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Exploring Non-Political Perspectives: The Influence on Santal Women as a Minority Perspective

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Abstract

The objective of the study is to identify the factors contributing to the apolitical views of Santal women as an ethnic minority perspective. The study focuses on discrimination, different cultural and physical traits, conservative mentality, financial insolvency, lack of time and patriarchal society that make Santal women apolitical. Although traditional society has transformed into modern society due to consciousness, the universal right to education, and the empowerment of women, Santal women are still apolitical. It is examined in the study that their participation in voting is high and they also participate in election campaign although 95 percent of women are apolitical while they all go to vote uninfluenced by the citizen rights and awareness. Rather, they go to vote influenced by the festive atmosphere. The analysis also reveals that political participation of Santal women is not effective but rather symbolic. The findings of the study show that as a minority ethnic group Santal women feel insecurity and inequality about participating in politics and women were discriminated against compared to mainstream Bengalis.

Key words: Santal, Apolitical Stratum, Political Participation, Political Unawareness.

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Introduction

Santals are one of the oldest ethnic groups in South Asia (Akman, 2021). In Bangladesh, a number of ethnic groups belong, such as Chakma, Marma, Rakhain, Murang, Khasi, Garo, Oraon, Munda etc. (Hossain, 2008). Santals live in different districts of Bangladesh, such as Naogaon, Bogra, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Panchagarh. The Santals of Bangladesh have very little education or public resources (Cavallono & Rahman, 2009). Santals are minority in society and thus are not represented in national politics (Shamsuddoha & Jahan, 2016). Ethnic perspectives on minority understanding voting and political engagement require specific racial, religious or cultural traits. Minorities have a unique way of political participation in politics that emerges from socialization within the group as well as from interactions with other groups and discrimination (Bird et al. 2011). The political dimensions of ethnic minorities' actions are further complicated by the fact that they lack sufficient access to suitable political channels, either de jure or de facto (Rath, 1983). Santal women are unaware of various political activities and citizen responsibilities and duties. Even though they have full participation in the elections, they are ignorant about the zeal issue of the election is the selection of a competent and qualified government. They are only aware of their fundamental rights and can assess the role of the state and government in fulfilling all these rights. Santals people of Amarpur village located in Noagaon district lead a very ordinary life. They are to face many challenges. In fact, Santals are indifferent to socio-economic and political life. They are always unaware of politics, even they do not participate any political party. The level of participation in their election campaigns in local and general elections is also low. But they all go to vote. The head of the family has an effect on the other members of the family when it comes to voting. Because the Santals believe in the patriarchal family system. Like other minority groups, Santals have their own identity such as history, language, religion, culture and

customs. United Nations (UN) statement of the mid-1990s that women comprising 50 percent of the world's population own just 1 percent of its property generated considerable research and policy interest in property and land rights, particularly in rural, agrarian societies (Rao, 2005). Several scholars have attempted to understand households and intra-household relations, the differential access to and control over resources and the causes and processes of women's subordination (Dwyer & Bruce, 1988). The apolitical background of Santal women is due to male dominance and political unconsciousness as they are known as a patrilineal ethnic group. The status of Santal women is economically and politically vulnerable as they are apolitical because of time and financial constraints. Also, Santal women have low self-reliance and internal strength.

Conceptual Framework

Apolitical Stratum

In all polyarchies, it seems, a sizable number of citizens are apathetic about politics and relatively inactive; in short, apolitical people are less likely to get involved in politics if they place a low value on the benefits to be gained from political involvement relative to the rewards expected from other kinds of human activity (Dahl, 1970). If a person thinks that his political knowledge is low and he does not understand politics well, he stays away from politics. An individual is less likely to become involved in politics if he thinks that what he does won't matter because he can't significantly change the outcome anyway. Besides, thinking about financial loss and insecurity makes people apolitical.

Political Socialization

Political socialization describes the process by which citizens crystallize political identities, values, and behavior that remain relatively persistent throughout their lives (Neundorf and Smets 2017). The process by which people acquire their specific political orientations as well as their

perceptions, feelings, and assessments of their political environment is known as political socialization (Wong & Tseng, 2008). The process of political socialization is essentially the installation of a society's political culture in its members and their generational transference. Therefore, agents of socialization are persons, organizations, or groups that have an impact on people's attitudes, behaviors, or other orientations as well as their self-concepts. Political socialization uses institutions like the family, the educational system, peer groups, the media, political institutions, community organizations, and religious organizations to spread predetermined thought and behavior patterns, laws, and norms as well as customs and folkways (Adekanmbi et al. 2020). Nonetheless, certain institutional settings and individual experiences may also contribute to the political indoctrination of adults. Some people may acquire a specific incentive to engage in politics as a result of receiving diverse political socialization. Political socialization happens at every stage of life and is not a one-way process (from parents to children). This perspective holds that experiences of political socialization can happen to individuals at various stages of life and in various settings, especially in representative institutions (Jaime-Castillo et al. 2021). Glasberg & Shannon (2011) defined political socialization as the general process by which members of society learn what is expected of them and what they can expect from the world around them: they realize their rights, privileges, responsibilities, and obligations. With the disclaimer that there is dispute in this field of study over what constitutes "political," I will define political socialization as the social process during the whole life-cycle of a subject's subjective internalization of an objective political reality. According to this concept, the study of political socialization is especially pertinent given the profound social and political transformations that modern nations are experiencing. Growing social and geographic mobility affects political socialization processes directly since it changes

both the transmission mechanisms and the objective truth being conveyed (Haegel, 2020).

Political Participation

Three categories of political participation are civic engagement, online political participation, and offline political participation. Citizens' actions intended to influence political outcomes and government action have historically been characterized as offline political engagement. Offline political involvement has been defined by most research as voting, working for a political campaign, giving money to candidates, contacting elected officials, signing petitions and participating in demonstrations (Chae et al. 2018). Political participation was assessed using an eight-item scale. The eight items were: “I call in to express my political opinion on radio or TV programs”, “I write and express my political opinion to newspapers and magazines,” “I write and express my political opinion to politicians,” “I participate in opinion votes on TV programmes,” “I attend campaign rallies,” “I write and express my political opinion to friends,” and “I vote in every election” (Song-In Wang, 2007). Political participation has been defined as those voluntary activities in which members of a society directly or indirectly participate in the formation of public policy. These activities include voting, seeking information, discussion and proselytizing, attending meetings, contributing financially, and communicating with representatives (Chowdhury, 2012). A change in the strategies employed by individuals who attempt to sway political decisions has frequently had an impact on the study of political participation. People today may be more aware of the most significant political pressure mechanisms and more capable of participating in the political process as a result of the general increase in both the population's educational attainment and political awareness. People with higher levels of life satisfaction have higher voter turnout and other forms of political participation and the strength of this association is comparable to that of education. Furthermore, we discover that the correlation between political

participation and life happiness is limited to "non-conflictual" kinds of engagement and does not hold true for the choice to participate in political protest. That is to say, a higher level of life contentment may encourage people to get involved in politics, but it is also possible that a higher level of life satisfaction may encourage people to get involved in politics. In their investigation on whether voting increases participants' pleasure and "procedural utility" (Flavin & Keane, 2012).

Research Methodology

Case Selection

The purpose of the study was to investigate why Santal women as a minority group are apolitical. The study investigated the targets, forms and repertoires of political activity used by ethnic minority groups especially Santal women in order to answer this question. The study worked with a variety of groups, selected based on a broad definition of political participation that encompassed varying degrees of involvement in campaign, community, informal and formal politics. According to last census of Bangladesh in 2011, the number of ethnic minority people in Noagaon district is 116736 out of 1586141 (BBS, 2015). Ethnic community like Santal, Oraon and Munda belong to this district. A number of Santals live in Noagaon District. So, the Amarapur Village under Dhamuirhat upazila of Noagaon district has been selected for research area. 100 Santal women voters were selected as respondents in order to rationalize the research.

Data collection and Data Analysis

Data have been collected from Santal people of Amarapur Village under Dhamuirhat upazila of Noagaon district. In the study, quantitative research method have been followed. Probability sampling method is used for this research. It is not possible to study all members of the population due to involving tremendous amounts of time and resources. Also, Information has been collected

through interview method by asking direct questions, Structural, open-ended and close-ended questions to evaluate the apolitical situation of Santal women. As a result, the respondents have certain answer. Similarly, they have answered as their own choice which make the research successful. On the other hand, the secondary data have been gathered from books, journals, newspaper reports. Arranging the random information from the research area, the data have been analyzed through various program of computer. In this article, I investigate the gap of political apathy of minority people like Santal and argue that the various factors that are affecting the apolitical behavior such as discrimination, subordinate mentality, difference between cultural and physical traits, socialization process etc. I draw examining through one hundred interviews with women of similar socio-economic and political backgrounds, I demonstrate factors of being apolitical strongly shape minority citizens' perceptions of politics.

Literature Review

There are some previous research papers related to the topic that provide a theoretical explanation for the study. The research has been given a new form by analyzing the data obtained through the earlier research and field survey. Karen et al. (2011) focuses on ethnic diversity, politicization of ethnicity, social and economic integration related multi-cultural policy, political participation, destructive and substantive representation and the fair inclusion of representative democracy of ethnic minorities. They investigate whether there are differences in political behavior between the majority population and ethnic minorities. Here, normative theory is explained to understand voting, campaign strategy, and minority representation. They reveal various reasons for ensuring proper participation in political life in the political institutions of minority people (Karen et al. 2011). Chaudhary (2015) has investigated that in conventional Santal ancestral networks. Santal

women have no political functions by any means. They are not permitted to hold office at the gatherings. They are not permitted to direct in any services, regardless of whether during childbirth, passing or marriage or in different events or celebrations. Santal women are contributing emphatically monetary interests. They gather natural products, tubers, consumable roots, and other household necessities (Chaudhary, 2015). Haider (2022) discussed the socio-economic and cultural background of Santals. He also elaborated on the illiteracy, unawareness, absence of peaceful residence, and lack of institutional support for Santal women. He focuses on the reasons behind the vulnerable situation in the Santal community (Haider 2022). Carrin (2022) discusses the concept of indigeneity and indigenous people. He elaborated on the Santal community since the 19th century and observed that due to displacement and discrimination, they have suffered lot politically and culturally. He also discusses the customs, culture, and land system of the Santals and get an idea of some taboos about women, like they cannot do heavy work, they cannot be chief, and their ritual life is also different in that they cannot watch the killing of the sacrificial animals and do not eat the backs and necks of the sacrificing animal. He sees traditional gender inequality as basically due to inequality in property rights and political participation (Carrin, 2022). Islam (2020) discussed women's empowerment having political awareness and claimed that political awareness is the key to democracy and good governance. The reasons of women are not involved in politics due to socio-cultural force, diversity of religious faiths and complex political and economic force. He also argued that voting, party activity, party membership, contesting the election and political communication are indicators of political participation (Islam, 2020). Tolia-Kelly (2019) described political awareness on the basis of Gramsci's hegemony and radical and critical intellectuals of society. The author explained that political awareness faces challenges in terms of inequalities, patriarchy, colonialism,

neoliberalism, imperialism and cultural prejudice. Here, he focuses on two issues like subordination and praxis. The praxis starts with a sense of political awareness beyond the understanding of individual requirements and struggles (Tolia-Kelly, 2019). Tone Bleie (2005) presented an overview of the evolving framework for aboriginal's human rights, which serves as a foundation for analysing government initiatives pertaining to ethnic minorities. This changing environment is influenced by the policies and strategies primarily employed by national and local NGOs to address the human rights and livelihood requirements of aboriginals.

Table 1: Relationship Between the Apolitical Strata of Santal Women and the Minority Perspective

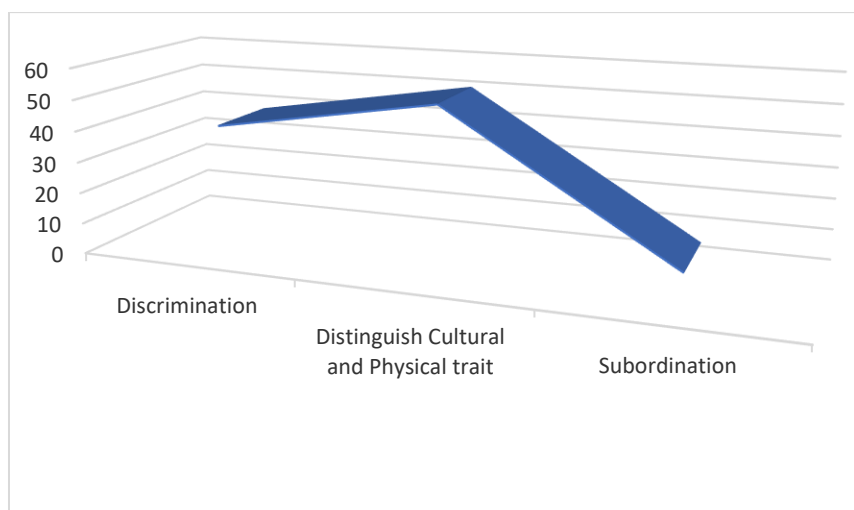
| Category | Strongly Agree | Strongly Disagree | Total |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|------------|
| Apolitical Strata | 1.17 (35) | 1.43 (18) | 2.6 (53) |
| Minority Concept | 1.32 (20) | 1.61 (27) | 2.93 (47) |
| Total | 2.49 (55) | 3.04 (45) | 5.53 (100) |

Note. The table is based on the data of the survey using chi square test, values in parentheses are in percentages. table value 2, df=1, P<0.05.

Let it take the hypothesis that the minority perspective of Santal women does not influence their apolitical stratum. On the basis of this hypothesis, the calculated value (5.53) of chi-square is higher than this table value, and hence the result of the experiment does not support the hypothesis (Table 1). it can be, thus, concluded that Santal women belong to the apolitical strata because of

their minority perspective. Sociologist Louis Wirth (1945) defined a minority group as “any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination” (Tonja et al., 2021). Respondents were asked: do you think minority thinking is the reason for staying away from politics? The responses are taken by strongly agreed and strongly disagreed. Over 95 percent of minority interviewees cast ballots and engage in other political activities is crucial. Some of the interviewees who cast ballots stated that they had no interest in politics, despite the fact that this study links political interest to political engagement. It is not possible to effectively prevent minority discrimination and promote political participation based on rights unless the minority is actively involved in the political decision-making processes that oversee the protection of minority rights. Therefore, the protection of other minority rights procedures may be significantly undermined in the absence of participation. This suggests that the group as a whole is beginning to feel this way (Bieber, 2003).

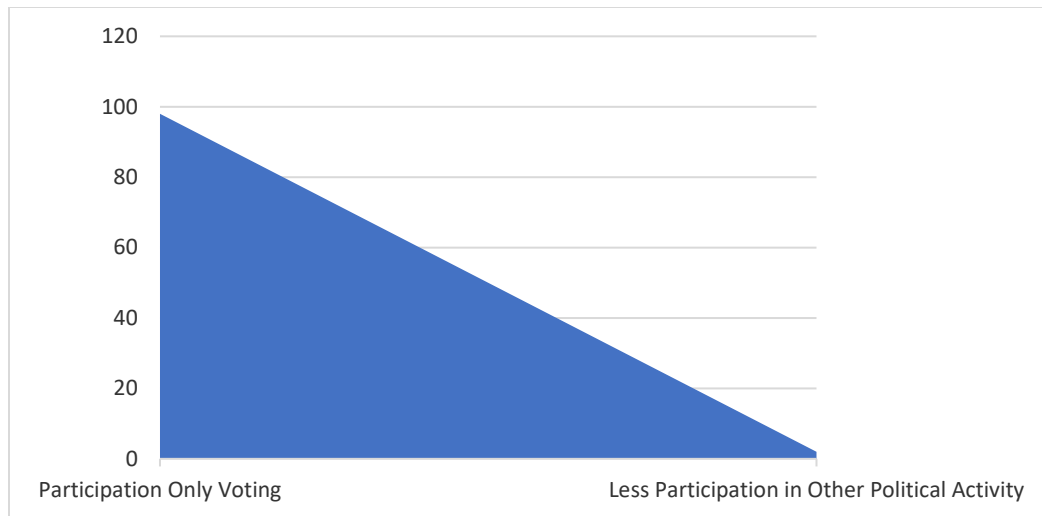
Figure 1: Opinion of Santal Women as a Minority Perspective



Source: The author analyzed the responses of the respondents

The Santals consider themselves a minority as they are less in number than the mainstream Bengalis. In sociological contexts, the terms “minority” and “subordinate group” can be used interchangeably to refer to groups that face discrimination, while "dominant group" is frequently used to refer to the majority group that holds sway over power and privilege in a given society. It is hypothesised that societal discrimination damages minorities' perception of themselves as “an integral part of the larger society,” which in turn makes them “believe that they are incapable of taking meaningful action” (Oskooii, 2018). The defining feature of a minority or subordinate group is their lack of power. Figure 1 presents that 50 percent respondents said that Santal were discriminated against due to their physical and cultural differences. Cultural identity threats and economic well-being considerations are intertwined. The threat to one's cultural identity and financial security are the two areas where discriminant validity is becoming more acute. Bengalis have more influence, power, property, prestige, and position than Santals. 40% respondents said they get fewer facilities than the bengalis provided by the Union Parishad. Bengalis do not consider them neighbors and maintain social distance with them. They also have confusion about national and personal identity. Moreover, in women's empowerment, they are lagging behind than mainstream women because of which they consider themselves subordinate (10 percent respondents). For childmarriage and childbearing at a young age, supporting the family and household Santal, women stay away from politics.

Figure 2: Symbolic or Effective Political Participation of Santal Women

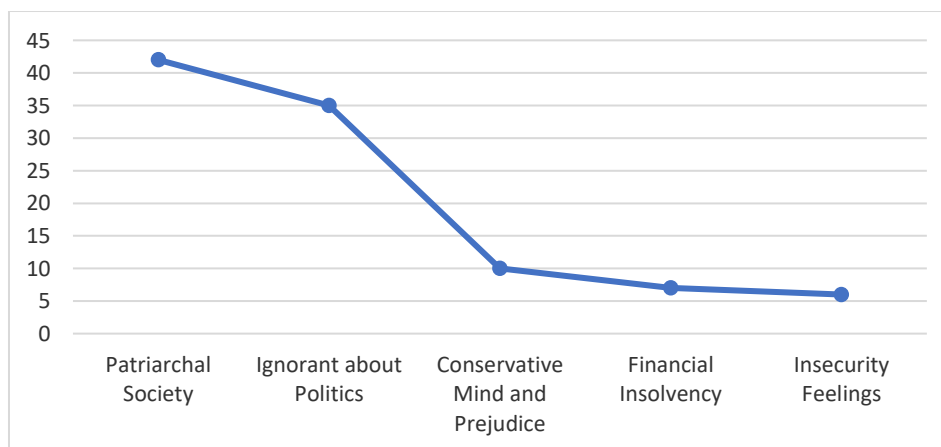


Source: The author has analyzed the answers of the respondents

Studies have shown during the election campaign, women are conscious of the election. That is, women are encouraged to participate in yard meetings, watch election processions, and discuss election-related issues in their spare time. Members of ethnic minorities can engage in politics in a number of ways, such as by creating a political party, voting, running for office locally, participating in protests, or engaging in political discourse on social media and online forums (Carlisle & Patton, 2013; Marien, Hooghe, & Quintelier, 2010). But it is noteworthy that Santal women do not participate in any other political activity apart from elections. Figure 2 displays that 98% Santal women think political participation means only voting. It means that they do not participate in politics due to their awareness and sense of responsibility. They never discuss the current governmental system, the ruling political party, or the positive and negative functions of government which hardly indicates to effective political participation rather it refers to symbolic political participation. Only 2% respondents think that political participation is needed to establish and strengthen democracy. Santal women said that if we compete as representatives in the local government election, the local Bengalis will not vote for us. That is why, as an ethnic people, we

lag behind in elections and politics. Low ingroup interests and low societal interests suggest marginalisation which suggests minority members want to avoid group-based politics rather than represent any political objectives or interests. For marginalised communities to have a better social standing, political engagement is essential (Pande, 2003; Petrusevska, 2009).

Figure 3: Factors Affecting the Political Stratum of Santal Women

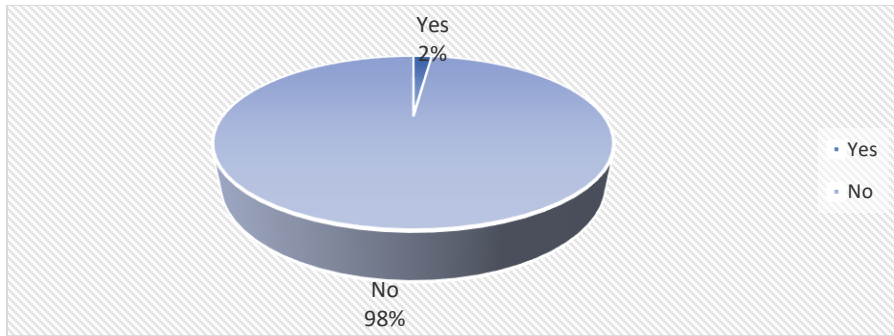


Source: The author analyzed the answers of respondents

Figure 3 illustrates that 42% respondents said, as Santal society is patriarchal, women are not independent, and the socio-political and economic attitude towards women very negative. Santal women remain inferior complexity because they cannot develop themselves. The political life of Santal women is influenced by the men of the family. Research have shown that 95% of Santal women vote on the advice of the head of the family. The women vote for the candidate preferred by the husband and father. Respondents (35 percent) said that women are not participating in politics. It refers that they are ignorant of politics and do not understand politics well. Respondents

state that the main focus of politics is the exercise of power. Santal women have no interest in power and feel that they do not have the talent, qualifications and time required to be in power. Moreover, women are lagging behind due to a lack of courage in leadership. Santal women say that involvement in politics is time-consuming because the interests of the group and reciprocity need to be protected. Santal women prefer to devote more time to family rather than involvement of politics. The Santals of Bangladesh are not economically prosperous. So, women are directly involved in the mode of production. Women are not economically self-sufficient, the importance of individual freedom decreases, so the needs of the family become the needs of women. Respondents express that if we work to improve economic solvency, the family will improve but will not benefit from political work. Also, women do not think of getting involved in politics because of the responsibilities of family and child rearing. 7 percent of the respondents think economic hardship is the reason for not engaging in politics. Santal women think women should not work outside the home because of their traditional mentality, history and culture. Due to a lack of proper education, many prejudices are prevalent among them. Lacking strength and courage, women prefer to hide themselves from everything. For this reasons, dependency works in everything for women. Studies have shown that 10% women uphold the prevailing prejudices in society. Women are indifferent about changing their status, they consider their social status as luck. Women avoid participating in politics because of insecurity (6% respondents). Santal women feel that there is no favorable environment to get involved in politics. Women are apolitical because they have no organizational skills. Women always treat themselves subordinate.

Figure 4: Political Socialization of Santal Women



Source: The author analyzed the responses of the respondents

Figure 4 displays that the socialization process usually starts at birth. Santal families do not spend money on the education of their daughters as they lack of economic independence. As a result, children are not socialized through educational institutions and peers. Remaining family conservative-minded women are encouraged to stay home and to do housework. Respondents enunciate that they understand politics only as voting, and Santal women never discuss various political issues or the government whereas a society educates newcomers about its culture in order to continue existing. A society vanishes if its way of life is not passed down to future generations. For a civilization to thrive, the things that make its culture unique must be instilled in new members. Children in the must acquire cultural values associated with democracy through political socialization. This includes learning how to use tangible items like voting machines and the customs around voting. They could pick up on these skills by observing their parents or guardians cast ballots or, in certain cases, by participating in student government elections using actual machines.

Conclusion

The study implies that Santal women are apolitical due to a lack of political knowledge, patriarchy, being conservative-minded, insecurity, and a lack of financial solvency. Santal women play an

apolitical role for two reasons such as, firstly, they think that politics is not a good thing and involving politics is not for them, secondly, they become apolitical because of the exploitation and subordination mentality of the majority Bengalis. It is merely focused that Santal women have very little political knowledge because they have not been politically socialized. The research data show that political parties have no contact with Santal women. Hence, they cannot participate in political activities like meetings where political issues are discussed constantly. Santal women do not get nominations from parties as elections are held on party symbols. As a result, their reluctance toward political participation increases. Therefore, their political participation is symbolic. Respondents said that politics does not attract them and that they have no desire to get involved in politics due to a lack of political socialization. Many women are never interested in discussing political parties, government, leadership, and elections. They only discuss voting during elections. For that, a culture should be developed to exclude the political participation of Santal women. Women should be given the responsibility of work which will make them confident. Women need to take an active role in policymaking and society needs to get out of the mindset that women can play subordinates. Then women play a role in decision-making. The state should consciously assess the diversity of women in Santal society. Women need strong willpower and a favorable work environment to succeed 'Our fate' concept.

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