



Political Strategies of BJP in Tripura: An Analysis

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Cite as: Khanal, D., et al. (2024), Political Strategies of BJP in Tripura: An Analysis, Journal of People, Politics and Administration, 1(2), pg.10- 14.

Abstract

Political strategy refers to a deliberate plan designed to secure the supremacy of a political party in one or more states, with the objective of attaining and maintaining formal control over significant systems, such as society, community, or organisations. The BJP-IPFT alliance became victorious in the 2018 Tripura Assembly elections by securing 44 out of 60 seats, thereby ousting the CPI(M)-led Left Front, which had been in power in the state for a period of 25 years. In the 2013 elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) failed to secure any parliamentary seats. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) displaced the primary opposition parties, the Indian National Congress (INC) and the All India Trinamool Congress (AITMC), and toppled the ruling Left government. The BJP-IPFT combination emerged victorious in the 2023 Tripura assembly elections, securing 32 seats and successfully establishing a second-term government. Their victory came at the expense of the Left-Congress alliance and Tipra Motha. These triumphs have established a significant milestone in the political landscape of North East India and have also ensured the formation of state governments in multiple additional states within the area. Examining the political tactics employed by the BJP in Tripura is essential because of the varied context it presents in the North East region of India. Therefore, the paper aims to understand the political strategies of BJP in Tripura.

Keywords: *BJP, Tripura, Political Strategy, Elections.*

Introduction

Political strategy refers to a deliberate plan designed to secure the supremacy of a political party in one or more states, with the goal of attaining and maintaining formal control over significant systems, such as society, community, or organisations. According to the Cambridge dictionary, “strategy means a detailed plan for achieving success in situations such as war, politics, business, industry, or sports, or the skill of planning for such situations”. The BJP-IPFT alliance was victorious in the 2018 Tripura Assembly elections, securing 44 out of 60 seats. This resulted in the collapse of the CPI(M)-led Left Front, which had been in power in the state for a period of 25 years. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

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failed to secure any seats in the 2013 elections. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supplanted the primary opposition parties, the Indian National Congress (INC) and the All India Trinamool Congress (AITMC), and toppled the ruling Left administration. The BJP-IPFT combination emerged victorious in the 2023 Tripura assembly elections, securing 32 seats and successfully establishing a second-term government. Their victory came at the expense of the Left-Congress alliance and Tipra Motha. These triumphs have established a significant milestone in the realm of politics in North East India and have also ensured the formation of state governments in several other states within the area. Analysing the political strategies adopted by the BJP in Tripura is of utmost importance given its varied context in the North East region of India.

Objective of the Study

The study is focused on the emergence of the BJP as a strong political force in Tripura and the effort made by the BJP to become the ruling party in Tripura and its political strategy. The study is based on Tripura, and people from various walks of life in Tripura are covered. The study is limited due to a paucity of time and funding. The study is significant as it analyses the political strategy of the BJP in Tripura and how it won two consecutive assembly elections in the state.

Data Source and Methodology

The present study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The study estimates the political strategy of the BJP in the state. It is both descriptive and analytical. Both primary and secondary sources are used in order to collect requisite data.

Primary data is collected by using a structured questionnaire, which contains closed-ended questions and is useful to collect the requisite data from the respondents. In order to collect requisite data, respondents are selected based on representative characteristics. Keeping in view of significance of this study, 200 respondents were contacted as part of a field survey, who could give their feedback on the subject under study, belonging to various walks of life in Tripura. Some of these respondents include political activists and civil society leaders, employees, students, and youths. Besides, teachers, lawyers, farmers, and workers were also approached during the course of study. Meanwhile, it is dependent on the character of the study areas. For instance, tribal and non-tribal representation is given proportionately.

Secondary data includes government records like Gazette, Election Commission data, Assembly Proceedings, Books, Newspaper, Magazines, Journals, Election Manifestoes, Party records.

Political Strategy of the BJP in Tripura

In terms of the political strategy of BJP in Tripura it reflects how the party has utilised anti-incumbency and chooses the issues relevant to the people of state at large that includes tribals and the Bengali population.

Anti-incumbency

The CPI (M) faced opposition due to anti-incumbency and the Left government's failure to understand the changing aspirations of voters. The BJP's slogan "Chalo Paltai" (Let's Change) in the 2018 Tripura assembly elections resonated with both Bengali and indigenous tribal communities. With 60 assembly constituencies of Tripura 30 for the general, 20 for the Scheduled Tribe (ST) and 10 for the Scheduled Caste (SC), the party capitalized on the

discontent of both groups, capturing the imagination of a cross-section of society.(Bijukumar, 2019)Therefore, the BJP was able to win seats in both the areas.

Based on a study conducted by CSDS, it was found that there was a significant degree of discontentment with the performance of the Tripura administration and its Chief Minister. Approximately one-third of the respondents expressed complete unhappiness with their performance.(The Indian Express, March 5, 2018) Such high levels of dissatisfaction according to previous survey's, are a certain sign that a government is in trouble. Any party would always have to overcome the anti-incumbency issue, but it was especially difficult while a pro-Modi wave was there in the country.

Consolidation of Tribals

In the 2018 Tripura assembly election campaign, the BJP highlighted the insensitivity towards tribals in the state, mobilizing their discontent. It was able to create a misconception that Bengalis benefited at the expense of tribals during the 25-year CPI(M) rule, as there was only minimal representation of tribals in the ministry and government services. The BJP used a pragmatic strategy to strike a political balance between Bengalis and indigenous tribal communities, championing the cause of the tribal community, who became minorities due to the Bengali community's migration and access to resources and political power. The BJP pitching its development agenda during the 2018 election campaign, also promised special economic zones for food processing, bamboo, textile, and information technology sectors.

Hindutva's political project of appropriating the tribal king and creating alternate narratives, stirring up ethnic feelings among the tribal communities, and regaining the support of the dominant Bengali community through its pro-development rhetoric not only overthrew the left's dominance but also solidified the BJP's foothold in the state. The simmering resentment over the CAB strained the comfortable alliance between the tribes and the BJP, but the Left could not take advantage of the favorable political climate and reclaim its lost dominance in the general elections. (Bijukumar, 2019) Moreover the Tipramotha, which is basically a tribal party has won majority of the ST seats in the 2023 assembly elections.

7th Pay Commission

The BJP emphasised that because the Seventh Pay Commission had not been implemented, state employees were receiving pay based on the Fourth Pay Commission. In fact, the BJP gained the support of government employees by promising to execute the Seventh Pay Commission in its vision statement. Because of this, a sizable proportion of Bengali Hindus switched over to the BJP. In order to strengthen its influence in the state, the party intentionally made use of the demographic makeup of state.

Role of RSS

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) groundwork was crucial in Tripura, among other states. The RSS played a significant part in this victory as well. Some senior workers were sent to the BJP to work in Tripura. Sunil Deodhar, incharge of the BJP in Tripura, was also a RSS pracharak. Deodhar managed Varanasi Parliamentary seat for Narendra Modi in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. (Livemint, March 03, 2018) The Sangh work in Tripura was intensified, from around 60 shakhas at the time of the 2014 elections, the RSS has 265 shakhas in the state in 2018. Moreover, BJP governments are always favourable for the growth of RSS and its affiliated organisations.

Co-option of Leaders from other parties to the BJP

A closer examination shows that the BJP's establishment of a political base in Tripura would not have been possible without the help of many political 'paratroopers'. Numerous regional leaders from various political parties joined the BJP prior to the 2018 assembly election. With hundreds of former Trinamool Congress leaders and members, they joined at the BJP in August 2017 (Times of India, December 11, 2017). Similarly, a number of Congress politicians switched parties before the elections and received BJP party tickets. (The Indian Express, January 28, 2018). Thus, the co-option of leaders from other political parties has greatly helped BJP in its victory in Tripura.

Massive Outreach and Campaign

The BJP appointed 'Vistaraks' per constituency to prevent infighting among mandals and local leaders, while more were brought in from other states to manage Tripura's tea estates. Each polling booth had 17-18 pages of voters, with a 'panna pramukh' responsible for each page. Local leaders were picked up for the job. The BJP also strengthened its Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, affiliated with the RSS, and launched online voter registration through missed calls. Over two lakh members were registered by the time of elections. 'Train Samparaks' traveled on trains wearing Modi-T-shirts and handed out BJP pamphlets to passengers, who received "prashikshan" training on ideology, nationalism, and Indian culture. Before the elections, 400 'Vistaraks' were brought in from Assam (Roy, E., 2018). A campaign rally by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union ministers, and chief ministers from other BJP-ruled states intensified the election campaign and drew a large crowd.

The BJP's 2018 electoral victory over the communists was attributed to multiple factors, including its long-term strategy of constructing a counter narrative among tribal communities and rousing sentiments against the dominant Bengali community. The party also highlighted developmental paralysis, unemployment, and inadequate salary conditions for government employees. The disarray of opposition parties like the TMC and Congress allowed the BJP to gain space, as both parties experienced frequent defection and fell under the BJP's poaching strategy.

The campaign strategy employed by the Bharatiya Janata Party in Tripura indicates that the party effectively organised booth-level operations through the establishment of "booth committees" and the appointment of "panna pramukhs" responsible for overseeing each page of the voter list. There is a significant prevalence of electronic and print media usage as well. The utilisation of slogans and songs in an election campaign is a common strategy employed by political parties to mobilise their party cadres and supporters. Large rallies featuring prominent leaders of the BJP are also advantageous in terms of activating party members and voters. The influence of financial resources was also a significant factor in the course of events. During elections in Tripura, slogans such as "Chalo Paltai," "Acche Din," and "Sampark se Samarthan" have been used.

Conclusion

In the Tripura legislative elections in 2018, the BJP-IPFT alliance was successful in defeating the Left party, which had ruled Tripura for 25 long years. In Tripura BJP also poached leaders from AITMC and Congress. The alliance with the tribal party IPFT, worked in favour of the BJP. Further, in 2023 state legislative elections BJP faced a tough contest from the left party and somehow managed to return to power in the state. Because in this election newly formed Tipra Motha gained a majority of tribal votes, which created a challenging situation for the BJP in Tripura.

In Tripura, the BJP has used various tactics as part of its election strategy. These include capitalising on anti-incumbency sentiments against the left government, forming an alliance with the IPFT, pursuing a Hindutva political agenda by appropriating the tribal king and constructing an alternative narrative, implementing the recommendations of the 7th pay commission, and extensive groundwork by the RSS. Additionally, the BJP has attracted leaders from other political parties, organised widespread outreach programmes through the deployment of 'Vistaraks' and 'Panna pramukhs' at the booth level, and intensified the election campaign through large-scale rallies featuring the Prime Minister and other prominent party members.

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