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GENDERING OF THE POWER RELATIONS

Social participation is a method of grouping of people for common existence by sharing common activities under the bonds of relationship. The patterns of sharing of activities vary in terms of degree and mode and, therefore, the social participation reflects various arrangements of human relationships in a group-the major ones being egalitarian and unegalitarian/hierarchical. In reality almost all the organizational arrangements are hierarchical and they reflect the dominance by powers of some individuals over the others. *Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests* (Max Weber 1947). The power is based on various sources. Gender is one of the sources of power. It is the males who are always in the forefront of social participation and achieve power over the females in most of the societies. In Dewan man is the head of family and represents it in the village or outside, despite the fact that women are also present in it.

The present chapter is aimed to analyze the patterns of socio-political participation of women through gendered distribution of positions in the institutional structures such as Gaon panchayat, caste panchayat, Baagaan panchayat/trade union, tea garden management and political party. Before discussing women's role in these power organizations, it is important to understand their role in a family's decision-making as family is a basic social unit present in all kinds of organizations the human beings have in their life.

Decision Making in Family

The extent of rights or participation of females in the major decision making in their families upon marriage of children, buying of new property, land or household items like T.V., cycle, radio, bed, etc. and visit to relatives reveals the distribution of powers between the two genders in the village. Distribution of the respondents into the types of the roles they play in the decision-making in their families is shown in the Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Distribution of the Respondents into the Roles in Decision Making in Family by Community, Religion and Caste

Family Decisions Taken by	Community, Religion and Caste															Grand Total			
	Bengali			Hindustani											Oriya				
				Bhojpuri Hindu			Bhojpuri Muslim		Hindi Speaking			Hindustani Total							
	OBCs	SCs	Total	OBCs	SCs	Total	OBCs	OBCs	SCs	Total	OBCs	SCs	Total	OBCs	STs	OBC	SC	ST	Grand Total
Husband	5	-	5 (38.46)	5	1	6 (24.0)	1 (50%)	1	-	1 (33.33)	7 (31.81)	1 (12.5)	8 (26.68)	1 (20%)	1 (50%)	13 (34.21)	1 (10%)	1 (50%)	15 (30%)
Husband & Wife	4	1	5 (38.46)	8	3	11	-	1	-	1 (33.33)	9 (40.90)	3 (37.5)	12 (40.0)	2 (40%)	1 (50%)	15 (39.47)	4 (40%)	1 (50%)	20 (40%)
Father-in-law	1	-	1 (7.69)	1	2	3 (12.0)	-	-	1 (33.33)	1 (4.54)	3 (37.5)	4 (13.33)	-	-	2 (5.26)	3 (30%)	-	5 (10%)	
Mother-in-law	-	-	-	1	-	1 (4.0)	-	-	-	1 (4.54)	-	1 (3.33)	-	-	1 (2.63)	-	-	1 (2%)	
Husband & Mother-in-law	1	1	2 (15.38)	2	1	3 (12.0)	-	-	-	2 (9.09)	1 (12.5)	3 (10.0)	1 (20%)	-	4 (10.52)	2 (20%)	-	6 (12%)	
Husband & Son	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 (50%)	-	-	-	1 (4.54)	-	1 (3.33)	-	1 (2.63)	-	-	1 (2%)	
Husband & Brother-in-law	-	-	-	1	-	1 (4.0)	-	-	-	1 (4.54)	-	1 (3.33)	1 (20%)	-	2 (5.26)	-	-	2 (4%)	
Total	11	2	13 (100)	18	7	25 (100)	2 (100)	2	1 (100)	3 (100)	22 (100)	8 (100)	30 (100)	5 (100)	2 (100)	38 (100)	10 (100)	2 (100)	50 (100)

The data show that 40% respondents decide their family matters jointly with their husbands and in the case of the remaining (60%) the matters are decided by their husbands (30%), husbands and mothers-in-law (12%), fathers-in-law (10%), husbands and brothers-in-law (4%), and husbands and sons and mothers-in-law (2% each). None of the respondents decided any family matter independently.

Community wise, 38.46% of the Bengali, 26.68% of the Hindustani (24% of the Bhojpuri, 50% of the Bhojpuri Muslims and 26.68% of the Hindi speaking), 40% of the Oriya and 50% of the

Santal respondents decide their family matters jointly with their husbands. In case of 38.46%, 7.69% and 15.38% of the Bengali, 26.68%, 13.33% and 10% of the Hindustani, 20% each of the Oriya and 50% of the Santal respondents the family decisions are taken by their husbands, fathers-in-law, husbands and mothers-in-law respectively.

Caste wise, 39.47% of the OBC, 40% of the SC and 50% of the ST respondents decide their family matters jointly with their husbands. Of the OBCs the family decisions are taken by their husbands (34.21%), fathers-in-law (5.26%), mothers-in-law (2.63%), husbands and mothers-in-law (10.52%), husbands and sons (2.63%) and husbands and brothers-in-law (5.26%); of the remaining SC respondents the decisions are taken by husbands and wives (40%), fathers-in-laws (30%) and husbands and mothers-in-law (20%) and of the remaining ST respondents the decisions are jointly taken by husbands and wives (50%).

So, on the basis of the participation in the decision making process in family, it appears that women continue to suffer from discrimination and occupy a lower position in the family.

Caste Panchayats

Caste system is the most rigid and clearly graded type of social stratification. *A caste is a social category whose members are assigned a permanent status within a given social hierarchy and whose contacts are restricted accordingly* (Lundberg 1968). The caste panchayat that is almost universally present in India affects nearly every person regardless of his religion. It plays an important role in the life of the villagers. To evaluate the status of women the participation of women in caste panchayat has been taken into account. It has been found that none of the women irrespective of caste and community are the members of any caste panchayat. Moreover, no woman can sit along men in a caste panchayat's meeting.

Bharati Bawri, 35 years, is the wife of one of the influential members of the **Bawri caste panchayat**. A number of meetings of the panchayat have been held in her house. But she never

participated in the meetings. The women cannot see the panchayat meetings openly but they can see them secretly. Only those women who have filed complaints before the panchayat or have been found guilty may be asked to remain present in the meeting as a complainant or accused.

Thirty two year old Kaushalya Kahar, educated upto middle school, said that her husband is one of the active members of the **Kahar caste panchayat**, but so far she has not seen any meeting of the caste panchayat.

Anita Bawri, 38 years, has attended a meeting of the Bawri caste panchayat along with her husband. The meeting was called to decide upon their marriage that has been the culmination of their love affair. In the meeting they were just culprits before the panchayat.

Bagan Panchayat

Bagan panchayat plays an important role to protect the rights of the labourers. Both males and females constitute the labour force in the garden. Therefore, to evaluate the status of women in the tea garden village it is important to know what active role women play in the structure and functioning of such a panchayat.

The data reveal that all the office bearers of Bagan panchayat are males. Though permanent female labourers also attend the meeting of labourers in which Bagan panchayat is constituted, the office bearers, instead of elected, are generally selected by the male trade union leaders from the permanent male labourers. The female labourers are only supporters to the decision of the leaders.

The female labourers are totally ignorant about the Bagan panchayat activities. The permanent female labourers like Taramati Kumar, 50 years, Kaya Saha, 34 years, Nomi Bhuyan, 44 years, and Bela Kalwar, 30 years, know nothing about the Bagan panchayat's activity because they feel that it is the duty of the male labourers to run the panchayat and protect their rights and privileges. But when the Bagan panchayat launches any agitation against the garden management, the women also do participate in it only as the followers of the males.

Briefly, despite their support and participation in the panchayat and its activities, the women's position in the Bagan panchayat is nowhere as they are basically thought to be secondary to the males in all matters.

Gaon Panchayat

In 1994 Assam Government introduced a three-tier system of rural local government and reserved for women one third of the seats for the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and General Caste categories at the three levels of the Panchayati Raj. In the panchayat elections of the village prior to 1994, the political parties did not show much interest in the elections of local bodies. But since 1994 the panchayat elections have turned to be different in the sense that the political parties are playing important role during the elections. In the last Gaon panchayat elections held in 2001 there took place a close contest among the four female candidates- W, X, Y and Z for two of the reserved seats. W and Y are literate; X is educated up to primary school and Z is illiterate. All of them are married. They participated in the elections because their husbands and parents-in-law desired so. None of the women had any political background. The Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) supported X and the Congress Party supported Z and W and Y. W and Y each won a seat in the elections only due to the support they got from the political parties and not due to any socio-economic and educational background of the candidates.

In Dewan's present Gaon panchayat all the members including a president in its prime office were elected under the banner of Congress Party. The elected female members admit that only the male members including the president took all decisions and carried out the official work whereas the female members just put their signature approving these.

Voting Behaviour

Irrespective of the caste and community all the respondents have cast their votes during the last elections of the panchayat/state assembly/parliament. The fact seems to be very encouraging

from the point of view of the growth of women's political consciousness in India. But the sheer fact of numbers may be only a façade of the political consciousness and the reality may be something else. Therefore, to measure true nature of the political consciousness it requires examining the extent of voluntary motivation for the vote casting. For this, one has to look into the source of motivation for the vote casting. Further, even the motivation of the women by the pure intents of others may be an indicator of diffusion and growth of the political consciousness. But if it is alloyed with the socio-economic and political controls in the families and society of the women, then it is again fake consciousness under the controlled/guided motivation as it goes against the basic principles of liberty and equality in democracy. Therefore, only voluntarily motivated vote casting is the true indicator of political consciousness.

The facts reveal that the women who were motivated by others exercised their right to vote under control/guidance of political parties, husbands and sons. The voting behaviour of the respondents influenced by others is shown in the Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Distribution of the Respondents into the Types of Motivation for Vote Casting

Motivated for Vote Casting	Community and Caste																Grand Total				
	Bengali			Hindustani										Oriya	Santal						
				Bhojpur Hindu			Bhojpur Muslim	Hind Speaking			Hindustani Total										
	OBCs	SCs	Total	OBCs	SCs	Total		OBCs	OBC	SC	Total	OBCs	SCs	Total	OBCs	STs	OBCs	SCs	STs	Grand Total	
Voluntarily	2	-	2 (15.38)	4	1	5 (20%)	-	-	-	-	4	1	5 (18.18)	1	-	1 (20%)	-	7	1	-	8 (16%)
By Husband	4	-	4 (30.77)	9	2	11 (44.0)	1 (50%)	2	-	2 (66.66)	12	2	14 (54.54)	1	2 (100)	17 (44.73)	2 (20%)	2 (100)	21 (42%)		
By Political Party	4	2	6 (46.15)	4	4	8 (32%)	1 (50%)	-	1 (33.33)	1	5	5 (62.33)	10 (33.33)	2 (40%)	-	11 (28.94)	7 (70%)	-	18 (36%)		
By Son	1	-	1 (7.70)	1	-	1 (4.0)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1 (4.54)	1 (3.33)	-	1 (20%)	-	3 (7.89)	-	-	3 (6%)
Total	11	2	13 (100)	18	7	25 (100)	2 (100)	2	1	3 (100)	22 (100)	8 (100)	30 (100)	5 (100)	2 (100)	38 (100)	10 (100)	2 (100)	50 (100)		

The table indicates that 84% respondents were motivated for vote casting by the others like political parties, husbands and sons whereas only 16% of these have decided for vote casting by their own will. Of the respondents 36% are motivated by the political parties; 42% by their husbands and 6% by their sons.

Therefore, about a half of them are motivated and guided by the males in their families for vote casting in the elections. The role of the political parties for motivating the people for vote casting also seems to be significant among the women. But, actually, their role is far more significant than seemingly apparent as the political parties play this role indirectly through the women's families. In their families the males like husbands and sons are motivated and guided for the vote casting by the political parties. The males further guide the womenfolk in their families. Thus, 84% women are directly and indirectly (through their families) motivated and guided by the political parties. This multi-layered motivation and controls for the vote casting questions the very presence of political consciousness among the women. It means that only a small fraction of the women decide on their own to cast their votes in the elections and their majority is neither aware of the political right nor do they decide even their own vote casting. It is the family, or the political parties through the family, which determine their vote casting. In the family the decisions whether independently or under the guidance of the political parties are taken by the males. Thus, the patriarchy (male dominance) has a greater control in the political life of the women. Almost the same picture emerges from the analysis of the data on the community/caste of the women.

Community wise, 15.38% of the Bengali, 16.66% of the Hindustani (20% of the Bhojpuri Hindu), 20% of the Oriya respondents cast their vote voluntarily; 30.77% of the Bengali, 46.66% of the Hindustani (44% of the Bhojpuri Hindu, 50% of the Bhojpuri Muslim and 66.66% of the Hindi speaking), 20% of the Oriya and 100% of the Santal respondents were motivated by their husbands; 46.15% of the Bengali, 33.33% of the Hindustani (32% of the Bhojpuri Hindu, 50% of the Bhojpuri Muslim, 33.33% of the Hindi Speaking) and 40% of the Oriya were motivated by the political

parties and 7.70% of the Bengali, 3.33% of the Hindustani (4% of the Bhojpuri Hindu) and 20% of the Oriya respondents were motivated by their sons.

Briefly, the data point out the dominating role of family for vote casting in the Hindustani (Hindi speaking) and Santal women whose forefathers belonged to Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh. This, therefore, indicates that the cultural hangover of the people is still in tact, though a significant accretion of culture, language and festivals is seen in their life.

Caste wise, 81.57% of the OBC, 90% of the SC and 100% of the ST respondents were motivated for casting their vote by the others and only 8.42% of the OBC and 10% of the SC respondents decided by their own will. Here, again, the family's/political party's dominance is reflected in the vote casting among the OBC, SC and ST women.

In sum, the women continue to suffer discrimination in the matter of political decision making in all the traditional (caste/community panchayats) and modern political institutions (Gaon panchayat, Bagan panchayat and elections) across the community and caste. However, it is seen that bigger is the caste/community, greater is the share of voluntary motivation for vote casting among the women and, therefore, greater is the level of upcoming political consciousness. Traditional cultural hangover and family, both, sustain the male dominance and patriarchy that subordinate the women. Even the modern political institutions like political parties largely use these traditional structures and institutions to serve their political interests among the women. Therefore, in Dewan the women, compared to men, occupy a lower position in political (both traditional and modern) institutions and decision-making and the position is more or less perpetuated even today by the modern institutions through family, society and culture.