

Politically Aware?: Investigating the Levels of Political Awareness of the Third Gender Community in Northeast India


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In Political Science, the concept of political awareness is a well researched concept across communities, groups and geographical locations. India is not an exception. Political awareness refers to the extent to which an individual/or group have understanding and knowledge of the political system of the society they dwell in. But when we talk of such common concepts like political awareness in relation to marginalized communities like the third gender community of India, there are not only limited number of studies, but to find a single study in this context is rarer. Thus we come up with this study. It will include two states of Northeast India, Assam and Nagaland. Based on field surveys employing the strategy of personal interviews with the help of interview schedules, the present study explores the extent of political awareness of third gender community in Assam and Nagaland.

Keywords: political awareness, third gender, northeast india, assam, nagaland

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1. Introduction

Gender difference prevails in every society. History beholds that this difference has not only led to social discrimination but has also made them the target of hostility catechizing their social acceptance as individuals/groups and communities. The third gender community are one of such communities whose identity have always been catechized by social norms. In the political context, it implies "a community of interests among people who may form no genuine community ...and who may even be deeply divided among themselves ...where the use of the word is part of an attempt to normalize and make socially acceptable groups that have been the target of hostility" (Scruton, 2007, p. 122). Lack of social acceptance has pushed this community beyond the brinks of society (Sutradhar, 2025). This has, in turn, triggered unacceptance in other key aspects of life not ostracizing the political ambience. Because there exist a positive correlation between socio-economic and political aspect. To begin with the basics to understand political status, an attempt has been made to understand the extent of political awareness of the third gender community in select locations of Northeast India.

2. Review of Literature

Notable works on third gender community were conducted by Serena Nanda, Adnan Hossain, Jessica Hinchy, Claire Pamment, Jeff Roy, Veerendra Mishra in English language. Third gender studies have been flourished by autobiographies by Sasindran Kallinkeel (2021); Kalki Subramaniam(2022); Akkai PadmaShali (2022); B. Manjamma Jogathi (2023); Santa Khurai (2023) are few. In regional languages too, there have been novels and research works by authors like Ajay Majumder, Niloy Basu, Rabin Tarafder, Swapnomoy Chakraborty and so on. Recently authors like Enakshi Nandy, Vinu S. and Kesavan Rajasekharan Nayar have also written on the transgender community of India. There is a dearth of literature in researching the political status of third genders in India as well as Northeast India.

3. Research Methodology and Knowing the Respondents

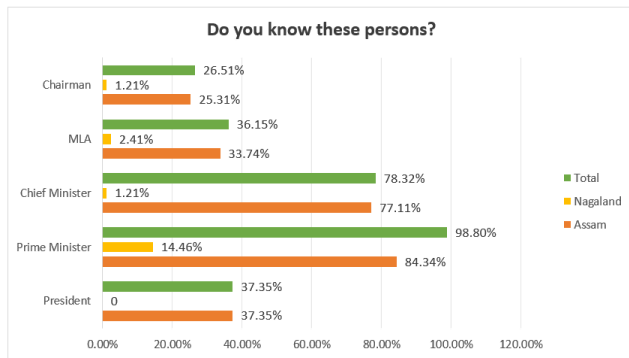
This study entails two states of Northeast India, Assam and Nagaland.

Selected districts of the two states were visited and data was collected through personal interviews and focussed group interviews. The total sample size is N=83 in the present study and then the data was analysed and presented using simple percentage and frequency calculations.

4. Political awareness of Third Gender Community of Assam and Nagaland: Exploring the numbers

Political awareness reveals the civic culture of a certain society. Where several societies witness a profuse political culture, some others witness a weak political culture. The book "The Civic Culture" highlighted the fact that "some societies seemed to transmit a general distrust for authority and to create very low levels of political hopefulness in their citizens" (Robertson, 2007, p. 385). Among the third genders of Northeast India, they have been asked basic questions regarding their awareness of important political leaders. Their responses revealed a mixed response. While majority of the respondents, around 99% are aware about the prime minister of India, a minimum percentage of 26.51% are aware about the municipality chairman or panchayat chairman, depending on the locality where they reside. The second highest percentage of awareness is about the Chief Minister, which stands at 78.32%, followed by president at 37.35%; local MLA at 36.15% and chairman (Figure 1). As the data shows, around 41% of the respondents are aware of only one person and that was the prime minister of the country (Table 1), and for those who responded for two persons, it was the prime minister and chief minister of Assam (Table 1). The density of responses can be clearly seen in the density chart with the two major peaks of density (Figure 2). Statewise, none of the respondents of Nagaland are aware about the president, while all of them are aware about the prime minister of India, which shows a stark contrast in awareness regarding the head of the state and head of the government of India.

Figure 1: Bar Chart showing Political Awareness of Third Genders in Assam and Nagaland



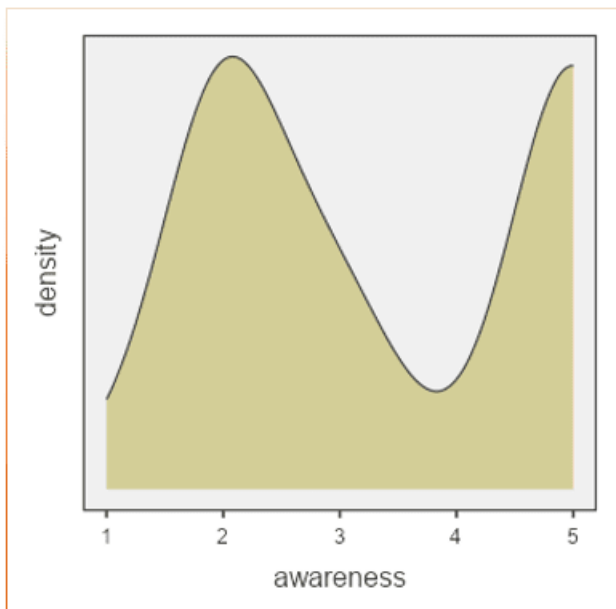
Field Survey, 2024, 2025

Table 1: Frequencies of political awareness

| Frequencies of awareness | | | |
|--------------------------|--------|------------|--------------|
| Awareness | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
| All | 2 | 2.410% | 2.410% |
| >two | 32 | 38.554% | 40.964% |
| Three | 14 | 16.867% | 57.831% |
| None | 1 | 1.205% | 59.036% |
| Only 1 | 34 | 40.964% | 100.000% |

Field Survey, 2024, 2025

Figure 2: Density chart of political Awareness



Field Survey, 2024, 2025

5. Why politically (un)aware? A Discussion

In understanding political status, so as to entail participation, representation and awareness, all of which are related concepts,

it is very important to know what factors play a role behind the current state of political awareness of the respondents. According to Roskin et al. (2020), there are several factors like regional voting, caste, gender, religion, age etc which affect a person’s engagement or disengagement with politics. That is, these factors along with the environment of the people also affect their awareness/unawareness. To explain, the third genders of both Assam and Nagaland have shown similar trends in certain aspects. For instance, in both the states, political awareness is at its peak when it comes to prime minister of India. With 99% of respondents aware about Prime Minister of the nation, the kind of popularity the P.M has among the masses is very much clear. A lot more of respondents are also aware about the Chief Minister of Assam and not Nagaland. It is to be noted that for few third genders of Nagaland also, they are aware about the Chief minister of Assam but not Nagaland. While this is a surprising fact, it may be due to the political inclination of the Third Genders towards a specific political party of which both the Chief minister of Assam and the Prime Minister of India belongs. Gender difference apart, alike the majority population of the Northeastern region, the third gender population of the region are equally influenced by common political scenerio and leaders. This shows that “some regions do identify strongly with certain parties” (p. 222) just as the tilting of majority of respondents towards a specific political party. So far as age factor is concerned, political awareness has to be understood in terms of age also, because attaining a certain age group is essential to attain maturity and understanding the importance of awareness and inclusion in the political system of the country. This is the very reason, why every nation allows allowed its citizens to vote after attaining a certain age of maturity. Hence, we find that majority of respondents belong to the mature age group of 24 to 29 years, followed by 24.1% in the 18 to 23 age group. 16.9% respondents are from the 36 to 41 age group, and 15.7% are from the 30 to 35 age group. Respondents from older age groups are fewer, 9.6% are from the 42 to 47 age group, and 6.0% are from the 48 years and above (Table 2). Figure 3 shows the density of age with political awareness of the respondents. In Northeast India, majority of respondents belong to the age between 18 to 29 years. Although the overall picture depicts their extremely low political awareness but the percentage is still better than the upper age group.

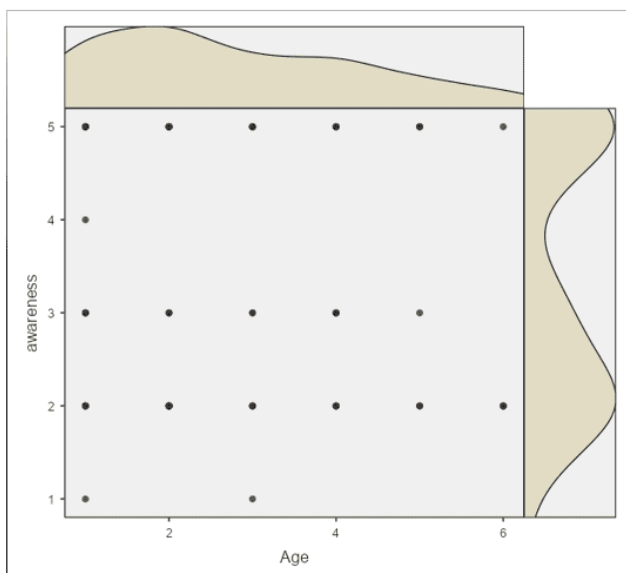
The pattern of data so found aligns well with Roskin et al. (2020) who observed that “older voters were less open on race” but in contrast younger generation “tend to catch the tide that is flowing in their youth” which gives them a sort of “permanent identification” with a particular political party (p. 224). Again, the correlation matrix (Table 3, Figure 4) shows that age is negatively correlated to political awareness which means higher the age, lower is the political awareness and vice versa. One reason for this is the fact that majority of the third genders identify themselves as beyond the gender binary at adolescence and by 17-18 years of age most of them try to come out of the clutches of social norms and begin their independent life with the gender identity their mind aligns with. So, when their minds and lives are already in a psychological turmoil of society and gender identity, they cannot think of politics or the political system of the society, because for them society comes first to politics. And it is social acceptance which they direly need by heart to live a life with dignity which will be void with bullying, teasing and rejection.

Table 2: Age of Respondents

| Frequencies of Age | | | |
|--------------------|--------|------------|--------------|
| Age | Counts | % of Total | Cumulative % |
| 18 to 23 years | 20 | 24.1% | 24.1% |
| 24 to 29 years | 23 | 27.7% | 51.8% |
| 30 to 35 years | 13 | 15.7% | 67.5% |
| 36 to 41 years | 14 | 16.9% | 84.3% |
| 42 to 47 years | 8 | 9.6% | 94.0% |
| 48 years and more | 5 | 6.0% | 100.0% |

Field Survey 2024, 2025

Figure 3: Scatter plot Chart (density of responses)



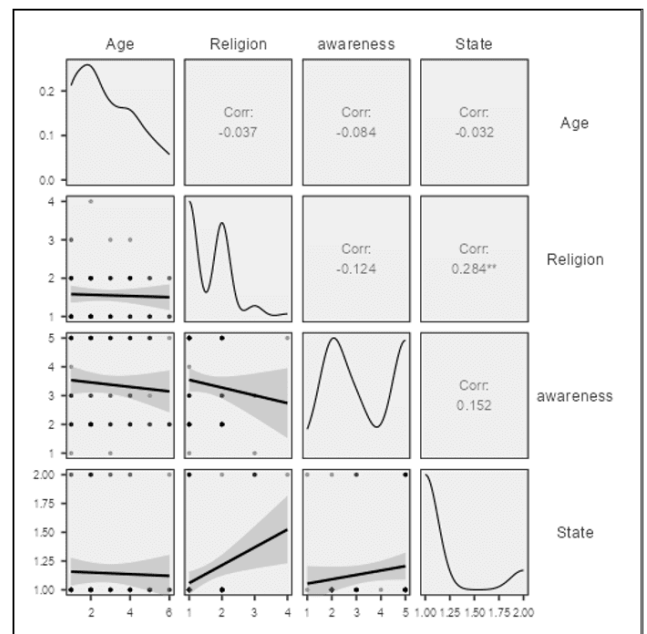
Field Survey 2024, 2025

Table 3: Correlation Matrix of Political Awareness

| Correlation Matrix | | | | | |
|--------------------|-------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| | | Age | Religion | awareness | State |
| Age | Pearson's r | — | | | |
| | df | — | | | |
| | p-value | — | | | |
| Religion | Pearson's r | -0.03734 | — | | |
| | df | 81 | — | | |
| | p-value | 0.73753 | — | | |
| awareness | Pearson's r | -0.08410 | -0.12353 | — | |
| | df | 81 | 81 | — | |
| | p-value | 0.44972 | 0.2658817 | — | |
| State | Pearson's r | -0.03164 | 0.28423** | 0.15187 | — |
| | df | 81 | 81 | 81 | — |
| | p-value | 0.77646 | 0.0092096 | 0.17051 | — |

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Figure 4: Correlation Matrix Graph of Political Awareness



Field Survey 2024, 2025

6. Conclusion

To conclude, the study reveals that none of the respondents of Nagaland are aware about the president, while all of them are aware about the prime minister of India. And, psychological stress is one major factor which poses as a barrier to their political involvement and awareness. Northeast India, presents a very unique socio-cultural landscape with tribal population and traditions, diverse ethnic groups.

Third Gender communities in Northeast India face multifaceted problems. They are shunned from family and society alike, leading to isolation. The extent of their political awareness throws the question towards society *Are the Third genders really politically aware?. If not, who is responsible?* Getting a precise answer for this question is difficult, because most of the fingers of the hands would point back towards ourselves. It is we, people like us, who constitute the society. Many do accept and understand the kind of problems third genders face, but the percentage is higher which do not even accept the presence of gender difference in society. For them the words difference, deviant do not exist in the gender binary system which has well been accepted and authenticated by our social norms. We are the carriers of such norms to the next generation, because despite knowing and understanding the intricacies of gender in nature and society, many do hesitate to fight the social norms. Such tough are the norms of patriarchy and gender binary!.

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