ethnic communities in politics
- II. Identify the prevents/obstructs/bars of participation in politics
- III. To measure minimum knowledge regards politics
- IV. Recommendation for improving the situation.

Methodology

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Unfolding the political participation of ethnic communities quantities method has followed. The qualitative tools focus group discussion (FGD), trend analysis and key informant interview (KII) has extensively used to understand the facts of the situation that affect the community.

Sources of Data Collection

There are two sources of data– (i) primary source and (ii) secondary source. Ethnic community treat as primary source and study issue related previous books, journals, literatures and governmental and non-governmental official documents are use as secondary sources of information.

Sampling and sample size

In order to conduct the study, first of all we have determined universe and then from the universe we have selected representative samples using random sampling process. At least 150 sample sizes are determined for HH data collection, 4 FGD (2 male, 2 female) and 02 KII have been conducted.

Methods of Data Collection

A semi-structured questionnaire has used to collect the quantitative data from the households drawn following random sampling technique from the list of households of individual community. Semi-structured checklist has used for qualitative data collection from targeted communities.

Limitations of the Study

1. Small sample size.
2. Stipulated time period.
3. External variables are not controlled.
4. Insufficient literature regarding this topic.
5. Lack of sufficient financial support.
6. This study may not reflect the actual situation of the whole study community.

Respondent Age Level

The survey was conducted on above 18 years old ethnic community's people whom have the rights to be voter according to Bangladesh constitution. The following table shows 14% respondent were 18-25 years old, 31.33% respondent were 26-35 years old, 24.67% respondents were 46-60 years old and only 3.34% were above 60 years old. The table also shows that 72% respondent were under 18-45 years whom are main role player in the election. So, their responses focus the actual situation of the communities.

Table: Age of Interviewer				
SL #	Years	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percent
1	18-25	21	14	14
2	26-35	47	31.33	45.33
3	36-45	40	26.67	72.00
4	46-60	37	24.67	96.67
5	60+	5	3.33	100.00
Total		150	100	

Education Status of the Respondent

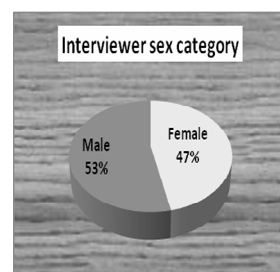
Education is the main pillar of the development and key facts of awareness. The survey data shows 71.3% respondent are illiterate or only can do sign, 22% respondents education level is class I to V, 2% respondent education level is level class VI to X, 2.7% respondent education level is class XI-XII and only 2% respondents attain graduation level or more than graduation. The result reveals that education status among the adult ethnic communities is very poor which is a very important significant factor to behind the ethnic community's development.

Table: Educational Status				
SL #	Level	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	Illiterate or only can do sign	107	71.3	71.3
2	Level 1 to 5	33	22.0	93.3
3	Level 6 to 10	3	2.0	95.3
4	Level 11 to 12	4	2.7	98.0
5	Level 13-16	3	2.0	100.0
Total		150	100.0	

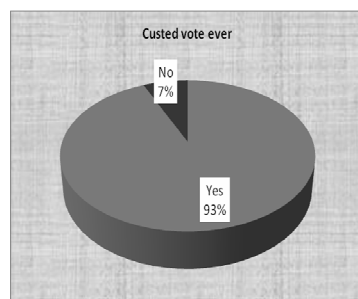
Source: Field Survey

Sex Category of the Interviewer

Gender –role development is one of the most important areas of human development. In fact, the sex of a newborn sets the agenda for a whole array of development experiences that will influence the person throughout his or her life. That society is developed in where both male and female enjoy their rights equally. Mainly female are faces different impediment. So, sex is vital indication of a society. The figure shows among the interviewer 53% were male and 47% were female. The result will claim that the findings of the study are reflection of both categories.



Source: Field Survey



Vote Casting Status

Vote is the important way by which a citizen can participate in the politics.

The following figure shows that 93% ethnic communities have casted vote in different election events and 7% voter never enjoyed vote. The survey findings unveiled that vote casting rate among the ethnic communities is remarkable than other communities and it also indicates the ethnic communities political participation level. So, it seems that ethnic people participate in voting although face various obstacle. Sometimes minorities groups vandalize their house, physically assault, misbehave or threat to harm by the majorities. So, minorities are not safe and they cannot express their opinion with out threat.

Enjoyed casting vote

The Voter gets the opportunity in different election. In our country, Voter directly cast vote in local government election, national parliament election or memorandum election if needed. So, in a adult life every Voter cast his or her vote more than one times. The survey result shows 48.9% Voters exercise his/her franchising more than four times, 19.1% three times, 12.8% four times, 10.6% only one times and 8.5% exercise voting power two times. The 51.1% have experience to cast Voter up to four times and remain have experience more than four times.

How Many Times Enjoy Voter				
SL #	Description	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	One time	15	10.6	10.6
2	Two times	12	8.5	19.1
3	Three times	27	19.1	38.3
4	Four times	18	12.8	51.1
5	More than four times	69	48.9	100.0
Total		141	100.0	

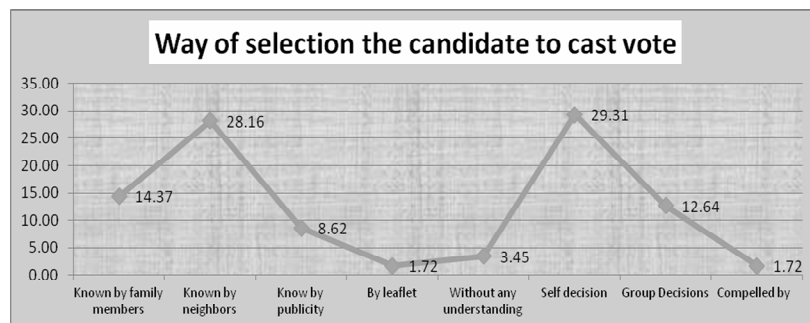
Field of Casting Vote

The community adult people have different casting experiences. 36.2% communities have 36.2% vote casting experience on national parliament election, 27.5% have vote casting experience on Upazila council election, 26.7% have experience on union council election and only 9.5% have experience on Municipality election. The data shows ethnic communities have vote casting experience on different fields.

Field of Casting of Voter			
SL#	Field of casting vote	Frequency	Percent
1	Union council	98	26.7
2	Municipality	35	9.5
3	Upazila council	101	27.5
4	National assembly	133	36.2
Total		367	100.0

***Multiple answer

Way of selection the candidate to cast vote/ Way of select the candidates



Source: Field Survey.

Vote is a significant tool of political participation. Political party, its manifesto and candidates are lighting agendas. Generally voters select the candidate in different ways. The candidate selection depends on society and voters educations, scope of information dissemination. The study shows maximum 29.31% voter of ethnic community selected candidate using own judgment, 28.16% known by neighbors, 14.37% known by family members and 1.64% voters compelled and forced to vote unchained full selects the candidates and 3.45% choose the candidate without any judgment. The survey result shows that most of the voter take decision by others influence. Many social ethnic leaders are pursued by candidate, they play role as strong influential group and work in favor of them in ill motive. Ultimate, many ethnic franchisers cannot play vital role as honored citizen. Thus, the election process becomes futile. Results not reflect to all people opinion.

Age for Voters

Age is a most important base for a voter. The minimum age in Bangladesh for being a voter is above 18 years according to article 122 (2), constitution of Bangladesh- Qualification of registration as voter.⁸ Among the communities 46.7% knows the minimum age of voter and 52.7% respondent don't know the age criteria of a voter. The result shows, till now majority people of ethnic

Table: Minimum age for Voter			
SL#	Description	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	70	46.7
2	No	79	52.7
3	Do not know	1	0.7
	Total	150	100.0

community didn't know what is the actual age for voting. This status could be manipulated adults not listed his or her name on voter list.

Face any challenge before or after vote

Vote is a fundamental right of an adult citizen. By casting vote a citizen exercise his or her rights and elect his chosen candidate. In our county, many candidates intentionally create fear atmosphere in the community before vote. Sometime, mussel-man or influential group compel the general or minority group's especially ethnic community to cast vote in favor of them or try to

Face any challenges after declared result			
SL#	Description	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	15	8.3
2	No	135	91.7
Total		150	100.0

Source: Field Survey

disengage the disfavor groups from vote. If their opinion goes against then, they physically assault, wrapping with false case, destroyed house, shops or burn assets. In few cases, desperate people or groups slaughter innocents. It's a embarrass situation for innocent community or voter.. The study data shows 8.3% communities face challenge before or after vote and 91.7% communities do not face any challenge. These unanticipated encourage innocents to unexpressed their opinion and discourage to participate in political programme or activities.

Type of destructive activities during or after election

This is a common scenario in Bangladesh that after vote either national parliament election or local government election, minorities become victim of vandalism. The result express 53.3% deprived from government service if there disfavor people or party men elected, 40% gets verbally threat from opposition and only 6% answered their houses or assets destroyed by offender. Thus, ethnic community sometimes lose interest in politics.

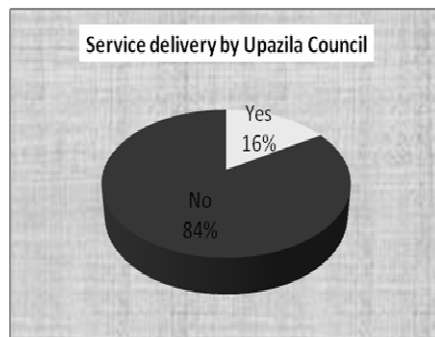
SL#	Description	Frequency	Percent
1	Verbally threat	6	40.0
2	Destruction of house	1	6.7
3	Deprived from benefit	8	53.3
Total		15	100.0

Knowledge about local government (Union council/Municipality) providing service:

For development and betterment of communities government is delivering service through local government. For unawareness, some people are depriving of getting service. This is observation that most of the ethnic communities do not know about Union council or Municipality responsibilities or activities. The study result reveal 36% ethnic communities know social safety net program operations is the main duties of Union council or Municipality. 23% ignore about Union Council and Municipality's programs. As a result, ethnic communities are behind the development or depriving necessary services. A distance makes between elected representative and ethnic communities. Local government takes inadequate measures for awaking unconscious people, limited scope of access to services and poor honored are making this unexpected circumstance.

Knowledge regards Upazila Council

Upazila is a very important stage of local government. Every central government offices are available here for delivering services on behalf of department at the community level. The Upazila council is co-ordinating Union level works, monitoring, planning development works for Upazila territory and providing all government services to people. So, it is very important for people to know what sorts of services are delivering by Upazila council. The study data indicates only 16% ethnic community have knowledge regarding Upazila council providing



services and 84% ethnic communities are completely unconcern. Because of, most of the ethnic people are illiterate and poor relation engross with mainstream.

Status of receiving local government services

Local government particularly Union council/Municipality and Upazila council are always ready for delivering citizens necessary supports. Receiving supports by citizen it may happen to make bridge between citizen and government that is an indication of political participation. Result indicates 51.% ethnic people received service from local government and 48.7% never gone to local government or received direct service from these. The following table also shows 28.3% birth certificate, 29.2% social safety net service, 19.5% citizen certificate, 18.6% justice and solidarity or arbitration, and 1.8% relief related service are delivered by community level local government.

Table: Do you received service from local government			
SL#	Descripti on	Frequen cy	Percent
1	Yes	77	51.3
2	No	73	48.7
Total		150	100.0

Table: Type of Receiving service from local government			
S L#	Descriptio n	Frequen cy	Perce nt
1	Birth certificate provides	32	28.3
2	Social safety net service	33	29.2
3	Certificate deliver	22	19.5
4	Justice and solidarity or arbitration	21	18.6
5	Relief	2	1.8
6	Do not know	2	1.8
7	Constructi on work	1	0.9
Total		113	100.0
*** Multiple answer			

Way to know about political participation

Despite the fact that, a proportion of ethnic communities are participating in politics. Some are realizing for their individual development and community's development there is no alternative to participate in politics. So, need to know way of participation. The study result focus that 47.3% ethnic people know about the way of political participation by neighbor, 12% by government advertisement, 3.3% by political parties program, 9.3% by family members and till now 26% do not about the issue. So, neighbors are playing a effective role to the community participation in politics.

Table: How do you know, participation process in politics			
SL #	Description	Frequency	Percent
1	Known by family members	14	9.3
2	Known by neighbors	71	47.3
3	Know by government advertise	18	12.0
4	By leaflet	2	1.3
5	Reading	1	0.7
6	Political parties program	5	3.3
7	Do not know	39	26.0
Total		150	100.0

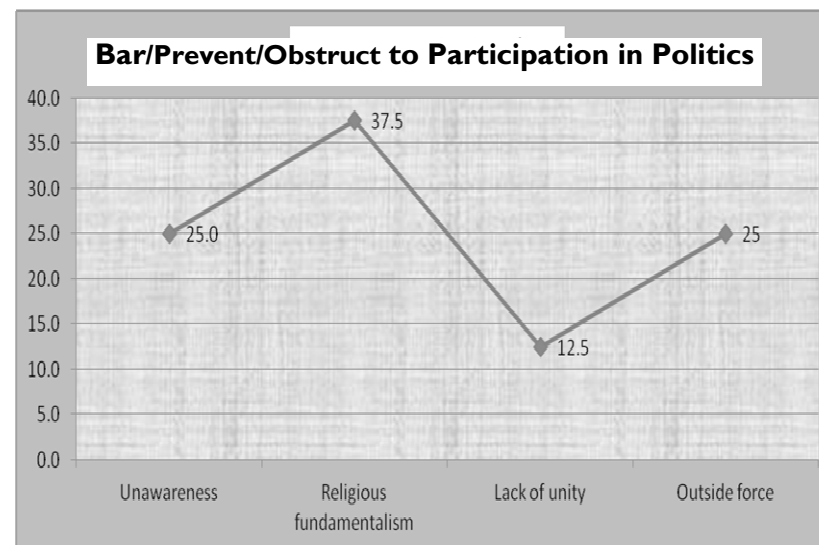
Bar/Prevent/Obstruct to participation in politics

Some people participate in politics with joy, some have will to participate in politics but fail. The result expresses 13.3% feel the importance of political participation and 86.7% realize that they have no bar to political participation. Now the question have been raising communities participation level. Only government/Non government initiative can more aware the people on concerning issues.

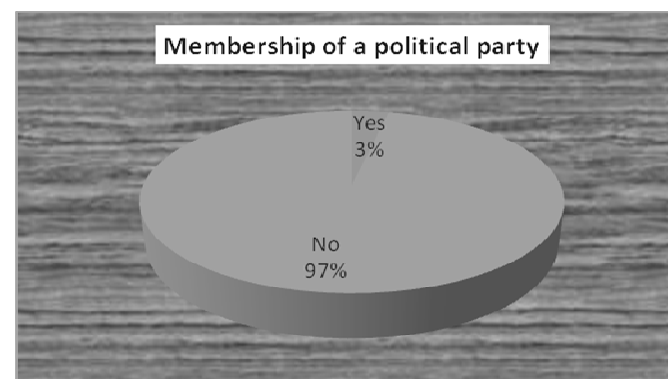
Have any bar to participation in politics			
SL#	Description	Frequency	Percent
1	Yes	20	13.3
2	No	130	86.7
Total		150	100.0

Reason for bar/Prevent/Obstruct to Participate in Politics

In open discussion the ethic people identify some causes which is main bar/prevent to participate in politics. 37.5% Ethnic communities think over, fundamentalism is the main bar to participation in politics, 25% says outside forces and similarly 25% feel and remain 25% are treat unaware as the principle causes.



Member of a political party



Membership of a political party is a vital/important participation in politics. In developing and least developed county in where democratic system is absent, people of these county show less interest in politics. In democratic country, political party is most vital factors. The study data shows, among the communities only 3% adult ethnic community are engage in political party and remains are not get any political parties membership. Till now ethnic people politically unaware, introverted, feel shy of communicate with other

religious or minorities and enjoy themselves within their communities. On the other hand, majorities usually avoid them or ignore them. These facts build a big wall between majorities and minority ethnic communities. In fact, most of the popular political parties do not reach them or little bit initiatives for being a part of political party. Consequently, they are less involved in politics and living in confined. Only, many dominated groups use them as voting tool. During different vote issue, candidate or political parties want vote from them or pressurize them to cast vote in favor of them.

Recommendations

- Need to take intensive initiatives to aware ethnic people especially women.
- Many ethnic people particularly women cannot clearly understand Bengali language. They use to their own language. So, it is very important to aware them by ethnic language and it will more better if awareness program might be facilitated by ethnic social leaders or faith base leaders.
- Undertake voter and civic education programme aimed specifically at women.
- Need to drive youth movement for community mobilization and build bridge with minorities for solidarity and reduce community discrimination
- Political parties need to reduce close gaps among parties and ethnic minorities
- During difficult political circumstances political parties and government need to keep them, protect them and stand beside them

Conclusion

Political participation is a constitutional rights of Bangladeshi citizen. For individual and society development, community need to participation in politics. Political participation is important to ethnic society that can determine the future of ethnic as a whole. But mostly ethnic people in this area are excluded or marginalized from national and local politics. So, they are not able raise their voice, not begin movement and called for a greater recognition of the human and cultural rights of ethnic peoples and their more active participation in development and other forms of public decision-making. To change the situation, need great attention to them. Government and political party could be played positive and effective role in great interest of underprivileged ethnic peoples. All level of communities need to aware, educate and advocacy related initiatives on behalf of them. Only politically conscious and participation in politics will retrieve them from all form of violations, ignorance and move them in development trends. Otherwise they will never reach to mainstream.

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 - ⁵ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Population Census Report, 2013.
 - ⁶ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2011, Community Series: Dinajpur District: Table C-12 : Distribution of Ethnic Households, Population by Sex, Residence and Community.
 - ⁷ Kibriaul Khaleque, *Ethnic Communities of Bangladesh*, p. 12.
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