

A Historic Win of BJP by Overthrowing the Left Front Government Who Ruled Tripura for 25 Years in a Row from 1993 to 2018

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In the 2019 general elections, the BJP was able to open its account in Tripura. Its candidates – Rebati Tripura from East Tripura and Pratima Bhowmik from West Tripura – won by a massive margin of votes. Before Tripura state assembly elections had witnessed historic win over communist party in 2018, the BJP, has already expanded its electoral footprint to four of the seven states in the region. It was already in power in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. But the win in Tripura State Assembly-2018 was special and historic because it not only unseated the five-term regime of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, but it also managed to increase its vote share from about 1% in the last election to a little over 42.5 percent which is only marginally below to that of the CPM at 43.2%. Subsequently adding victory to BJP at the Lok Sabha election 2019. It is important to assess the historic win of BJP party in justifying the basic factors that contributed largely towards the victory of BJP in Lok Sabha Election 2019.

Tripura, has only two constituencies, Tripura East and Tripura West. The state, with a population of 36.74 lakhs (2011 census) voted in two phases in the Loksabha elections of 2019. With the ruling BJP emerging as a potent political force, the state witnessed a multi-corner contest in the Lok Sabha seats, which were generally won either by Left parties or the Congress ever since the state was formed in 1972. The CPI (M) had ruled the state for 25 years in a row from 1993 to 2018 and for altogether 35 years including a decade long stretch from 1978 to 1988. Though CPI (M) won both Lok Sabha seats in Tripura in 2014. But in the State Assembly Elections-2018, BJP in alliance with IPFT (state regional party of Tripura) came to power for the first time winning 36 of the 60 seats overthrowing the Left government in the state. The BJP managed to get 43.59 per cent of the valid votes, while the IPFT bagged eight seats and 7.38 per cent votes. The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-

M)-led Left Front won 16 seats and bagged 44.35 per cent votes while the Congress could manage only less than 02 per cent of the votes as most of their workers joined the BJP before the polls.

Tripura West Constituency includes Agartala, the state capital and covers both rural and urban segments. Sharing an international border with Bangladesh, this constituency is dominated by the Bengali community. The other constituency i.e. Tripura East constituency is also inhabited by both ST and Non-ST residents and is mainly dominated by Bengali Community. The total number of voters during Lok Sabha Election – 2019 in Tripurawere 26,05,325. The number of male voters were 13,19,693 while female voters were 12,85,618 and third gender is 14. The first time voters in the age group of 18-19 years were 39,077. The total number of polling stations set up were 3324. The state has 100% Elector Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) coverage. In Tripura West Constituency seat, the ruling BJP has fielded party's General Secretary Smt. Pratima Bhowmik; the CPI-M re-nominated its sitting MP and trade union leader Shri Sankar Prasad Datta and the Congress has nominated Shri Subal Bhowmik, the renowned political leader of the state. In Tripura East Constituency seat, the three main contenders were CPI-M's sitting MP and the party's leading Scheduled Tribe (ST) leader Shri Jitendra Chowdhury; then from BJP's side Shri Rehati Mohan Tripura and then from Congress' side Rajkumari Pragya Debbarman, the elder sister of state Congress chief Pradyot Bikram ManikyaDebbarman.

Data released by the Election Commission of India (ECI) shows that in the general elections, the Congress's vote share in East Tripura Lok Sabha constituency was 26.58%. In the West Tripura constituency, it bagged 24.18% of the votes, thus emerging as the BJP's main challenger. The CPI(M), which ruled the state for two decades and pocketed both the Lok Sabha seats since 1996, was third in the constituencies, with 19.22% (East Tripura) and 15.51% (West Tripura) vote shares. A study of these vote shares adds weight to the argument that in these elections, like in West Bengal, the BJP's gained at the expense of the Left. While in the East Tripura constituency, the BJP received 46.12% of the vote, it took home 51.77% of the votes in West Tripura.

The Congress Party's Stand

After worst electoral defeat in the State Assembly Elections of 2018, the opposition Congress seems to have rapidly improved in terms of public support for votes. The Lok Sabha election results presents a different profile of political preferences in the state. That was evident

from the results of the two Lok Sabha seats of the state in 2019. During assembly elections of 2018, Congress Party had lost in the entire 58 seats it had contested, securing barely 2% of votes. Out of 60 assembly segments that constitute the West and East Tripura loksabha seats, Congress candidates actually led comfortably in 9 segments. These 9 segments includesimna (ST), Mandai (ST), Takarjala (ST), Ramchandraghat (ST), Asharambari (ST), Ampinagar (ST), Karamcherra (ST), Boxanagar, and Kailasahar. Needless to say, massive swing of minority votes in favour of Congress in Boxanagar and Kailasahar had given the party massive leads against the ruling BJP. A significant swing of indigenous tribal votes away from CPI (M) and IPFT had helped the party earn considerable leads in 7 segments out of 20 indigenous tribal (ST) reserve assembly segments across West and East Tripura seats. The newly elected state Pradesh Congress Committee chief, Pradyot Manikya Barman, led from the front in these elections. He succeeded in injecting much-needed vigor into party workers to compete with the BJP's enthusiastic ground workers. His campaign, "*Poila Jati, Ulo Party*" (First the community, then the party), was tailored keeping in mind the opposition to the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in the tribal areas. It resonated to a considerable extent.

Influence of Royal Family During Lok Sabha Election -2019

A matter of serious concern and significance that the poll results spawned for the BJP-IPFT combine was that in the Karamcherra (ST) seat represented by BJP MLA Dibachandra Hrangkhawal, BJP had polled only 9600 votes against 14,490 secured by Congress candidate Pragya Kumari Debi. In the assembly election-2018 BJP candidate had polled 19,397 votes against only 739 polled by Congress. But IPFT, the junior partner in the ruling coalition, suffered the worst fate by polling number of votes in each and every assembly segment of the two Lok Sabha seats. Even the IPFT's two senior most leaders and ministers, Shri Narendra Chandra Debbarma and Shri Mevar Kumar Jamatia trailed far behind the Congress. In the state assembly election-2018, Shri Narendra Chandra Debbarma had polled 22056 votes but in Lok Sabha-2019 Polls he secured only 8332 votes. Similarly, Shri Mevar Kumar Jamatia who had polled 19188 votes in the State assembly-2018 polls secured only 5971 with a steep fall of deep concern for the party as well as its dominant partner. These were attributed to multiple factors like candidature of 'Kumari Pragya Debi, the royal scion and her brother's ethno centric slogan 'puilajati, ola party' and also to general disillusionment of tribal voters with the regional IPFT, partner in the state's coalition and the BJP, the dominant partner. Unstinted support

from the other regional party , INPT had also played a key role in boosting Congress's votes . Another significant feature of the LS poll outcome is that among the 36 seats won alone by the BJP in the state assembly polls of 2018, the party's vote share fell in as many as 13 assembly segments including Mohanpur, Banamalipur, Krishna Nagar (6-Agartala), Charilam (ST) etc. However, it is worth mentioning that in 23 state assembly segments the BJP's vote share registered a rise and this includes Pratapgarh , Kamalasagar, BishalgarhSonamura, Dhanpur, Khowai where the opposition CPI (M) failed to retain its lead in none of the sixteen seats the party had won in the state assembly-2018 polls.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill

The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill become a contentious issue in the Lok Sabha Polls in Tripura. The BJP's alliance partner Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura (IPFT) and the Indigenous Nationalist Party of Twipra (INPT) had bitterly opposed the Bill. The indigenous parties of the state said the amendment would encourage illegal migration of non-tribals into Scheduled Tribe areas. The Congress state president Maharaj Madyut Kishore Manikya Debbarman had opposed the bill and the other regional political party joined hands to oppose the bill together with the congress party. Which subsequently influence the sentiments of the Indigenous people of the state and their existence for the future. That fetched larger support in favour of congress party during Lok Sabha election 2019.

National Register Of Citizens

The series of trouble took its pace with the call for NRC. The “National Registrar of Citizenship” that was revised in the Assam as under the supervision of the Apex court of India, has prompted the smaller range political parties of the state such as NCT and INPT along with social and student's fronts like TSF, NESO and civil societies to come under a single roof demanding the same for the state. Depending on a fabricated fact which is somehow pressed to be believed in the indigenous inhabited areas, the previous government had sheltered a large population coming from neighbouring Bangladesh to get electoral benefits, the demand of exercising NRC came to surface. Accordingly, independent petitions were filed in the Supreme Court from both the apolitical and political fronts which was initially the beginning of the emergence of a new equation. Introduction of NRC in Assam boosted the support of the aborigines in getting larger votes during assembly election 2018. The

anticipation of application of NRC in Tripura motivated the ethnic people of Tripura where lacks of influx changed the demography of the state with over population and illegal migration from Bangladesh.

The Common People Yearned for Better Change

Tripura lacked a strong opposition party. Until the 2013 election, Congress, being the main opposition to the Left government, gained approximately over 35% of votes. But as Sudip Roy Barman, the present member of State Legislative Assembly sated that *voters in Tripura were divided into two groups — Left and anti-Left. Till a few days ago, Congress was the main opposition party but when people saw a nexus between the Congress and Communists they lost confidence and were looking for a party that could dislodge the state government. Finally, they found it in the BJP under Narendra Modi's leadership.*”The huge support for BJP is the result of 25 years of monotonous rule and obsession lingering among a percentage of the people. After a period of 25 years, the common people yearned for a change; a change for something better. A change in the political rule.

Role and Contribution of Sunil Deodhar

The Role and contribution of Sunil Deodhar, the architect of BJP's Tripura win is credited with spectacular victory in Tripura assembly polls. Sunil Deodhar is a BJP politician, Swayamsevak, BJP National Secretary, state in charge of Tripura and was a national coordinator of the Northeast India communication Cell. Under his leadership, BJP achieved massive victory in Tripura.

Campaigns By Central Leaders

Several Union ministers regularly visited Tripura prior to the assembly election and reiterated the Modi government's promise of inclusive development. In the run up to the election, the BJP got its star campaigners Prime Minister Narendra Modi and party chief Amit Shah to address rallies in Tripura. Both slammed the Manik Sarkar government on the issue of development and asked people to vote for change.

BJP MP Hema Malini also addressed a public rally prior to election at Dhanpur assembly constituency, the home turf of Chief Minister Manik Sarkar. Mr. Manik Sarkar had won elections from the seat for four consecutive terms since 1998. She urged people to vote for the BJP

candidate from Dhanpur. She said that the “poor would only become poorer” under the Left Front government in Tripura and appealed to the people to vote for a change in the state”. PM Narendra Modi, Congress Chief Rahul Gandhi, BJP President Amit Shah, UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath, CPI leader Sitaram Yechury were among the big names who campaigned in the state. Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had released Vision Document for Tripura. BJP President Amit Shah addressed many public rallies and organized roadshows. Uttar Pradesh chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also sought votes for the party nominees.

Choosing People’s Issues

The BJP, in its ‘ChaloPaltai’ or Let’s Change campaign, consistently attacked the Manik Sarkar-led Left government on the issues of unemployment and corruption. Tripura’s unemployment figures at 19.7 per cent are the highest in India, according to Labour Bureau data. Addressing a rally in Tripura, Amit Shah attacked the Manik Sarkar government for rising unemployment and said that under the 25-year Left rule, the number of jobless youths rose from 25,000 to 7.33 lakh. The Manik Sarkar government also came under attack over its alleged role in the multi-crore Rose Valley chit fund scam and the pathetic 10323 school teachers’ employment issue who lost their job due to Left Front Government’s wrong recruitment policy.

Alliance with State Indigenous Party

By securing an alliance with the Indigenous People’s Front of Tripura (IPFT), the BJP which aimed at splitting the indigenous scheduled tribe votes have succeeded, otherwise normally voted for the CPI(M) party. The formation of “Tipraland”, a state within the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), under article 2 and 3 of the Indian Constitution is demanded by the IPFT as one of their political agenda. IPFT, the regional party decided to join hands with BJP in order to take cabinet authority in lobbying the demands of the indigenous people issue, particularly in fulfilling the demand of separate state, ‘Tipraland’.

Major Drawbacks of the Indigenous People’s Front of Tripura (IPFT) During Lok Sabha Election 2019

The major drawbacks of the Indigenous People’s Front of Tripura (IPFT) during Lok Sabha Elections in 2019 were circled around the weak

management of the party leaders as reported by the party leaders themselves. Some of the drawbacks are like raising the issue of Tripaland at the state assembly. The dream of the indigenous people to bring "Tripura Land" is not addressed in the Tripura Legislative Assembly by the existing 8 MLAs including two Cabinet Ministers. Addressing the "Tripura Land" issue in the villages has become only a statement and not practical as the leaders did not highlight the issues at state assembly anytime after they came to power in alliance with the BJP. The expectations of the common people was that it should be addressed at the Assembly and not in the villages during various party campaigns anymore. Secondly, the false allegations made against the Royal family members during Lok Sabha Elections campaigns hurt the sentiments of the public. Which ultimately weaken the vote share of the public. Thirdly, the party youths are not given priority in the party after it came to power. The youth leaders became silent either for personal gain or struggle against party ideology. Which eventually weakened the party backbone in harnessing the support of the common people in the indigenous areas. Fourthly, the allegations made against the party workers in harassing and bullying by the IPFT youth to other indigenous party leaders. E.g. AgorDebbarma, the senior regional party leader has slammed the party. Fifthly, IPFT don't address Tripura Land, CAB and NRC anymore. Sixthly, the allegation of attack made against Kumari Pragya Debbarman by the IPFT cadres has become a headline throughout the election period. And finally, the harassment cases logged against IPFT youths of about 700 youths was another important factor of the party lose in Lok Sabha Elections 2019. The party even though it came to power failed to bring justice to them. All these youths had to appear before the court on their own personal expenses. Many had to flee outside the state looking for safety and job opportunity for survival. Those active youths who were once the most active supporters of IPFT youth who withstood during various challenges of the party are scared of standing for the party and are struggling to fight their own cases in the court.