

Electoral Politics and the Issue of Marginalization: A Study of the Tea Garden Community of Assam

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Abstract

Tea garden workers of Assam belongs to more than two million migrant workers, who worked under the condition of indentured servitude in tea plantation in Assam, producing tea for an increasingly profitable global market. But the socio economic condition of tea garden workers hardly has improved in post colonial period. The tea garden community of Assam who has been in the state of marginalization has transformed as a cohesive political force since independence. But whether this transformation or consolidation into a political force has helped them to form a dominant social group within the society of Assam or whether they are able to uplift their socio economic and political status in the society is still questionable. Within this context, the present paper is an attempt to discuss the political participation and mobilization of the tea garden community of Assam. Paper reveals that despite their political mobilization and an important role in the electoral politics of Assam, their state of deprivation and marginalization still makes them subaltern.

Introduction

Subaltern Politics in India is manifested through the everyday form of resistance of the subaltern groups of people. The proliferation of Subaltern movements in India initiated an awareness of potential collective strength among the subaltern groups and has a significant impact on the bargaining position of the subaltern groups vis-a-vis, dominant groups. The subaltern struggle for their rights has expanded the arena of civil society and it widens the scope of democratic participation. Similarly the tea garden community of Assam is struggling for their rights and their struggle does not remain confined within the arena of political and civil rights but it has widened to include their social and economic rights. The experiences of State for the tea garden community are varied in different period of time. Tea garden workers of Assam belong to more than two million migrant labourers, who worked under the conditions of indentured

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servitude in tea-plantation industry, producing tea for an increasingly profitable global market. But the socio-economic conditions of the tea garden workers hardly have improved in the post-colonial period. Based on this inferior condition of tea plantation workers, they are referred to as the 'Subalterns'. They are put into the status of the subaltern as they are systematically deprived and exploited since the colonial days, and whose condition is still not improved. By looking into the deplorable life of the tea garden community of Assam it is clear that the postcolonial state is also somehow unable to realized the expectations and needs of the community. Nevertheless State is still seen as locus of their expectation and the institution which is responsible for their welfare. In short, tea garden community continues to repose hope in Indian State and the community views state as a mechanism to solve their issues and perceives state as the agent of bringing welfare to the community. For that purpose of articulating their different interests in front of the State, diverse socio political organizations have been formed by the educated elites of the community.

Within this context, the political condition of the community can be analysed through Partha Chatterjee's concept of 'political society'. Though they are formally 'citizens' with right to vote, they are not connected to state through any juridical and constitutional framework of rights. Rather they are connected through 'temporal, contextual and unstable arrangements arrived at via direct negotiation'. (Chatterjee,2008) Subaltern of political society manipulate the electoral democracy and governmental categories for their benefits and they use violence, the hallmark of the old subaltern to attract the attention of the state towards a particular problem and to elicit a particular response.(Nilsen and Roy,2015) Similarly the tea garden community is not merely the denizens of political society as described by Chatterjee but they are being mobilized democratically and asserts their rights and they claims over the state for their demands. Although Chatterjee does not see the formation and the politics of political society, the tea garden community explicitly involves in the politics of the state. They have formulated different socio political organization with the help and support of the elites of the community and try to mobilize their demands through these organizations. As Alam, points out that post-colonial democracy in India began as the trust between the elites and the masses where masses were promised to provide welfare measures and in return it delegated the elites the power to rule.(Javed, 2004) The emergence of the educated elites has created an illusion of consensus between the community at large and the elites.

Emergence of Political Elites of the Tea Garden Community of Assam

The composition of political elite in terms of India is related with the nexus of caste, class and power politics. Political elite in India tend to be heavily drawn from higher socio-economic groupings in society in terms of caste, occupation and education. But ever since independence with adoption of the concept of democratic decentralization, adult franchise, secularism and egalitarianism laid the foundation for reshaping the political future of India. Therefore it is not always the minority ruling groups which

come from the upper caste or class of the society. Political elite lacks the coherence and homogeneity and there is no necessary congruence between social, economic, and political power. Because it is observed that a new group of elites are emerging from the subaltern classes of the Indian society. Different cultural, ethnic, social, tribal and agrarian movements articulating the demands and aspirations of weaker sections, minorities, and women, rural and urban poor have provided up new leadership and are able to get the support of the masses. Some of these leaders' joined the political parties and contested elections which helped in reshaping the politics of the nation. The educated elites of the tea garden community of Assam emerged from the various background have begun to articulate the demands and needs of the community. The educated elites of the community comprises of different sections of the society such as politics, society, literature etc and these elites are playing a significant role in terms of formulation of different organizations which gives a new trend to the politics of the state.

Emergence of educated and the political elite among the tea garden community of Assam did not happen suddenly. It is with the gradual formation of the community among them from their shared history of exploitation, movement, migration and servitude which later on helped them to emerge as a community. It is with the wider scope of peoples participation, favorable conditions for using their democratic rights, universalisation of education etc gradually developed a realization among them to organize among themselves to assert their rights and demands. Consequently there emerged a group of enlightened leaders who started perceiving that the strong organization is necessary for the community to realize their needs and objectives. Development of such perception and realization helped to formulate different socio political organizations. Through these organizations the community is trying to present their demands and interest. It began to place a number of grievances before the concerned authorities seeking fair solution for the cause of the welfare of the community. Educated elites of the community have started joining the politics of the state with the aim of making the community's voice laudable in the house of the assembly.

Presently, the tea garden community of Assam has become one of the potential political force with a number of leaders representing the community have started joining the politics. In this case Indian National Congress (INC) was successful in articulating and mobilizing the tea garden workers with the support of Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS). INC therefore tried to politically accommodate the thriving tea garden workers and ex-tea garden labours elite by projecting the elites of the community as the candidates from the tea garden dominated constituencies of Assam. But this accommodative strategy not only remained with the INC, this has been taken up by the other political parties also. Political parties later on, national or regional, have accorded considerable weightage and due recognition to the tea garden community's leaders as an emerging potential political force whose support is highly require for them to install their government. The trajectory of the political culture of the tea garden community can be manifested by understanding their orientation towards the

political system, during pre and post independence periods of Indian history. Indian political culture in pre independence era was characterized with a national political culture without any sub-cultural forces which itself exhibits the presence of united discontent against British colonialism. Participation of Indian community in nationalist movement has gradually shaped to evolve an organized political culture during the colonial period. The provincial wide political upheaval that followed was an integral part of the national upsurge triggered by the call for national movement. In Assam also the tea garden workers fought back at their individual gardens with the objective to end up the exploitation, deprivation & serfdom condition they had under colonial regime. Though the plantation workers of Assam were weak, powerless, unorganized and ignorant compared to the powerful tea planters, the struggling spirit of the tea garden community was very strong. The tea garden community rose into protest against the colonial hegemony even before India's organized nationalist movement. The strikes and protest of tea garden labourers were latter on had shaped to develop a political culture of the community. But what is interesting here is that all these movements were not carried out in an organized way and their own interest was not articulated with a political agenda to fight against the planter's management. The famous Chergola Exodus, 1921 is a landmark in the history of the plantation workers movement in Cachar which had rocked the entire plantation world. In spite of having struggling spirit of tea garden workers, they did not get enough support from the leaders of Congress and from the mainstream Assamese society for which they remained unaware about many political issues of colonial India. However the Arunabund Labour strike of 1939 provided an opportunity not only to the political leaders of all different ideologies but also to the ordinary men of the locality to come to a common platform to augment labour movement in Cachar. Things have changed later on. It is under the leadership of political party, especially the Indian National Congress (INC) and Communist Party of India (CPI), the labourers working in various industries begun to organize. As a result, in 1920s INC and CPI jointly formed the All India Trade Union of Congress (AITUC) and since then the latter began to represent worker's interest. (Behal, 1985) The phase of labour struggles during 1937-40s can be regarded as the turning point in Assam's history in more than one respect. The formation of tea garden labour union was also a remarkable development during the period of 1939-40 which led to the initiation of political mobilization of tea garden community in the post colonial period.

A matured political culture of a community is based on the foundation of political awareness of the people of the community. Political awareness includes the participation in election, awareness about the voting rights which build not only a strong political system but also a well developed political culture. Political participation denotes activities through which citizens shared in selecting their government. In this context it is necessary to examine the role of the tea garden community in electoral politics of Assam as it reflects the political awareness of the community on the political process. Tea garden community of Assam has played an effective role in the electoral politics of Assam even before the independence. During the freedom struggle of India, a

wave of political consciousness among them was seen. The implementation of the Government of India Act, 1935 empowered the tea planters and tea workers in Assam to elect representatives to the Assam Legislative Assembly (see Table No. 1). This can be regarded as the milestone for the tea garden workers to participate in the decision making process.

Table 1: Special Constituencies of Assam Legislative Assembly Allotted by Government of India 1935 Act

Sl. No.	Special Constituencies	No. of Seats
1	a) Backward Plain Tribes	4
	b) Backward Hill Tribes	5
2	a) European Planters	7
	b) Indian planters	2
3	a) Commerce and Industries (European)	1
	b) Commerce and Industries (Indian)	1
	Tea Garden Labour	4

Source: Election Returns showing the results of elections in India in 1937, New Delhi 1937

As per the Government of India Act 1935, in 1937 tea garden labourers were allotted four seats in the legislative assembly of Assam. With this provision, a sense of awareness was generated, and they began to feel that they too have a say in the decision making process of the province.

The four labour seats and the persons elected in April, 1937 Assam legislative Assembly Election are cited in the table no. Below:

Table 2: Elected Representations of the Labour Constituencies in Assam

Constituencies	District	Representative Elected
Doomdooma	Lakhimpur	Besishi Pan Tanti
Jorhat	Sibsagar	Bhirab Chandra Das
Thakurbari	Darrang	Binod Kr. J. Sarwan
Silchar (Chatla Valley)	Cachar	Parameshwar Parida

Source: (Assam legislating Assembly, 1939, p. 949)

Role of ACMS and the Electoral Politics of Tea Garden Community

In the post independence period also the voters of tea garden community became very important for the political parties as they resided in clusters in a heavy number which made the political parties easy to address them. Voters of this community played a decisive role in the results of election in many Assembly constituencies. There are about 38 Assembly constituencies in Brahmaputra valley where tea workers played an important role in election. With the democratization of political system in the post-

colonial Assam, the role of tea trade unions played a very important role in mobilizing politically the tea garden community of Assam. In this context, the role played by the Assam Chah Mazdor Sangha is also not an exception to it. It has played an important role in supporting many of the tea garden leaders to win election. In fact the ACMS, affiliated to Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) has been organizing the tea labour of Assam since 1958. The organizational strength of INTUC in the tea belt of the Bramaputra valley had been one of the reasons for congress dominance in the Brahmaputra valley. It may be evident from the 1951 Assam Legislative Assembly election results, where elected leaders like Omeo Kumar Das, Chanu Kheria, Dalbir Singh Lohar, Jadunath Bhuyan happened to be the prominent Leaders for starting a trade union among the Tea garden workers. Since the birth of ACMS, it has been providing support to the Congress. ACMS is acting like a platform for many congress leaders of the tea garden community to join the politics. The organizational strength of ACMS is also very high. ACMS has its constitutional units in 786 tea gardens of Assam Valley and its membership is more than 4 lakhs 50 thousands. ACMS has got affiliation to various important labour organizations in the world because of its wider membership and functionaries. (Joyjatra 1962) As an affiliating trade union to the INTUC, ACMS has been working as a Congress trade union. The organizational supremacy of the ACMS and the legacy of its leadership in initial period have helped in sustaining its control over other unions in almost the Brahmaputra valley. In most tea gardens, the word trade Union is synonymous with ACMS. (Sharma 2009) Because of the wide support provided by the workers to ACMS, Congress has able to made a strong presence in the gardens of Brahmaputra Valley. The formation of ACMS has provided the TGLs a legitimate strength to ventilate their grievances before the government and the plantation authority. Most of the ACMS leaders have been elected from various constituencies to both the state legislative assembly and the Lok Sabha Constituencies of Assam. Since the winning of Chanoo Kheria in 1952 to the Assam Legislative Assembly, a good numbers of leaders have joined the state politics, and these leaders were directly associated with the ACMS. The name of these leaders are like, Malia Tanti (Doomdooma), Dipak Murmu (Lahowal), Upen Sanatan (Chabua), Gajen Tanti (Mariani), Chtra Gopal Karmakar (Sarupathar), Rameswar Dhanowar (Digboi), Dileswar Tanti (Doomdooma), Prithivi Majhi (Lahowal), Joychandra Nagbanshi (Moran), Rupam Kurmi (Mariani), Dinesh Prasad Gowala (Lakhipur), Monilal Gowala (Patharkandi), Mithius Tudu (Gossaigoan), Silvius Condpan (Mazbat), Boloram Nag (Kaliabar), Arkilius Tirkey, (Sarupathar), Narad Kumar (mahmara), Satya Tanti (Sonari) etc.(Thapa 2006)

Apart from the Assam Legislative Assembly election of 1951, in the 1st Lok Sabha election also, ACMS gave their full support to the two trade union activist namely Jogendra Nath Hazarika and Kamakhya Prasad Triparthi who won general election from Dibrugarh and Darrang district respectively. Similarly, on the eve of second Assam Legislative Assembly election in 1957, the Indian National Congress gave sixteen ACMS backed candidate and out of them fifteen candidates won the election.

Within the limited scope of the study, the list of candidates who won the Assam Legislative election in (1951, 1985, and 2011) with the support of ACMS is shown in table no.3 and 4 below:

Table 3: 1951 Election

Constituency	Candidate	Party	Result
Moran	P.Kumari Gohainadena	INC	Not Elected

Source: Statistical Report on general election, 1951 to the Legislative Assembly of Assam, E.C.I.

Table 4: Assam Legislative Assembly Election, 1985

Constituency	Candidate	Party	Result
Majbat	Silvius Condpan	INC	Elected
Kaliabar	Baloram Nag	INC	Not Elected
Sarupathar	Akilius Tirki	INC	Not Elected
Mariani	Siba Buragohain	INC	Not Elected
Lahowal	Dipak Maomoo	INC	Not Elected
Tingkhong	P.S. Ghatowar	INC	Not Elected
Chabua	Upendra Nath Lanton	INC	Not Elected
Digboi	Rameswar Dhanwar	INC	Elected
Doomdooma	Dileshwari Tanti	INC	Elected

Source: Statistical Report on general election, 1985 to the Legislative Assembly of Assam, E.C.I.

Table 5: 2011 Election

Constituency	Candidate	Party	Result
Rangapara	Bhinnananda Tanti	INC	Elected
Sarupathar	Aklius Tirky	INC	Elected
Mariani	Rupjyoti Kurmi	INC	Elected
Moran	Jiwantara Ghatowar	INC	Elected
Lahowal	Prithyivi Majhi	INC	Elected
Tingkhong	Mtuwa Munda	INC	Elected
Chabua	Raju Saha	INC	Elected
Digboi	Rameswar Dhanower	INC	Elected
Doomdooma	Rupesh Gowala	INC	Not Elected

Source: Statistical Report on general election, 2011 to the Legislative Assembly of Assam, E.C.I.

Tea garden leaders have set for winning the election and landside victory in the political history of the ACMS. Trade union politics in the tea gardens have contributed to the rise of many leaders who got elected not only in Assam Legislative election but also in the parliamentary election and thereby have created a new dimension to political culture of the tea garden community. Chatragopal Karmakar became the first minister from the tea community in Mahendra Mohan Chaudhury's Govt. in 1971. The Marioni

MLA, Gajen Tanti became the first Cabinet minister in Sarat Chandra Sinha's ministry (1972-78). Gajen Tanti had been entrusted with the portfolio of labour, Supplies and cooperatives. During the three decade long Congress regime in the states the tea community came to forefront of electoral politics. The election results that have revealed that tea garden community have been capable of enhancing their numerical strength in Assam legislative Assembly.

In fact the tea garden community has increasingly become conscious of their democratic right to vote & to be voted for their development at large. ACMS sponsored INC (I) nominee Paban Singh Ghatowar who was a leading figure of TGLs Community won the Lok Sabha seat of Dibrugarh defeating the AGP candidate named Dipen Tanti with a huge margin of votes in the year 1991. He was re-elected in 1996, 1998 and 1999. In 2009, he was elected to Parliament again from Dibrugarh. (Times of India 2016) Likewise Paban Singh Ghatowar, the ACMS backed candidate was inducted as the Member of Parliament (MP) also submitted a memorandum to the Congress High Command Sonia Gandhi at New Delhi on 20th December, 2000 for the reservation of 35 Assam Legislative Assembly seats for tea garden community of Assam. Presently voters of the tea garden community dominate at least 38 constituencies of Assam and ACMS played an important role in the political affairs of the state. The tea community has been said to be the support base of the Congress that made the party always win in the tea garden community dominated constituencies. Paban Singh Ghatowar one of the notable leaders of Congress has given his view in support of the community towards ACMS, said, that the Tea and the Ex-Tea gardens voters has been loyal to the Congress Party whereas other people left the Congress Party.'(Memorandum 2006)

Election results mentioned above reflects how the ACMS backed candidates played a decisive role in Indian contemporary politics. It is a prominent platform for the political parties to popularize, disseminate and influence their ideologies and there by mobilize public opinion. But the situation have changed radically, in fact the other parties like AGP, BJP has also realized the importance of tea garden community's votes and they have also fielded a number of candidates who belonged to the tea garden community. A change came to the political scenario of the state in 1985. AGP made a strong presence in the heavily tea workers populated constituencies in Jorhat and Lakhimpur districts. The candidates belonged to the tea community, who won on AGP ticket were Naren Tanti from Mariani constituency, Binod Goala from Sarupathar, Barki Prasad Telenga from Thowra, Dipen Tanti from Lahowal. AGP has also floated a trade union organization called the Assam Shah Sharamik Parishad, a rival trade union to counter the well entrenched ACMS. ACMS again played an important role in this regard where because of opposing anti-foreigner movement, many congress (I) candidates could not win election of 1985. Congress leaders like Hiteshwar Saikia, Keshab Gogoi could win on the votes of tea labourers. Hiteshwar Saikia even admitted that congress got intact votes of the tea garden labourers and the defeat was mainly due to the heavy polling by the Assamese voters. The Assam legislative assembly election of 1998 was important because of the election boycott called by the extremist outfit United

Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), which had a significant impact on the voting trend of the masses. This had further added uncertainty and confusion among the people. As there was only 35 percent poll done in the Jorhat Lok Sabha Constituency. But out of ten Legislative assembly constituency in the Jorhat Lok Sabha constituency, five assembly constituencies dominated by the tea garden community have done very well. In those five constituencies the INC (I) candidates gained more votes in comparison to his nearest rival candidates. As the report made by the State's leading Daily news paper, Assam Tribune, 18th October, 1999.

'Low polling in this constituency, where the tea tribe comprises about 30 percent of total votes of over 10 lacs, put Congress in an advantageous position over the rival parties. The reason is that even if the polling is low, majority of the tea workers exercise their franchise. As tea workers are the traditional support base for congress in the tea heartland of upper Assam, mass voting by them in case of low poll turnout gives Congress candidates an edge over their rivals. That is why Congress never leaves any stone unturned to ensure mass voting by tea garden workers'. (Assam Tribune ,1999)

Table 6: Parliamentary Election Assam Constituency wise Statistics of Winner Candidates of TGLs and Ex-TGLs Community

Year of Election	Name of Candidates	Party	Constituency	Vote	Margin
1977	Haren Bhumij	INC	Dibrugarh	119882	14209
1985	Bhadreswar Tanti	AGP	Kaliabar	240647	89000
	Haren Bhumij	INC	Dibrugarh	229263	42055
1991	Paban Singh Ghatowar	INC	Dibrugarh	243973	137920
1996	Paban Singh Ghatowar	INC	Dibrugarh	281253	107355
1998	Paban Singh Ghatowar	INC	Dibrugarh	234195	141122
1999	Paban Singh Ghatowar	INC	Dibrugarh	270863	67116
2009	Joseph Toppo	AGP	Tezpur	352246	30153
	Paban Singh Ghatowar	INC	Dibrugarh	359163	35143
2014	Kamakhya Prasad Tasa	BJP	Jorhat	456420	102420
	Rameswar Teli	BJP	Dibrugarh	494364	185347

Source: Elections Report, Government of Assam

This election turnout once again proved that tea garden workers have supported the Congress. However the other political parties were also equally trying to mobilised the community for their interest. Likewise the regional political party AGP, BJP has also started concentrating on developing its own pockets of influence in the tea belt. It is evident with the winning of election of Rameshwar Tally, Kamakhya Prasad Tasha (BJP) as the Member of Parliament in 2014 election from the Dibrugarh and Jorhat constituency respectively. The tea garden labourers most often are considered as vote bank for a definite political party, and thought to be devoid of ideological commitments to politics, because their voting patterns were directed by their leaders of ACMS. But

in this context the victory of Motilal Kanu from Pather Kandi constituency (1967) and Dinesh Prasad Goala from Lakhimpur constituency (1983) as independent candidates were something remarkable as the tea labourers are usually considered as the vote bank of congress. This community has in fact played a decisive role in the victories of the Congress candidates of Upper Assam. (Goswami, 2004)

Apart from playing a decisive role in the state politics of Assam, Tea garden and Ex-tea garden community of Assam has been playing a significant role in the Parliamentary Election of the nation. Here the following table shows how the political leaders from this community has been successfully elected since 1977 to 2014 and they have been elected not only from Congress but also from other political parties such as AGP and BJP, they have able to made a significant impact in the politics of the state as well as in the country as a whole.

BJP's Inroads to the Tea Garden Community of Assam

In the foregoing discussion, it is seen that contemporary trend in electoral politics in the state showed the declining influence of the Congress amidst the tea garden workers. Electoral politics of the state has shifted to a different trend in the beginning of 1985. The one party dominance system is gradually giving way to the multiparty system in which different political parties and regional party started playing a significant role. The support of the Congress Party shows a remarkable decline while a regional party like AGP and the other parties such as BJP have been able to consolidate its hold in Assam politics. The AGP in fact, has started the Assam Chah Shramik Parishad to counter the INTUC. Different student's organisations such as All Assam Students Union (AASU), All Assam Tea Tribes Students Association (AATSA), All Assam Adivasis Students Association (AAASA) etc have been trying to influence the Tea garden community of Assam. The AASU too has been trying to influence the Tea Tribal Students Organisation. (ibid 2008) Student's organisations are also playing a decisive role in politically mobilising the tea garden community of Assam. The other parties like AGP and BJP are spreading their influence among tea community of Assam.

Despite having regional political party and the presence of Congress as the dominant political party, BJP has been continuously rising and able to make its stronghold in the state politics of Assam by winning both parliamentary and state assembly election of Assam. It is in this context the rise of BJP in the politics of the state can be contextualised. Since General elections 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has successfully challenged the dominance of Congress, particularly in the state of Assam. Similarly since 2016 and subsequently followed by 2019 as well as recently conducted assembly election of 2021 in the state, has also given mandate in favor of BJP.

One of the striking feature of 2021 election was that , BJP has successfully consolidated different ethnic groups and communities including tea garden communities of Assam. These communities constitute around 17% of Assam's total population and have a

35%–40% vote share in the Brahmaputra Valley. In the 2014 Lok Sabha and the 2016 assembly elections, the BJP's performance had been extraordinary in upper Assam primarily due to the shifting of these communities towards the BJP, which used to be a solid vote bank of the Congress in the past. (Pisharoty,2019) In the past five years BJP has introduced financial, educational and health schemes for tea garden workers of Assam , including the hike of wages from Rs137 to Rs 217 are some of the important contributory factor for shifting their support to BJP. BJP's government ambitious move to ensure financial inclusion of tea garden workers of Assam under 'Cha Bagichar Dhan Purasakar Mela' (fair for gifting wealth to tea garden workers) through which Rs 2500 were credited to tea garden workers who hold bank account is can be referred as the one of the important step of BJP's inroads to tea garden workers of Assam. But despite their dominant role in state politics and the fact that a large number of legislators who themselves belong to the community, the living conditions of tea garden workers have hardly improved.

False Promises, Rhetoric and Deprivation of the Tea Garden Community of Assam

Political parties are able to corner the votes of the tea garden community, since the community also plays a decisive role in the politics of the state. However no political parties sincerely raised the crucial issues related to the basic rights of the tea garden workers as a political issue affecting citizens. But during the election time, the community becomes the subject of public focus. The plight of the tea garden workers of Assam have not changed. Illiteracy, poverty, poor standard of living condition and limited health facilities are like the part and parcel of the garden's life. Land alienation is one of the main issues for the community, although both the political party such as Congress and BJP made the poll promises of giving land to the tea garden community, the promises never become a reality for the community. Neither of the political parties has done anything specific in solving the major livelihood issues of the community. Even voters have lost the confidence in either the leadership, or in the parties they have voted for in the past, they continue to vote in large numbers. The reason is the community still trusts democracy. The community participates in a growing numbers within the electoral process and assertively reaffirms their faith in democracy. It is true that democracy has enabled the political empowerment of various disadvantaged groups, but the expansion of the political arena does not bring the political equality to the subalterns in true sense of the term. The increased representation of the tea garden community in the legislature and other policy making bodies has not translated into social and economic gains for the members of the community. It is seen that the commitment of the elite to the community has been rhetorical and the state authority to accomplish the needs of the community has also been limited. In spite of representing the community politically, the elites of the community are unable to make significant changes in the socio economic condition of the tea garden community. Almost all the political parties, such as Congress and BJP have included lucrative promises in their agendas but most of them remained unfulfilled. The major promises such as giving land pattas to the tea garden community to those who are living in government ceiling

lands are made by both the Congress and BJP.(Manifesto) But this promise has yet to be implemented and the issue of not getting land pattas makes them insecure in terms of enjoying their rights. Again not giving demanded wages of Rs 351 to the tea garden workers is the major issue which have been neglected by both the leaders and political parties. The issue of not recognising the scheduled tribe status to the tea garden community of Assam is again an unfulfilled promise made by the community leaders.

It is seen that subaltern political culture in India has been differ from the political culture of elites. But in the *Nation and its Fragments*, Partha Chatterjee had given different opinions that the politics of elite and subaltern has been shaped by the 'emergent from the other'. (Chatterjee, 1993) Elite politics has had to acknowledge the political culture of the subaltern and they are trying to negotiate with their own terms for the purpose of producing the consent. Whereas the politics of subaltern become increasingly familiar with and even trying to adapted itself to the institutional forms of characteristics of the elite' domain.(Ibid,1993) Subaltern groups have become familiar with the spread of governmental technologies which has been the result of the deepening reach of the developmental state under electoral democracy.(Chatterjee, 2008) As a result the subalterns groups have adapted themselves with the workings of the governmental agencies and skilful in manipulating their technologies of rule so as to ensure the delivery of services and entitlements.(Chatterjee, 2011) Thus the greater interaction between the political culture of the elite and subaltern not operates separately; rather their politics have been supported by each other domain. Tea garden community of Assam being one of the marginalized and subaltern sections of the society began to utilize public institutions, governmental technologies and democratic discourses of the state to challenge the adverse power structure in contemporary time. Moreover these perspectives suggest that the potential of tea garden community's participation and democratic deepening is significant in the politics of the state. Although in every class divided society there is the division between the privileged and the subaltern classes, Tea garden community as subaltern group is situated outside the mainstream society and being characterized by the absence of civic rights , liberty, security and social justice and marked by the marginalization, struggle for their existence, oppression and their attempt to resist. Thus the politics of the tea garden community exists and operates within the discourse of the elite politics. The view of Spivak is significant here, because the Spivak does not agree with the subaltern historians that the subaltern is a sovereign political subject. According to her, sovereignty of the subaltern is only an effect of the dominant discourse. The tea garden community of Assam has been emerging as the cohesive community with the potentiality to influence as a political force. Despite politically represented, they are unable to get rid of their state of marginality. It could only be possible when they become able to shed of their state of marginality with the strong attempt to represent their interest, rather than becoming an accommodative or merging their interest with that of the interest of the elites.

Concluding Observation

As it has been discussed above that in spite of the tea-community emerging as a dominant political force in the politics of the state, local leaders or the elites of the community have been negotiating and discarding the interest of their own community and have accommodated themselves with that of the politics of the elites of the mainstream society. But the remaining tea garden community is acting like the agonistic way, their political subjectivities are agonistic and they combine the efforts of contest and collaboration, resistance and negotiation, defense and offence. They are trying to make an impact in the political domain through emphasizing their differences. It is not to be wrong to say that both the state and associated elites have sought to replicate the 'rule of colonial differences', in post colonial world. Although the state and elitist have been trying to perpetuate difference even in the post colonial time, but there is no reason to believe that the subalterns are so completely hegemonies that they consent and contribute to sustaining this difference. As the tea garden community is vocal about the ideas of socio, economic and political equality rather than accepting the domination and hegemony of the mainstream classes, they have been resisting and revolting and protesting against the plantation authority, against the state since the colonial days. The community has been vocal about social equality, justice and dignity and invocation of these values does not detract them from the possibility of negotiating with the government and other political actors for accessing the targeted welfare programmes and social welfare schemes. Rather, it serves or helps them to widen their political horizons and encourage them to imagine alternatives possibilities and other way of being.

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