

From Grassroots to Political Force: The Rise of Tipra Motha in Tripura's 2024 Lok Sabha Elections

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Abstract

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections in India witnessed significant political developments, one of which was the impressive rise of the TIPRA Motha Party in Tripura. Emerging as a key player in the state's electoral landscape, TIPRA Motha's success represents a blend of grassroots mobilization, tribal rights advocacy, and strategic political manoeuvring. This article examines the trajectory of the TIPRA Motha Party in the 2024 elections, analysing its formation, electoral strategies, and the reasons behind its success in securing a significant number of seats. The paper further contextualizes TIPRA Motha's political ascent within the broader socio-political environment of Tripura, focusing on tribal empowerment, regional autonomy, and challenges posed by existing political structures.

Keywords: TIPRA Motha Party, Grassroots mobilization, 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Tribal rights advocacy, regional autonomy

Introduction

The Tipra Motha Party (TMP)¹, is the second largest party in Tripura Legislative Assembly and is led by Pradyot Bikram Manikya Deb Barma, a royal scion. TIPRA Motha chairman Pradyot is known as 'Bubagra' which translates as Maharaja in Kokborok dialect. On February 25, 2019, Bubagra Pradyot Bikram Manikya Deb Barma was appointed President of Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (Deb, 2019; NE NOW NEWS, 2019). After a few months, he resigned, accusing the Congress high command of pressuring him to accommodate 'corrupt people' (Chakraborty, Tripura Congress chief resigns, accuses party of asking him to accommodate "corrupt people", 2019). Deb Barma was appointed Tripura's Congress state president in 2019, but he resigned the same year due to party disagreements over the National Register of Citizens

and the Citizenship Amendment Act. The Congress had asked him to withdraw a petition he filed in the Supreme Court to implement the NRC in Tripura. Three months later, he formed a social organisation to fight for indigenous rights. Mr. Deb Barma stated on 5 February 2021 that his organisation would contest in the 2021 Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council election as a political party. The INPT², TSP³, and IPFT⁴ amalgamated into TIPRA in 2021.

Tripura Legislative Assembly Election 2023 saw approximately 42 TIPRA Motha candidates in various constituencies. First regional party in Tripura to become main opposition with 13 seats (Mayengbam, 2023). Tipra Motha joined Manik Saha's Tripura administration in March 2024, and Animesh and Brishaketu Debbarma took the oath as ministers of state. TIPRA's main goal is to create a new state called 'Greater Tipraland' under Article 2 & 3 of the Indian Constitution (Colney, 2021; Deb, 2021; Chakraborty, 2021; aninews.in, 2021; Lokmat Times, 2021). The Motha emphasises Tipra nationalism with the slogans "Puila Jati, Ulobo Jati" and "Puila Jati, Ulo Party" (Community first, party later). The party views its operations as a peoples' movement, not political. In the 28-member Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council elections, TIPRA and its allies INPT won a majority. TIPRA got 16 seats and INPT two. The Left Front's 15-year reign of the council ended, and the regional party became the only one to win without a national party alliance (Jaiswal, 2021).

Leveraging Emergency Crisis that Gained Political Momentum

A compelling narrative of how timely help during emergencies can pave the path for political momentum is provided by the emergence of a new political force arising during the COVID-19 epidemic. The effort of Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma saw a notable change and impact in the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) elections, when they obtained the landslide victory despite being a quite young body.

The journalist Kimi Colney's interview (Colney, 2021) with the party head highlights on the factors that contributed to their success. One of the main reasons for the party's acceptance by the public was the involvement of new, dynamic team of youths, majority of whom joined from non-political backgrounds. Majority of the party candidates were not influenced by family connections or dynastic politics, which allowed them to present themselves as independent voices with no historical backups. The young people were mainly the members of the party, with many candidates in their late 20s and early 30s.

The pandemic marked a sea change in their popular perception. The nation was severely disrupted when COVID-19 occurred, and many individuals were left to struggle without any prompt help from the government or political organisations already in place. The opportunity to fill this void was taken initiative by Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma. He started providing useful aid to people in need, especially migrant workers and students who were stuck far from their homes, with the help of the enthusiastic young volunteers. Over 35,000 people including migrant workers and students were given help and assistance to return back to Tripura from Major cities like Hyderabad, Bengalore, Chennai, Delhi, Pune, Guwahati, Himachal Pradesh and Shillong. From arranging buses and vehicle for road transportation facility to making sure of their food and other essentials, they have helped stranded people to come even by flights back to Tripura across all communities including non-indigenous people of the state. Along with assisting the needy people going through crisis, this humanitarian gesture bounded the party's relationship with the general public of the state. The party established itself as a respectable and caring political option as they gained greater recognition for their initiatives. During the time of TTAADC election this gesture of goodwill gained the confidence of voters.

Tipra Motha party was successful in meeting the crisis to show off their leadership abilities, get widespread acceptance, and accelerate their political agenda of coming together to fight for greater Tipraland. They differentiate themselves from well-established political parties by effectively and empathetically attending to urgent needs, establishing themselves as a source of real community support in addition to being a political organisation. Their historic political success was fuelled by a blend of youthful vigour, nonpartisan campaigning, and skilled crisis management.

Call for Unity

The call for unity within a political movement focused on indigenous rights and nonviolence. The Tipra Motha party's initiative to bring together all regional political parties in Tripura centres around a serious concern over the challenges of the indigenous people of the state. One of the major issue is that the parties in power have not only failed to address the challenges and needs of these communities but have also subjugated them for political benefits. These failures by the centre in fulfilling the demands and promise made to the public left the indigenous people marginalized and unheard.

Unsatisfied with this, the local leaders of the indigenous community felt the need to take initiative to join Tipra Motha. Due to lack of developments with the existing political parties and the systemic neglect of the indigenous issues compelled them to establish their own political entity. Despite having only two months in hand to form a new party, they worked hard to connect with people across Tripura. This urgency did not diminish their purpose; on the contrary, it transformed their commitment to stand for the rights of the indigenous populations. The party's campaign was centred on oneness, with the slogan "Thansa" meaning "together", focussing on people's actual concerns while encouraging the possibility of true change. Despite tremendous resistance from many political groups and numerous verbal and physical attacks, the Tipra Motha party remained determined not to engage in violence or retaliate physically.

The main principle of the party was the discipline of nonviolence, which gave them a separate entity altogether from rest of the political parties in the state and proclaim their message of peaceful initiative and constructive politics. With these values in reaching out to regional parties, Tipra Motha aimed to forge a coalition based on the common problem of the indigenous people's struggles. This initiative reflected not only the urgency of taking up longstanding challenges and issues but also an effort for more inclusive political movement where the indigenous voices could be heard and respected.

Call for Greater Tipraland

One last fight for 'Greater Tipraland' demand in Tripura Legislative Assembly Poll 2023 is another important factor. In the lead-up to the 2023 Tripura Legislative Assembly elections, the TIPRA Motha Party fervently called upon the Tiprasa community to unite and take collective action in the pursuit of "Greater Tipraland." During several political rallies and campaigns, the party highlighted the community's historical challenges, while also criticizing the current situation after 75 years of India's independence. The party's ideology contends that, despite the nation's overall progress, the Tiprasa people have continued to face marginalization, lacking access to essential resources such as employment, education, healthcare, and land rights.

Pradyot Bikram Manikya Deb Barma, who is affectionately called "Bubagra" or "Maharaja" in the Kokborok language, urged his followers to take part in "One Last Fight" to assert their constitutional rights. He emphasized the longstanding deprivation faced by the Tiprasa

community, citing inadequate government response to their grievances and the lack of meaningful changes despite promises made by past leaders. He criticized the ruling political class for its failure to deliver on promises, particularly in providing land rights (“Patta”) and creating job opportunities.

During the rally, Debbarma made it clear that TIPRA Motha’s struggle was not driven by religion or sectarian politics but by the need to secure the constitutional rights of the indigenous Tiprasa people. He distanced himself from the divisive political tactics of the ruling BJP, reiterating that TIPRA Motha’s platform was based on fairness, justice, and the preservation of Tiprasa identity. Furthermore, Debbarma committed to ensuring that his party would continue its efforts to provide land rights to Tiprasa people if it came to power, signalling a strong opposition to the BJP-led government’s land policies.

He also sought to dispel the notion that TIPRA Motha was an isolated or fringe movement, stressing that it was a widespread “movement for Tiprasa survival.” He asserted that the TIPRA Motha was prepared to contest 40 seats in the 2023 elections and hoped for a decisive victory. Asserting his unyielding commitment to the cause, he declared that even if it meant his own death, he would never compromise on the rights of his people. Debbarma’s call for “One Last Fight” represents a critical moment in the political landscape of Tripura, highlighting the continued struggle for indigenous rights and autonomy within the state’s evolving political framework.

The elections were held on February 16, 2023, and the result was declared on March 2, 2023. TIPRA Motha made a remarkable debut by winning 13 seats in the 60-member assembly, becoming the largest opposition party in Tripura². This was a significant achievement for a party that was relatively new to the political scene.

In the 2023 Tripura Legislative Assembly election, TIPRA Motha formed alliances with several regional parties to strengthen its position. The key parties that allied with TIPRA Motha included:

1. Indigenous Nationalist Party of Twipra (INPT): This party merged with TIPRA Motha in 2021, forming a strong coalition focused on the rights and empowerment of the indigenous people of Tripura.
2. Tipraland State Party (TSP): Another regional party that merged with TIPRA Motha in 2021, contributing to the unified front for tribal rights.

3. IPFT (Tipraha): This faction of the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura also joined forces with TIPRA Motha, further consolidating the alliance.

These alliances played a crucial role in TIPRA Motha's success in the 2023 elections, where the party won 13 seats and became the largest opposition party in Tripura

Contribution of Tipra Motha in Lok Sabha Election 2024

The TIPRA Motha Party (TMP) played a pivotal role in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Tripura, significantly contributing to the BJP's success in the state. This strategic alliance between TIPRA Motha and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) reshaped the political landscape of Tripura. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Tripura were held in two phases on April 19 and April 26. The election was significant as they saw the participation of major political parties, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), and the Indian National Congress (INC). The BJP continued its stronghold in Tripura, winning both the Tripura West and Tripura East constituencies. Biplab Kumar Deb from BJP won the Tripura West seat, while Kriti Devi Debbarman secured the Tripura East seat. Kriti Devi Debbarman contested the Tripura East constituency as the joint candidate of TIPRA Motha and BJP. As a member of the royal family of Tripura, Kriti Devi Debbarman brought a unique blend of heritage and political acumen to the forefront. Her campaign focused on tribal rights, regional autonomy, and the creation of 'Greater Tripaland.' The alliance proved to be highly effective, with the BJP retaining both the Tripura West and Tripura East constituencies. The vote share for the BJP surged significantly in both constituencies compared to the 2019 elections. In Tripura West, the BJP's vote share increased from 51.74% in 2019 to 72.67% in 2024. Similarly, in Tripura East, the vote share jumped from 43.32% in 2019 to 68.48% in 2024 (India Today NE, 2024).

In March 2024, just before the Lok Sabha elections, TIPRA Motha joined the BJP-led coalition government in Tripura. The TIPRA Motha Party, which had formed an alliance with the BJP, played a crucial role in the elections. This alliance was formed to address the socio-political issues faced by the indigenous people of Tripura and to strengthen the BJP's position in the state. This alliance added a new dimension to the state's political landscape, posing a challenge to the INC and CPI(M). The elections were marked by discussions on key issues such as tribal rights, regional autonomy, and the Citizenship Amendment Bill. These issues

were central to the campaigns of various parties and influenced voter preferences. TIPRA Motha played a crucial role in consolidating the BJP's position in the tribal areas of Tripura. The party's emphasis on tribal rights and regional autonomy resonated with the indigenous population, helping the BJP secure a substantial number of votes. The alliance also led to the signing of a tripartite agreement aimed at resolving issues related to the history, land, political rights, economic development, identity, culture, and language of the indigenous people of Tripura.

Tipra Motha Party - Development Indigenous Tribes

Some of the major development and empowerment initiative of Tipra Motha for the indigenous tribes in Tripura includes:

- a) **Tripartite Agreement:** In March 2024, Tipra Motha signed a historic tripartite agreement with the central government and the Tripura state government. This agreement aims to address long-standing issues faced by the indigenous people, including land rights, political representation, economic development, identity, culture, and language.
- b) **Greater Tipland:** One of the core demands of Tipra Motha is the creation of a separate state called "Greater Tipland" for the indigenous tribes of Tripura. This initiative seeks to provide the indigenous communities with greater autonomy and control over their land and resources.
- c) **Empowerment of TTAADC:** Tipra Motha has been advocating for more powers for the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), including direct funding from the central government, its own police force, and a share of the state's gas exploration revenue.
- d) **Language and Cultural Rights:** The party has also been pushing for the Roman script to be declared the official script for the indigenous Kokborok language, which is spoken by the Tripuri people.
- e) **Economic Development:** Tipra Motha has been working towards improving the economic conditions of the indigenous tribes by focusing on sustainable development, job creation, and infrastructure development in tribal areas.

Observations

The TIPRA Motha Party's journey from grassroots mobilization to becoming a prominent force in Tripura's 2024 Lok Sabha elections underscores the increasing political consciousness and agency of the state's indigenous tribal population. This transformation is a testament to the party's dedication to regional autonomy, cultural preservation, and the socio-economic upliftment of tribal communities.

TIPRA Motha's focus on regional autonomy has been pivotal in its rise. The party's advocacy for the creation of 'Greater Tripaland' reflects its commitment to ensuring that the indigenous people of Tripura have greater control over their political and economic affairs. This emphasis on self-governance resonates deeply with the tribal population, who have long felt marginalized in the broader political landscape.

Cultural preservation is another cornerstone of TIPRA Motha's platform. The party has worked tirelessly to protect and promote the unique cultural heritage of Tripura's indigenous communities. This includes efforts to preserve traditional languages, customs, and practices, which are integral to the identity and pride of the tribal population.

The socio-economic upliftment of tribal communities has been a central focus of TIPRA Motha's agenda. The party has implemented various initiatives aimed at improving education, healthcare, and employment opportunities for the indigenous people of Tripura. These efforts have not only enhanced the quality of life for many but have also fostered a sense of empowerment and self-reliance within the community.

TIPRA Motha's rise is indicative of a broader trend in Indian politics towards the assertion of regional and identity-based demands. Across the country, there is a growing recognition of the importance of addressing the unique needs and aspirations of diverse communities. This shift is reflected in the increasing prominence of regional parties and movements that advocate for greater autonomy and representation for their constituencies.

While TIPRA Motha has achieved significant success, it continues to face challenges in navigating the complex political terrain of Tripura. The party must balance its regional and tribal-focused agenda with the broader political dynamics of the state and the country. This requires strategic alliances, effective governance, and continuous engagement with the community to address emerging issues and concerns.

The success of TIPRA Motha in the 2024 elections signals the growing

importance of tribal issues in Tripura's future political discourse. The party's achievements have brought greater visibility to the challenges and aspirations of the indigenous population, prompting other political entities to take these issues more seriously. As TIPRA Motha continues to evolve and expand its influence, it is likely to play a crucial role in shaping the political landscape of Tripura and advocating for the rights and interests of its tribal communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the TIPRA Motha Party's journey from grassroots mobilization to becoming a significant political force in Tripura's 2024 Lok Sabha elections underscores the transformative power of regional and identity-based movements in contemporary Indian politics. This remarkable ascent is a testament to the party's unwavering dedication to regional autonomy, cultural preservation, and the socio-economic upliftment of tribal communities. By championing the cause of the indigenous people of Tripura, TIPRA Motha has successfully resonated with a population that has long felt marginalized and underrepresented.

The party's emphasis on regional autonomy has empowered the indigenous communities, giving them a stronger voice in the political arena. Cultural preservation efforts have fostered a renewed sense of pride and identity among the tribal population, ensuring that their rich heritage is safeguarded for future generations. Additionally, TIPRA Motha's focus on socio-economic upliftment has led to tangible improvements in education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, enhancing the overall quality of life for many.

As TIPRA Motha continues to navigate the complex political landscape of Tripura, its success in the 2024 elections signals a broader trend towards the assertion of regional and identity-based demands in Indian politics. This journey not only highlights the party's achievements but also paves the way for a more inclusive and representative political future for Tripura's indigenous communities.

End Notes

- [1] The Tipra Motha Party (TMP) is also known as the Tipraha Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance. This regional party is popularly known as TIPRA Motha Party.
- [2] The Indigenous Nationalist Party of Twipra (INPT) was a regional party in the Indian state of Tripura. Bijoy Kumar Hrangkhawl was the president of the party.^[1] It merged with the Tipraha Indigenous

Progressive Alliance (TIPRA) party on 11 June 2021. The INPT was formed as a merger of the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura and the Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti in 2002.

- [3] The Tipraland State Party (TSP) is a regional political party in Tripura. It was founded on October 25, 2015, by Chitta Ranjan Debbarma, a retired Tripura Civil Service officer. The party's main demand is to elevate the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) to statehood under the name "Tipraland"
- [4] The Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura (IPFT) is a regional political party in Tripura. The party was united into the Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura (INPT) in 2001, but split out in 2009. The party joined with the BJP in the 2018 Tripura Legislative Assembly election, winning eight of the eight contested seats. The party received 7.5% of total votes cast. The BJP won 36 seats, giving the BJP-IPFT coalition a two-thirds majority in the Legislative Assembly with 44 members.

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