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Political Participations of TGL and Ex-TGL Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Study of Obstacles and Challenges in Biswanath District of Assam

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Abstract

Panchayati Raj Institutions, the apex body of local governance and the third tier of modern Indian federation, are a popular political institution of our age, which is the ultimate result of various Indian traditions and the legacy of the past. The Panchayati Raj Institutions are an administrative unit that consists of the local representatives to solve local problems by adopting a public choice plan. The Amendment of the Indian Constitution (73rd) introduced a uniform pattern of Panchayati Raj Institutions all over the country, and the Act of Panchayati Raj Institutions 1994 mandates thirty per cent of total seats reserved for women. In Assam, the government made a reservation of fifty per cent of total seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions by the Panchayati Raj Institutions Act, 1994, for popular participating and capacity building of women's community, irrespective of caste and marginalised groups. Tea Garden Labourers and Ex-Tea Garden Labourers belong to marginalised groups of Assam, transitioning from plantation subjects to political citizens. The study of political participation of women of Tea Garden Labourers and Ex- Tea Garden Labourers, in fact, has significant implications in the study of social science research to understand the level of their participation and leadership quality. Considering the ground reality, this paper will examine the levels of political participation among Tea Garden Labourers and Ex- Tea Garden Labourers women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, focusing on the issue of garden control and free garden control environment by using a mixed-methods approach, locating the Biswanath district of Assam, India, as the study area.

Keywords: Women, political participation, tea garden laborers, ex-tea garden laborers, seat reservation.

1. Introduction

In the 20th century, the process of decentralization constituted a healthy politico-environment at the grassroots level in democratic countries. ^[1] It enables ordinary citizens to understand democratic principles and importance of active participation in democratic institutions. ^[2] In India, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are functioning as the apex body of democratic administration and the symbol of decentralised governance through which government implements public welfare programmes more effectively. ^[3] The Amendment of the India Constitution (73rd) introduced a uniform pattern of PRIs all over the country and the Act of 1994, Government of Assam mandate reservation of fifty per cent seats for women of PRIs. ^[4] The implementation of thirty per cent seats reservation for women in PRIs in the country

and fifty per cent in Assam has created a revolution in the history of Indian democracy, which enables the cultivation of leadership capabilities and institutional capacity among women at the grassroots levels. This approach aims to provide maximum opportunities for women to participate in governance structures by changing the traditional representative pattern. ^[5] It provides equal opportunity to women belonging to all sections of society to participate in a decentralised process. But the women of Tea Garden Labourers (TGL) and Ex-Tea Garden Labourers (Ex-TGL) of Assam are not properly linked with this decentralisation process. The TGL and Ex-TGL communities were brought to cultivate tea in Assam by the British during colonial administration from different parts of the country. Despite constituting nearly fifty per cent of the workforce of this

community, they are still deprived of basic amenities and social services. Women of TGL and Ex-TGL communities have been facing multiple layers of discrimination based on gender, class and ethnic identity.^[6] Their socio-economic conditions remain deplorable, characterised by limited educational opportunities, inadequate healthcare access and restricted economic mobility.^[7] The PRIs potentially offer these women unprecedented opportunities for political empowerment, capacity building and development of their leadership quality.

2. Objectives

This study addresses several interconnected research objectives, which are presented below:

1. Examining the Political participations of TGL and Ex-TGL women in PRIs
2. Understanding the hindrances to the political participation of women in PRIs, with special reference to TGL and Ex-TGL women, along with the obligations of social organisations.

3. Research Methodology

The present research is an interdisciplinary inquiry. Its central focus is on the political participation of TGL and Ex-TGL women in PRIs within the contemporary democratic framework. Naturally, the study has adopted mixed methods for analytical purposes. Precisely, the study is empirical in nature, historical in approach and descriptive in analysis. For the study purpose, Assam has been taken as the universe and its Biswanath district as the sample area. The researcher has selected three Developmental Blocks of the district, and eight Panchayats (out of 31 Panchayats of the three Blocks) were selected for study and data collection. The sample unit consists of 350, selected from the TGL and Ex-TGL community. In this sample, the populations comprise the Presidents, Members of Gaon Panchayat, the members of Anchalik Panchayat and the citizens who enlist their name in the electoral roll as voters.

4. Discussion and Result

Assam is rich in tea, and it is one of the most vital areas of the state economy. Every year, Assam produces more than 1000 million tonnes of tea, which is more than 50 per cent of the total production of the country. As per the report, there are approximately 800 tea estates and 1, 33,000 Small Tea Garden. The total tea cultivated land of the state is about 3.59 lakh hectares in both the valley of the river Brahmaputra and the valley of the river Barak. The tea industry of Assam is divided into two sectors: (1) the largest estates, which have larger plantations with their own tea factories, and (2) small tea growers, located on individual land plots of less than 10.12 hectares. These tea estates produce 687.76 million kg, and the small tea growers produce 345.39 million kg of tea every year. Nearly 7 lakh tea labourers have been working in these sectors regularly. The history of the tea industry of Assam is about two hundred years old. Before the identification of the tea of Assam, it was stated that the tea plants were available in the jungle of Assam. E.A. Gait stated that Robert Bruce and his brother Alexander Bruce had discovered tea plants in Assam. When Robert Bruce visited the Singphos Chief, the Singphos Chief offered him a special type of beverage and specimens of a plant that, in the course of time, was declared as tea.^[8] After the formal identification of tea in Assam, the colonial administration, with the help of different companies, started to establish tea estates in Assam.

Hence, the colonial administration recruited a huge number of tea labourers in the tea gardens from different parts of the country as contractual tea labourers or periodic tea labourers (coolies). In the history of social composition of Assam, these workers are socially termed as Chah Janagosthhi, Chah Janajati, Chah Majdur, Chah Patia, Na-Assomiya, Baganiya and Coolies.^[9]

For administrative purposes and commercial interest, the colonial planters divided the tea workers into two categories and provided two separate identities. Originally, they had different identities and belonged to different castes, tribes and communities having their own independent religious faith, beliefs, dialects and rituals. All these people were recruited in the tea gardens of Assam by colonial planters from Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and the then Chotanagpur area.^[10] Hence, it can be easily understood that these people do not belong to the same race or community. Sushil Kurmi, in his book named Chah Bagichar Katha, has mentioned that there are 121 castes and tribes amongst this community. But, Deuram Tassa stated that there are 75 castes and tribes. Sushil Kr. Bhowmik stated that these labourers have different social, religious and cultural behaviours and they belong to Austric and Dravidian Kols. According to him, Kols were the most ancient group of aboriginals of the country and were divided into numerous branches and fractions. It is almost impossible to ascertain their actual branches and divisions.^[11] However, based on their languages, they can be divided as Asur, Karuwa, Kurukh, Kormali, Kurha, Khariya, Gadaba, Tuyang, Chaura or Chabbar, Santhal, Ho, etc. Eminent writer Sanjay Kr. Tanti, in his article Asomor Chah Janagosthhi-Adivasi Sakalor Nri-Tatwik Parichay, stated that the British used the word Adibashi just to defame the identity of some of the aboriginal castes and communities like Santhal, Munda, Ho, Khariya, etc.^[12] the tea cultivation of Assam has given birth to two concepts among the tea labourers. The labourers who live outside the tea garden are known as Ex-TGL, and the labourers who live within the garden boundaries are known as TGL. After the end of the contract period, the tea labourers were dropped from their engagement, and the garden authority directed them to leave the station. It was noted that in the year 1920, the number of time-expired workers was about 1,200,000. Among them, almost 50,000 workers, in a compelling situation, reside outside the tea gardens or nearby areas for the sake of their lives, who were declared by the garden authority as *faltu labour*. Today, these people are known as Ex-Tea Labourers. Gradually, the number of such engagement time expired. labourers increased, and they started to live outside the garden. Considering the humanitarian point of view, the government of Assam also directly leased waste lands to these emigrant peasants and workers. By June 1920, the government leased 223,331 and 34,592 acres of land to the peasants in Brahmaputra and Barak Valley, respectively.^[13] As a result, many villages were born in the surroundings of each tea garden, which is known as *Basti*.

During the same time, many thousands of coolies were recruited from different parts of the country with the help of contractors to construct roads, railways, oil fields and other public departments of the government. In the course of time, these workers also settled in Assam permanently by acquiring wastelands and forest lands of Assam. These people were also known as coolies, and the location where they lived was known as a *basti*. As per the census report, the total population of the tea community of Assam is estimated to be

around 70 lakhs, making up roughly 20 per cent of the total population of Assam. According to the 2011 Census, the literacy rate of the Tea Tribe community is 46 per cent, which is significantly lower than the overall literacy rate of Assam, 72.19 per cent and the national average, 72.98 per cent. ^[14]

4.1 Participation of TGL and Ex-TGL Women in Panchayat Election

Political participation focused on the formal political activities of individuals in influencing political structures, which reshape the engagement of citizens in political life. It encompasses various governmental and non-governmental actions, along with casting a vote in an election, establishing relations with pressure and interest groups, communicating with legislators, participating in political campaigns, sharing and forming political opinions, discussing public issues, attending community meetings, etc. It also covers the political awareness, expressing opinions, and involving decision-making processes of the state. The PRIs stand as a grassroots democratic government, serving as sophisticated platforms for political participation. Situating away from the bureaucratic framework, PRIs symbolise different traditions of Indian civilisation which emphasise community participation, collective decision-making and an indigenous self-governance system. It consistently occupied prominent positions in the politico-administration of the country, since ancient times, to establish equality and social justice in society. The Khel, Mel, Paik, Namghar, etc. of the ancient age symbolised the existence of local self-government in Assam. During the Ahom rule, the PRIs of Assam had gained maturity. There were also some community-centric Panchayat-like institutions, which were most popular among the communities. These institutions were playing a vital role in society in establishing social harmony and justice. A well-organised social structure and stable eco-political environment are the basic components of social development.

Equal participation of every section of the people, including men and women, is important to overcome different challenges and establish equality and social justice. The Amendment of the Indian Constitution (73rd) provides significant opportunities to women to build their capacity and improve their leadership quality. This constitutional privilege not only increased their numerical representation but also encouraged them to take direct part in the process of their political engagement or decision-making process. It is worth mentioning that just after the implementation of the amendment, in 2001, the number of women representatives increased in Assam up to 9,903 in PRIs. Before that, the representation of women in political activities was minimal, representing only 4 per cent to 5 per cent. But, in post-amendment periods, women's involvement in PRIs rose to 25 per cent to 40 per cent, which brings drastic changes in the political landscape of Assam. Like other women of Assam, the political participation of TGL and Ex-TGL in PRIs has also increased. In this study, an attempt has been made to understand the status of political participation of TGL and Ex-TGL women in PRIs of Biswanath District of Assam. It is noted that the discussion on the research problem would be made on the basis of the data of the last Panchayat election of Assam 2025. To understand the political participation of TGL and Ex-TGL women in the PRIs elections of Biswanath District of Assam, the researcher took a sample from the selected areas of the district and administered questionnaires to obtain data for the purpose. The objective of the study is to find out whether there are any relationships between the attitudes of the respondents towards the political participation of women of TGL- Ex-TGL of Biswanath District in PRIs. In this regard, a descriptive presentation is made in relation to religion, community, education, profession, economic condition, sex, and age of the respondents belonging to different PRIs of the Districts.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents

S. No.	Name of Panchayat	Tea Garden Labour	Percentage	Ex-Tea Garden Labour	Percentage	Total (Tea & Ex-Tea)
1	Mukhargarh	27	56.25 %	21	43.75 %	48
2	Tinisuti	17	43.59 %	22	56.41 %	39
3	Monabari	18	43.90 %	23	56.10 %	41
4	Ratowa	21	53.85 %	18	46.15 %	39
5	Bihmari	23	11.73%	19	13.67%	42
6	Borgang	32	16.33%	21	15.11%	53
7	Serelia	28	66.67 %	14	33.33 %	42
8	Rangagarh	21	45.65 %	25	54.35%	46
	Total	187	53.43%	163	46.57%	350

Source: Field study of the researcher

Data have been collected from eight different Gaon Panchayats of the district as mentioned in Table No. 1. Altogether 350 respondents were selected for the purpose, out of which 187 were TGL (53.43%) and 163 were Ex-TGL (46.57%). The highest number of respondents was collected from Borgang Gaon Panchayat, with a figure of 53. Out of these 53, 32 respondents were from TGL and 21 from Ex-TGL. On the other hand, Tinisuti Gaon Panchayat had represented only 39 respondents, 17 TGL, and 22 Ex-TGL, which was the lowest in numbers compared to the other Gaon Panchayats. The other Gaon Panchayat, Serelia and Bihmari,

represent equally 42, Mukhargarh, Ratowa 39, Rangagarh 46 and Monabari 41 respondents. The figures of the respondents were varied due to the size and number of people residing in the Panchayat. According to the Act of 1994, 50 per cent of the total seats of GP, AP and ZP of PRIs are reserved for women in Assam. In this connection, the researcher has surveyed the study area to understand the exact participation of TGL and Ex-TGL in PRIs in the recent election. The data in Table No. 2 is the figure of participation and representation of the TGL women in the last Panchayat Election (2025) of the study area.

Table 2: Contesting and Winning Candidates of TGL and Ex-TGL Women in Gaon Panchayat Election, 2025

Name of the Panchayat	Total candidates (male/female)	Total Women Candidates	TGL Women Candidates	Winning TGL candidates	Percentage	Ex-TGL Women Candidates	Winning Ex-TGL candidates	Percentage
Monabari	21	14	3	1	7.14%	2	0	0%
Ratwa	16	8	2	1	12.5%	4	2	25%
Tinisuti	20	8	2	0	0%	2	1	12.5%
Bihmari	14	3	1	1	33.33%	1	1	33.33%
Rangarah	10	5	1	1	20%	1	1	20%
Serelia	15	6	2	2	33.33%	3	2	33.33%
Bargang	12	5	0	0	0%	2	2	40%
Mukhargarg	14	7	7	6	85.71%	0	0	0%

Source: Survey conducted by the researcher

Table No. 2 of the above said about the figures of contesting and winning candidates of TGL and Ex-TGL women of the study area in the last Gaon Panchayat election 2025. In each Panchayat of the area, there are ten Wards from where one member is elected as a GP member. In Monabari Panchayat, there were a total of 21(both men and women) candidates contesting in the election. Out of these 21, only 14 candidates were women, including 3 TGL and 2 Ex-TGL women candidates. Notably, only one TGL women candidate was able to win in the election, with a percentage of only 7.14 and not a single candidate belonged to the Ex-TGL electorate in the election. Similarly, in Ratwa Panchayat, the total contesting candidates were 16, women candidates were 8, TGL candidates were 2, Ex-TGL were 4, winning TGL candidate was 1, and Ex-TGL were 2, the percentages were 12.5 and 25, respectively. In Tinisuti Panchayat, the total contesting candidates were 20, women candidates were 8, TGL candidates were 2, Ex-TGL candidates were 2, and the winning TGL candidate was 0, and Ex-TGL was 1. In Bihmari Panchayat, the total contesting candidates were 14, women candidates were 3, TGL and Ex-TGL candidates were 1 each, and the winning candidate was 1. In Rangarah Panchayat, the total contesting candidates were 10, women candidates were 5, TGL and Ex-TGL candidates were 1, the winners of the same were 1 each, and the percentage was 20. In the Serelia Panchayat, the total contesting candidates were 15, women candidates were 6, TGL candidates were 2, Ex-TGL candidates were 3, and the winning candidates of each were 2. In Bargang Panchayat, the total contesting candidates were 12, women candidates were 5, Ex-TGL candidates were 2. Not a single candidate from TGL was contesting and winning candidates from Ex-TGL were 2. In Mukhargarh Panchayat, the total number of contesting candidates was 14, women candidates were 7, TGL candidates were 7, and the winning candidate was 6, and the percentage was 85.71. It was noted that not a single candidate from Ex-TGL was contested in the election. It was noted that from Monabari, Mukhargarh, Serelia and Rangarah AP Member constituencies, the TGL women candidates were elected as AP members to the Anchalik Panchayat. But not a single member of the ZP constituency was elected from the TGL women's community. The above Table again stated that the TGL women elected in those wards where there was an

absolute majority of the TGL community. On the other hand, it was also noted that in many constituencies, the women candidates win in elections only because of the women's reservation policy. Only 18 candidates of the TGL women had contested in the election, of whom 12 candidates were successful. In percentage ratio, it was an outstanding performance, but in practice, these numbers increase only because of the reservation policy. For example, in Mukhargarg GP, where only 7 women candidates had filed nominations in the election, 5 candidates won without any contest. Only one contest was held in a ward between two TGL women, and finally 1 won the election.

4.2 Participation of TGL and Ex-TGL Women Voter in Panchayat Election

To understand the casting of votes in the PRIs election, a question was asked of the respondents whether they cast a vote in the Panchayat election. Responding to this question, 80 per cent of TGL respondents said that they cast their vote in the election of PRIs. But, 18 per cent of respondents said that they did not cast a vote in the election, and 2 per cent of respondents could not opine in this regard. On the other hand, 76 per cent of Ex-TGL respondents stated that they cast their vote in the last Panchayat election, but 24 per cent of respondents said that they did not cast a vote in the election due to their personal problem. In this connection, another question was put to the respondents whether they cast their vote in the election in their own choice or decision. In this regard, 12 per cent of TGL respondents stated that they cast their vote in the election according to their own choice and decision. But, 68 per cent of respondents opined that they cast their vote not according to their own decision but by the direction of others, and 20 per cent of respondents have no comment in this regard. 35 per cent Ex-TGL respondents stated that they cast a vote according to their own choices, 48 per cent respondents said that they cast their vote based on their family decision, and 17 per cent respondents had no comment in this regard.

To understand the determining factors of voting behaviour of the respondents, the researcher drew attention to the respondents by asking a question, which factors influence them to cast a vote in the PRIs election?

Table 3: Influencing Factors of Voting Behaviour

Own Decision	Family Decision	Community Decision	Local Leaders Influence	Management Order	Political Ideology	Political Mobilisation
8%	12%	22%	28%	20%	2%	8%

Source: Field study of the Researcher

As per Table No. 3 above, 8 per cent of respondents remarked that they cast their vote in the election according to their own

choice. 12 per cent of respondents stated that they cast a vote as per the decision of the family, 22 per cent cast their vote on

the basis of their local community decision. 28 per cent of respondents opined that they cast their vote as per the direction of the local influencing leaders, 20 per cent of respondents cast their vote according to the direction of the garden management authority, only 2 per cent of respondents said that they cast their vote in election based on political ideology and 8 per cent respondents cast their vote in election based on political environment and political wave. The above discussion stated that, regarding the casting of a vote in the election, both the TGL and Ex-TGL women are still not in a position to cast their vote according to their own decision. A nominal number of voters cast their vote beyond the external pressure. It was also found that women candidates get opportunities to be elected as representatives of PRIs only because of political reservation. There are various obstacles standing before the TGL and Ex-TGL women for political

participation and capacity building, which were identified during the field study.

4.3 Obstacles of Political Participations

During the investigation, it was clearly indicated that the participation of TGL and Ex-TGL women in elections, meetings of the Gram Sabha, affiliation to the Political Party, meetings and awareness programme organised by Political Party, NGOs and Interest Groups of the locality were comparatively low. On the other hand, the participation of the TGL women was lower than that of the Ex-TGL women. To understand the matter, a question was put to the elite group respondents of the study area as-What are the responsible causes behind the low participation of the TGL and Ex-TGL women in PRIs election and other awareness programmes organised by Political Party, NGOs and Interest Groups?

Table 4: Barrier of Political Participation

Illiterate	Economic Condition	Role of Local Leader	Role of Political Party	Numbers of Family Member	Paka Latrine	Garden Authority
100 %	100 %	55 %	40 %	100 %	65 %	30 %

Source: Field study of the Researcher

Responding to this question, as per Table No. 4 above, 100 per cent of respondents said that the main cause of low political participation of the TGL and Ex-TGL is illiteracy. According to them, still 70 per cent of people who belong to this community are completely illiterate or drop out of school at the primary level. As per the government rules related to the Panchayat election of Assam, the minimum educational qualification required to contest in the Ward Member election is Higher School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) passed, and candidates for Anchalik and Zilla Parishad are Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate (HSSLC) pass. The TGL and Ex-TGL women living in the garden and outside the garden areas are disqualified from contesting in the election. In a similar way, 100 per cent of respondents opined that the economic condition of the maximum number of TGL and Ex-TGL is too weak to contest in the election. 55 per cent of respondents believed that the local leaders of the area could not encourage the women's community to contest in the elections. 40 per cent of respondents stated that the political party's role in this issue is not satisfactory. They only preferred a section of the people of the area or a particular family of the locality. 100 per cent of respondents again opined that the rule of government related to the number of family members is also another hindrance. It is noted that to contest in an election, the number of children (son or daughter) of the candidate should not exceed two. In the society of the tea community, family planning is still not popular, and hence, the number of their child is more than two, and so they are disqualified to contest in elections. Another condition laid down in governmental law is that to contest in an election, the latrine of the candidates must be a pakka one. But, according to 65 per cent of respondents, the latrine of the TGL and Ex-TGL women is not in the form of Pakka. From this point of view, they are disqualified. 30 per cent of respondents stated that the instructions of the tea garden authority create a barrier to contest in the election. Because their economic life is completely dependent upon the will and wish of the garden authority. The garden management plays a crucial role in any country's election. Apart from that, the gender-based discrimination and family responsibility pose a challenge to the TGL and Ex-TGL women.

5. Findings

The study reflects some specific issues related to the political participation of TGL and Ex-TGL women of the Biswanath District. The findings of the study can be discussed as follows.

The study clearly identifies the existing difference between TGL and Ex-TGL women. The TGL women have been living within the boundary of the garden area. Hence, their social circles, community engagement, and social interactions remain confined to the tea estates. They could not get maximum opportunities to avail new ideas and social exchange. As a result, their awareness of rights, privileges and local governance is significantly low. Due to these reasons, the TGL women are still not in a position to understand the concept of gender equality, healthcare rights and political participation in PRIs properly.

But the Ex-TGL women, who are no longer confined to the insular environments of tea estates, often live in more integrated settings where they have access to maximum opportunities for interaction with diverse groups of people. In this environment, Ex-TGL women get opportunities to engage in conversations about socio-political issues, participate in community activities and obtain information about government schemes, legal rights and social benefits. These interactions help them to build capacity and enhance leadership quality, which encourages them to participate in political processes like voting and contesting in elections, and so forth actively.

Both the TGL and Ex-TGL women are economically weak, socially marginalised and politically unaware compared to the general categories of women. Hence, these women are morally too weak to contest in elections and to avail themselves of political power. It is worth mentioning that despite their big population size, they did not get the opportunity to represent their community in the PRIs. The illiteracy and the enplaned family concept also stand as a hindrance to their political representation.

The Tea community women continue to be excluded from leadership roles in local governance, even though they make up a big portion of the electorate. The number of representatives of women increases in PRIs from this community only because of the 50 per cent reservation

provision in the PRIs Act. The intention behind the reservation for women was to provide a platform for political participation and empowerment. But, the interest of this political consideration is still not fulfilled in the case of TGL and Ex-TGL women due to their unawareness of political participation.

The patriarchal mindset is a big challenge for the TGL and Ex-TGL women to entrust themselves in socio-economic and cultural events. The opposition role of husbands is a notable barrier to these TGL and Ex-TGL women from being involved in PRIs and other forms of local governance. In many cases, husbands refuse to allow their wives to attend meetings or participate in political processes, considering their household responsibilities. Lack of trust and fear of losing control over their wives often leads husbands to question their wives' character. This social stigma discourages the TGL and Ex-TGL women from taking a leadership role in society, and hence, they are compelled to limit their representation in political institutions.

The TGL and Ex-TGL women are starting their plucking work from 7 a.m. with the men. After a day-long labour in the garden, they again need to be busy with domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water, washing clothes and taking care of children and elderly family members. This double heavy burden makes them too tired to be involved in other social and political activities.

The academic environment of the tea garden and ex-tea garden areas of Assam is still not in a mature stage. In school the students have been taught in Assamese language which is not understood by the tea garden children. The students of tea garden areas generally speak the local dialect. They get a little bit of opportunity to learn other languages or engage with diverse cultural perspectives. As a result of that huge number of students dropping out of school, they are deprived of many opportunities, such as participating in politics and so forth.

The role of the Political Party and NGOs is also not satisfactory in this regard. The political parties used these people as their vote bank and made a contract with them only during election time. The political parties also do not enrol these people as members of their party, but use them as their blind supporters. The role of the NGOs is also not satisfactory. The NGOs are generally involved in the process of creating awareness among the people and help them to access various government welfare schemes, which are related to improving their living standards. But, the NGOs working in the tea garden areas or nearby areas are still not able to attract this marginalised group or create trust among them towards their welfare agenda.

6. Recommendations

The TGL and Ex-TGL women are an integral part of the Assamese society. Hence, their all-round development and active participation in politics are essential. To overcome all the barriers related to the TGL and Ex-TGL women in political participation, the government, political parties and NGOs need to initiate special programmes and create a politico-friendly environment so that they can actively participate in social and political life. Apart from that, the existing concept of Mukhiya (head of the community), Pallok (religious caretaker of the community), Garden Line and Basti are the structural barriers of the TGL and Ex-TGL women. To overcome this situation, different initiatives need to be taken urgently. These initiatives should be-

1. Popularisation of education among the tea community is urgently required so that all the women of the second

generation can participate in all social and political institutions.

2. For all-round development of the TGL and Ex-TGL community for enabling political participation, the awareness programme must be organised with the help of NGOs and Political Parties in the study area.
3. The TGL and Ex-TGL women must be free from patriarchal forms of society and other existing institutions such as Mukhiya and Pallok.
4. The economic condition of the TGL and Ex-TGL women must be developed. The concept of saving should be popularised among them. The formation of women organisations, such as Self Help Groups and Mahila Samity, is essentially required so that these women can establish economic relations with the Bank and other financial organisations.
5. It is essential to provide permanent settlement in their own land so that they can get a permanent identity with their own house. If it is in the best interest of the tea community, then they could be free from the garden authority and live without any fear factor.

Conclusion

The study on the political participation of TGL and Ex-TGL women in PRIs reflects some vital issues related to the research problem. It is worth mentioning that the tea community of Assam, though, contributes a great contribution towards the upliftment of the economy of Assam, but they could not avail the minimum standard of living amenities. In every election, these communities are regarded as the vote bank or blind supporter of a particular political party or are used by their Mukhiya or local social elite class in their personal interest. As a result, the weightage of this community before the political parties of elites is no longer based on numbers. To overcome this juncture, the tea community must be educated and politically empowered so that they can make decisions for their all-around development. In this regard, the role of NGOs, Interest Groups and Political Parties will be noticeable.

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