

ACCULTURATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF MIGRANTS IN ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

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Abstract

The study is to explore the impact of acculturation on the political participation of migrants in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. People from different parts of mainland (India) migrated towards these Islands and gradually settled at the Islands. Colonial and post colonial migrations happened at the Islands and as a result of such migratory settlement a unique culture is formed among the migrants. Andaman Indian comprises people from almost every Indian state from different regions, ethnic groups, castes and creeds. The paper focused on how the process of acculturation followed by assimilation and integration which has an impact on the political participation of migrants in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Since a person acquires political values, beliefs and preferences through interaction with primary groups say family and secondary groups like friends, social circle etc and as such the acculturation which happened in the Islands has an impact on the political participation of the migrants. Every political system is embedded in a Sociological and Psychological environment giving birth to a political culture. The paper will also focus on the relationship between acculturation and political participation of the migrants. Andaman and Nicobar Islands also gave birth to a political culture based on the perception of the early migrants with the belief that their expectations will be fulfilled through this system. The electoral political base in these Islands is closely intertwined with the categories of settlement, migration policies and area of settlement. Some of the communities having dominance over the electoral political base are Local born, Bengalis, Moplahs, Malayalis, Tamilians, Bhantu, Karen, Ranchis, Punjabis etc. The linguistic dominance of the Islands has also played a vital role in the formation of an electoral political base and this aspect will also be focussed in the paper. This study followed the methodology based on grounded theory. Theoretical sampling method was used for data collection for generating theory. The study engaged the participants in an open-ended exploratory discussion using the tool In-depth interview. The population for this study comprised of migrants living in the Islands for the past forty yeras.

Keywords: *Islands, Acculturation, Migrants, Islands, Politics*



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Introduction

Andaman and Nicobar Islands is referred to the outside world as Mini India or Xerox copy of India. People living in the Islands are from different regions, ethnic groups, castes and creed of the Mainland India. Colonisation in the Islands started in 1755 but the British penal settlement which started in 1859 proved to be more permanent. Britishers started deporting

common criminals and political prisoners to the jails in the Andaman's under the penal settlement scheme. The migration of people to the Islands increased after Independence. People migrated to the Islands under various rehabilitation schemes of the Government of India. Many more people from different states of India migrated to the Islands in search of job and other business purposes and later on settled down in the Islands. Keeping in view of the population of Islands, only one Lok Sabha constituency is being allocated for representing the people of the Islands. Until 1967 general elections, the Member of Parliament representing these Islands were unelected, but directly appointed by the President of India. The first nominated Member of Parliament Bishop John Richardson does not belong to any party followed by Lachman Singh in 1957 and I. L. Niranjan in 1962 belonging to the Indian National Congress (INC). Andaman and Nicobar Islands first elected Member of Parliament was Mr K.R. Ganesh of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1967. During the British regime, under the rehabilitation scheme which allowed convicts to settle down at the Islands with their mainland families at the end of their term. Britishers even encouraged self supporters to marry convict women who were often inter-caste, inter-religion marriages. The offsprings from the union of these marriages were classified as "local born" community by the administration. Since people who settled in the Islands considered the Islands as their own home land and started developing a feeling of dominance for the land. The dominance of the locals leads to prejudice among them that they are the owners of the Islands and to strengthen their belief electoral politics started. From 1949 to 1979, under so called rehabilitation and colonization scheme, all together 4531 families were settled on clear plot of jungle (Dhingra, 2005). Many incentives were given by the Government which include food items, timber and construction materials, hilly and paddy land, food items, cattle's and some cash incentive. More than 85% of the rehabilitation families were Bengali refugees (Biswas, 2010) and this was strongly protested by the local born community. The old inhabitants who were in control of political powers, had fears that a Bengali majority might overpower them. This fear turned into reality and from 1977 to till date the Islands Member of Parliament is from Bengali community. Even during the recent years the migrant workers coming to the Islands are mostly from the Bengali community (Joy, 2017). This trend is not seen in the local elections for different posts in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. People focus on local problems and the candidate who fulfil the local demands are often elected by the people.

Acculturation theory according to Berry

Berry's acculturation theory contains four different acculturation strategies. Berry claims that every Individual needs to adopt one of the four acculturative strategies. The adoption

becomes more important when an Individual move to another country for a longer period (Berry, 2003). He further advocated the two dimension of acculturation i.e. maintenance of original cultural identity and maintenance of relations with other groups which further extends to the four acculturation strategies (Berry, 1994).

Assimilation: It refers to a rejection of cultural Identity and the adoption of the host culture (Berry, 1994).

Separation: When an individual advocates cultural maintenance but do not value intergroup relations (Berry, 1994).

Marginalization: When an Individual is neither interested in maintaining his original culture nor in learning something about the host culture(s).They neither value cultural maintenance nor intergroup relations (Berry, 1994).

Integration: When an Individual wants to maintain his original culture and on the other hand shows an interest in learning the host culture(s) also. They value both cultural maintenance and intergroup relations (Berry, 1994).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of acculturation on the political participation of migrants in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The study also sought explanation as to why linguistic dominance is seen in the electoral politics of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Theoretical Perspective

Theories of Political behaviour, which is an important component of political science describe the factors influencing the political views, political ideology and level of involvement in political activities. There are long term influences and short term influences on political orientation. The three main sources of long term influences on political orientation are family, teachers and other educational authority figures and peers. Similarly short term influences include the effect of media. Mass media have a crucial impact on voting behaviour. Other short term influences can be campaigns, debates and commercials and these are effective during the election period. The influence of social groups on political outcomes is a highly researched topic. There is a strong relationship between social groups and political efficacy. In our country (India) some of the biggest determinants of the voting behaviour are race, religion, caste, regionalism, language, ideology etc

Research Method

The study proposes to follow the methodology based on grounded theory. Grounded theory is a research method that involves forming a theory based on the gathered data as opposed to

gathering data after forming a theory. It is the systematic generation of theory from systematic research. It is a set of rigorous research procedures leading to the emergence of conceptual categories. These concepts/ categories are related to each other as a theoretical explanation of the action(s) that continually resolves the main concern of the participants in a substantive area. This study was conducted among the migrants of Andaman and Nicobar islands who were staying the Islands for the past forty years. Active migration in the Islands started right from 1857 i.e during British rule. Since the Islands are referred as the land of migrants, most of them either assimilated or integrated which became the base of a unique culture which was formed in the Islands. This unique culture influenced the voting behaviour and electoral politics of the Islands.

Participants

Participants in the study were migrants of Andaman and Nicobar Islands who are either born and brought up in the Islands itself or staying in the Islands for more than forty years.

Instrument

The research engaged the participants in an open- ended exploratory discussion using the tool in-depth interview. Small Individual interview sessions, lasting approximately 45 to 90 minutes were conducted with the participants to know how acculturation has impacted the electoral politics of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Procedure

Participants view on how acculturation has impacted the electoral politics of Andaman and Nicobar Islands were collected through open- ended exploratory discussion using the tool in-depth interview. The interview sessions were conducted in Hindi and the whole interview sessions were recorded. The recordings were converted into Hindi transcripts and the Hindi transcripts were further translated in English for its coding and analysis. The transcripts were converted into codes, coding of the data were further refined by the formation of concepts and categories.

Review of Literature

In this era of multidisciplinary, Political psychology is a blend of both Political science and Psychology. This applied branch is dedicated in understanding politics, persons involved in politics ie politicians and the behaviour of Individuals in political setup from a psychological perspective. The aim of Political Psychology is to understand relationship between Individuals and the political context which are influenced by beliefs, perception, cognition, information processing, attitude formation, learning strategies and socialization.

Politics in India take place within the frame work of the constitution, as India is a federal parliamentary democratic republic in which the President of India is the Head of the state and the Prime Minister of India is the Head of the Government.

India being a democratic country is totally different from other democratically set up countries. The formation of having more than 200 parties happened after 1947 which is unique in itself. One of the unique characteristics of political parties in India is that, a political party is often knitted in and around a single leader who exerts a dominant role and can be referred to as a Xerox copy of dynastic rule. Here political parties are formed on the basis of race, religion, language, caste etc. The personalization of politics encompasses two presumed processes. First, the personalities of candidates capture centre stage and become the focus of voters' attention. Second, the individual personalities of voters, rather than their social locations in various interest groups, become decisive for political choice (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004).

Andaman and Nicobar Islands hails people from different regions, ethnic groups, castes and creeds of Indian Sub continent and very few from Myanmar (Burma), Sri Lanka etc. Since people from different background settled at a common place and they want a platform to raise their voice for different issues. Human beings are cooperative, but not altruistic; competitive, but not exclusively so. Human beings have an innate inclination to cooperate, particularly within defined group boundaries, but are also highly sensitive to selfish actions on the part of other group members (Alford & Hibbing, 2004). Our preferences and behaviours are at least partially shaped by evolutionary forces and therefore by genetic heritage. Just as evolutionary pressures shaped genes governing the physical traits of humans, they also shaped genes governing behavioural traits. Evolution is a slow process, and much of the environmental pressure favouring human cooperation has existed for a long time. Our genetic composition is to some extent the product of conditions faced by our hunter-gatherer predecessors of perhaps a million years ago. One of the keys to an individual's survival was being a respected part of a viable group. The central insight of a behavioural theory built on evolutionary biology is that the desire for group life is a fundamental human preference (Alford & Hibbing, 2004).

The history of the colonial rule in Andaman Islands began in 1789, when British colonisers from the Indian mainland led by Lord Cornwallis, the then Governor General of India, started a settlement Portman, 1899). On the basis of the survey reports of Lieutenants Archibald Blair and Colebrook, the first settlement was started at Chatham Island. However, this settlement was abandoned in 1796 because of the unhealthy conditions of the island

(Krishnakumar, 2009). During colonisation, identity is transferred from one place to another and the act of colonisation affects the identity of the people. It depends on whether colonisation takes place in an empty space or in an inhabited space (Dawson, 2010). In the Andaman Islands colonisation takes place in an empty space and the main challenge for the people were is to learn about the new environment. Journeying to penal settlements, convicts also faced the prospect of compromising caste, most essentially because they were locked to a common chain (Anderson, 2009).The geographical distance of the Mainland from the Islands being more than 1000 KM and the means of communication were limited and scary, forced the people to stay back in the Islands. The British Government also started a rehabilitation scheme which has the provision for the loyal convicts to settle down with their mainland families as free, self-supporting colonists at the end of their term (Zehmisch, 2012). To create families for the permanent settlement of the colony in Andaman Islands, the British Government under their rehabilitation scheme encouraged self-supporters to marry convict women, too (Sen, 2004).

In these weddings, less emphasis was laid on the observance of rigid rules of engagement from the mainland. Spouse and groom just had to be from the same denomination (Temple, 1909). There was an attempt to reconstruct caste amongst 'Hindus' after 1884 (Sen, 2004), however, as suitable matches in the same caste and region were regularly lacking, inter-caste marriages became common. Facing less social control through extended family networks, sometimes even inter-religious marriages were arranged. The offspring of these often caste and language barriers transcending unions was classified as 'local-born' community by the Andaman administration (Zehmisch, 2012)

The electoral politics of the islands is closely intertwined with categories of settlement that took place in the Islands pre and post Independence. The convicts had starting experience of politics with the Jail authorities as they involve themselves in strikes against the officials and often some of their demands were also fulfilled unofficially. Even though government claims that all hunger strikes were abandoned unconditionally, in fact the colonial government had to amend the existing rules and redress the grievances of political prisoners. The hunger strike which started in 1933 was the last milestone in the history of militant resistance to colonial rule which forced a stubborn colonial bureaucracy to yield and destroyed the dread image of “black waters” – the penal settlement at the Andaman Islands (Srivastava, 2003). Political acculturation spins in and around four major political attitude ie psychological involvement in politics, Community Political awareness and knowledge, sense of political efficacy and political cynicism. The cluster of attitude cannot ascertain political acculturation,

but are indicators of how successful the political acculturation has been (Nelson, 1982). The result of migration has given birth to many communities in the Islands. Some of the prominent communities are the Local-born, Bhandus, Moplahs, Karen, Bengalis, Malayalis, Tamils, Telugus, Ranchis, Punjabis, Marathis, etc. There are, of course, internal divisions within the communities. The colonial officials believed that the journey across the oceans which transportation entailed threatened migrants with loss of caste and hence social exclusion (Anderson, 2003). The migration from a locality in the Indian mainland, from a particular village, district or state, functions here as a political identification, a creation of selves versus others (Zehmisch, 2012). For Andaman people, the community form has become the primary mode to raise their voice and to communicate with the administration. For raising voice and to mediate with the Government, some representatives were needed and for this purpose educated and well-connected leaders, who know how to speak the language of power were chosen. The prominent actors in this field were people like Ex-government servants, religious leaders, businessmen, media persons, NGO employees, politicians, and the so called 'social workers'. Higher educational achievement leads to greater political acculturation which in turn, leads to greater political participation (Nelson, 1982). Their claim to directly represent a strategically unified and decisive subaltern voice serves to underline their political efficacy as 'voice-givers'. This particular way of voicing demands through community leaders can be regarded as functional element of a welfare regime that is based on ethnically framed participation (Zehmisch, 2012).

Since people from different states of mainland India settled in the Islands, the nick name of “Mini-India” became a synonym for the Islands. Local welfare policies have become entangled with the local discourse of multi Culturalism. Political leaders have tried to include new migrants from their respective states, who often came through networks of chain migration, in their 'vote bank'. This emphasis on commonalities, like a vernacular, or the sharing of an imagined 'culture' and history, contributed to the forging of diasporic communities. As a result, in the contemporary island society, collective self-representations vis-a-vis others who do not belong to one's own vernacular group are predominantly framed in such broadly defined cultural identifications. Since people settled here is of from different ethnic background, yet they acculturate in the Andaman background. Both positive and negative qualities were blended in the new environment. The Malayalis, for example, who are often employed as clerks, are said to be educated, but also deceitful. Tamils, who dominate business and trade, are stereotyped to be arduous, but also scrupulous. The local-born are depicted as 'criminals' because of their convict ancestors. Bengalis are said to have an affinity

for politics, and a love for arts, but are assumed to be lazy. On the contrary, Ranchi's, who are mostly landless labourers living on encroachments, are seen as hard-working, docile, and submissive. Due to their indignity, they are continuously represented as backward, primitive and dumb (Zehmisch, 2012).

Andaman society largely witnesses the phenomenon of Acculturation. Acculturation is defined as "the process of cultural change that occurs when individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into prolonged, continuous first hand contact with each other"(Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936). Greater social contact with individuals outside one's own ethnic group leads to new value cues and social pressure to conform to an alternate behaviour pattern (Nelson, 1982).The Bengalis as biggest community in the Andaman's are said to heavily influence local politics. In the last three decades, every elected MP was a Bengali. That's why people from other communities often blame the former Bengali MP, who was in power for several decades, to have facilitated the migration and settlement of Bengalis in the Andaman's in order to increase his vote bank. The electoral dominance of Bengalis also had crucial influence on the introduction of Other Backward Classes (OBC) quotas in the Andaman's. This example demonstrates the inextricable entanglement of communities' articulation of political voice and their access to sinecures.

Result

The transcripts of the interviews collected were coded into Emergence of Politics, Community dominance, community characteristics, Central Governments dominance in Island politics, Acculturative feelings, Party Promises. The results clearly reveal that acculturation happened and people accepted the Islands as their own land.

"People started settling in the Islands and they started to believe that now everything for them is this land only" (Participant SKB)

"We live in a mixed culture society" (Participant KKU)

They were in the grip of an unique Andaman culture and is clearly evident as the dialect "Hindustani" became the link language of the Islands.

"All the people living in the Islands use Hindi as their communicating language" (Participant APM)

Since Government has provided many facilities and subsidies to the Islanders, the fear of losing the privileges and the desire to get more, people selected their representatives to talk with the Government and later on it took the shape of Electoral politics.

“Migrants were not required to toil much as they get their needed agricultural products from the Government with little efforts and spend their leisure time in discussing political affairs.”

(Participant SKB)

“..habit of living their livelihood through subsidies provided by the Government for which regular interference in the political system was required.” (Participant SB)

Pre Independence and post Independence migrants acculturated in different ways. Pre 1947 migrants assimilated while post 1947 migrants integrated during the acculturation process.

“..started to believe that they are part of a new and unique culture.” (Participant GR)

“Acculturation in the Islands gave birth to “Andaman Culture”.” (Participant RR)

Community dominance has also played a vital role in the Electoral Politics of the islands.

“Bengali settlers are responsible for introducing the electoral politics in the Islands.”(Participant AK)

As the settled communities were kept in groups, during acculturation the process of Integration happened and in order to maintain their culture of origin, cultural dominance dominated the electoral politics of the Islands.

“Bengali leader always wins the Parliamentary election since 1977 irrespective of any party dominance.” (Participant SKB)

“...as the Bengali migrants are refugees of the Bengal Partition, they feel more insecure about their existence and started involving in the Electoral politics of the Islands with leaders from their own cultural origin..” (Participant RR)

The difference in the acculturation pattern of pre and post independent migrants made a big shift in the electoral politics of the Islands as from 1977 general election, community dominance, dominated the electoral politics of the Islands.

“Bengali migrants were more in numbers compared to migrants from other parts and they showed dominance in the political participation.” (Participant SB)

Moreover Government use to nominate advisors for a particular area, who can be consulted from time to time for knowing the pending development issues of the area. These nominated advisors later acted as leaders of the area and gradually converted themselves into local political leaders with the support from any political party.

“...in due course time the advisors convert themselves into political leaders.” (Participant SKB)

Discussion

Andaman and Nicobar Islands popularly known as “Mini India” got the name as a result of giving shelter to people from different regions, religion, language, castes and cultures that migrated to Islands during colonial and post colonial periods. Post colonial migration can be further divided into two types of migration, the first type being state-directed policies of planned population movement and the other being Independent migration occurred without administrative planning. All the migrants have undergone the process of acculturation and they all settle down themselves in communities.

People who migrated and settled down in the Islands during colonial period can be categorised into different communities. The first and the most dominant category is of the “Local Born”. A rehabilitation scheme of the British Government allowed loyal convicts to settle down with their mainland families in the Islands itself as self supporting colonist after the end of their term. To strengthen this set up, the British encouraged self supporters to marry convict women also, after their punishment term such that a family can reside in the Islands itself (Sen, 2004). These marriages were often intercaste, inter religion and inter region due to the very limited options available and the offspring’s of such marriages were classified as “Local Born” (Zehmisch, 2011) .They believed themselves as the true son of the soil and for fulfilling their demands and expectations, politics emerged out from this community. Moreover to show and maintain their Identity and dominance a strong political base was developed and during the early years the “LOCALS” were like the real rulers of the Islands. The parents of the so called “LOCALS” also had a good experience of participating in strikes and other rebellious activities during their Jail term (Srivastava, 2003) which gave them a strong political background.

During 1920’s many homogeneous communities like moplaha, Bhatu, Karen, Burmese and Ranchis were brought to Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Kailash,2000). Of these communities the moplaha were good in number and they too get actively involved in politics for the sake of their community and also to establish a stand in front of the “LOCALS”. Other communities too established their presence in the political arena of the Islands but their presence was considered negligible.

The main focus of these communities was towards the facilities extended by the Government. The migrants very well knew that if their voices are properly communicated then they can avail better facilities and subsidies from the Government. Since acculturation happened with the people staying in the Islands, the thinking pattern of most of the members all the communities were more or less the same. Every community accepted a new dialect

“Hindusthani”, blossomed from the association and convergence of many languages and this dialect is still the common medium of communication.

The impact of Acculturation was as such that the people who migrated to the Islands especially during colonial period started thinking that the Islands are their own soil and they all are son of this soil. The assimilation and Integration process during acculturation made the migrants to believe that they need some representative who can act like moderator between them and the Government. This practise gradually took the shape of a political base for the Islanders and with time it matured a lot.

The political pattern of the Islands changed after the arrival of post colonial migrants in the Islands. Some communities were settled by the government under colonization and rehabilitation schemes: refugees from East Bengal, Burmese and Sri Lankan repatriates and landless people from Kerala and the Chota-Nagpur region (Zehmisch, 2011). Independent migration also started and these all led to the emergence of Bengali community as the strongest contender in the political field of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Since Bengali community had a natural affinity towards politics and the influence of acculturation made the political efficacy of the community very strong. The lone parliamentary seat of the Islands in 1957 and 1962 was leaded by nominated leaders from the “LOCAL” community. The dominance of leaders from the non Bengali background can be seen in the 1967 and 1971 general elections with affination towards the party ruling in the centre. From 1977 general election onwards a Bengali dominance was observed in the lone parliamentary seat and is still seen today irrespective of any political party. Despite of all these difference the peace and harmony of Islands is still far more peaceful compared to any other part of our country or world. The feeling of “Mini India “ still echoes in the minds of the Islanders.

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