

Rural Local Body Elections & Community Presence in Island politics

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I. INTRODUCTION

Elections to local bodies at a regular interval is an essential features in three tier Panchyati Raj System which brought in 73rd. Amendment of Constitution .To bring a uniformity to all states local self institutions was main object of the new PRIs in 1993. However , many states have failed to implement the new Amendment in letter and spirit .But with the introduction of new PRIs system in A&N Islands in 1994 , the first three tier elections to both urban and rural bodies were held in Sept. 1995 . Since its inception , in every five years of gap, the local body elections are held .

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

(1) To analyses various aspects , issues ,dimensions related to rural local body elections (2) To examine changes in previous local body elections , how language and community identity reflect in panchayat elections (3) How national political scenario impacts on islands local body elections

Hypothesis of the study :Number of factors such as language , ethnic identity and community are responsible to determine the effectiveness of local body elections .

Elections to Three Tiers Panchayats

In the wake of 73rd Constitutional Amendment , the President of India promulgated the A & N Islands (Panchayat) Regulation ,1994, which came into force from April 1994.After the first post- 73rd Amendment elections to the three tiers PRI system held in September 1995 , the islands territory witnessed four more elections in 2000,2005,2010 & 2015 .PRI elections are contested on party lines in the islands .Since 1995 ,two national parties ,i.e., INC and BJP , along with other parties like CPM, DMK, AIADMK ,TDP have fielded candidates in the PRI elections . The elections to urban as well as rural bodies of Andaman and Nicobar Islands concluded on 19th. Sept .2015. The previous election in 2010 and recently concluded election (2015) of both urban and rural have left many significance in local politics for national and regional parties in Islands society .The five years gap in between two elections has made many changes among voters behaviours of these islands . First , in 2014, 16th. Lok Sabha elections held and 10 years Congress led UPA collision government was replaced by BJP led NDA . Second, after a gap of 20 years BJP as single party got clear mandate in 543 member House of Representatives. Hence , people as well as political commentators are expecting a change in islands local body elections in Sept. 2015.

As BJP has successfully retained the lone Lok Sabha seat by defeating its rival candidate from Congress party in 2014. The 16th. Lok Sabha elections had given a favourable mandate to BJP candidate ,the sitting MP , Mr. Bishnu Pada Ray once again got support from Diglipur Bengali dominated area to Port Blair Tahsils . Even, in Municipal area , the ward wise votes polled revealed that BJP led all the wards and INC got second position . Except Nicobar tribal dominated district , the traditional vote bank of Congress party ,where Shri Kuldeep Rai Sharma received 88.74% votes and BJP candidate shri BP Ray got only 5.29% . In every Tahsil , BJP got more percentage of votes than Congress (Biswas :2015) .This result was not unexpected as the performance of INC for last five years was not satisfactory at national level . Mr. M R Bhakta ,Bengali settler from Diglipur , the Congress nominee and seven time winner of lone Lok Sabha seat from UT was forced to step down to contest in 2009 election .In his place Mr. Kuldeep Rai Sharma was the party nominee , who failed to retain his popularity among rural voters as well as Bengali voters too. However , Mr. B P Ray , being a Bengali filled up the vacuumed that created in Bengali dominated rural areas after Bhakta was ousted from Congress party .(Biswas;2015).

The recent PRIs elections were held for 35 Zilla Parisad (17 for Middle- North Andaman district and 18 for South Andaman district) seats , 70 Panchayat Samity seats ,656 Gram Panchayat members and 70 Pradhans . Main political battle was held in between Congress and BJP .But in 2010 elections TMC was also contested both in urban and also rural elections. Perhaps , in 2015 election neither TMC nor other regional parties like RJD, TDP , DMK , NCP , CPM could fill any single candidate in rural areas in Panchayat elections .It had become a high profile and prestige war for both national parties . To attract the voters , in rural areas , BJP engaged film actress , Ms. Rupa Ganguly , and BJP West Bengal Unit Present Shri Rahul Sinha in Bengali dominated areas .

Panchayat Elections 2015

Results of Panchayat Elections 2010 & 2015.

Name of parties	Panchayat Members		Pradhans		Samities members		ZillParishad members	
	2010	2015	2010	2015	2010	2015	2010	2015
INC	299	262	32	22	27	19	17	12
BJP	190	306	16	44	21	45	10	22
TMC	70	--	7	--	9	--	3	--
CPM	--	8	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others	51	7	4	-	-	1	-	-
Indep.	71	73	10	4	8	5	1	1
Total	681	656	69	70	65	70	31	35

The elections in between 2010 and 2015 of A& N Panchayats have shown many remarkable change in Gram Sabha , election of Pradhan,Panchayat Samity and Zilla Parisad .In 2010 elections , Congress was wining party and second position was hold by BJP . In 2010 Gram sabha elections , INC was captured 299 seats and BJP was 190 , a difference of 100 seats , and TMC got third position by capturing 70 seats .But in 2015 elections BJP got 306 seats and INC satisfied with 262 . TMC could not find a single place in any posts ,which was won 7 Pradhan post , 9 Samiti post and 3 Zilla Parisad in 2010 elections .All the seats have been shifted to BJP side .Surprisingly , other regional parties like DMK, AIADMK, RJD, CPM, SP, BSP , have failed to put their candidates and won a single seat in Pradhan, Samity or Zilla Parisad elections .The entire votes of local body elections has been polarized in BJP and Congress .However , in every election , the independents have impressive position ,who successfully occupied good response from their area . It is happened because , majority of the independents are basically denied tickets by their party in spite they have popularity in their areas . After denying party tickets to them , either they joined opposition party or contested independently and won the seat by their own credits . In 2010 elections, Congress captured both Zilla Parisad by winning 17 seats and BJP was satisfied with 10 seats only. However , in 2015 elections , Congress seats has come down to 12 and BJP won 23 seats, out of 35 members of two Zilla parisad (South Andaman 18 seats and Middle- North 17 seats).Both Zilla Parisad are now under BJP's control .Out of 18 members in South Andaman Zilla Parisad , 10 seat captured by BJP , 4 members were from Bengali . Similarly, 17 members Middle-North Zilla parisad 9 are Bengali of whom 8 are BJP .The uniqueness of Islands local body from Gram Panchayat to Zilla Parisad is ,the islanders have the representatives from all major linguistic /communities like Bengali, Tamil , Telegue, Malayalam, Local Born (pre-1942 community) and Ranchiwala .

District –wise Voting percentage of local body elections of 2015

Tashil /South Andaman	Total voters		Male		Female	
	Voters	Vote Polled (%)	Voters	Vote polled (%)	Voters	Vote polled (%)
Port Blair		12424		6617		5807
Ferrargunj		33772		17268		16504
Little Andaman		8902		4619		4283
Total =	75476	55098(73%)	39588	28504 (72%)	36430	26594(73%)
Tahsil North & Middle Andaman						
Diglipur		22398		11644		10754
Mayabunder		13742		7130		6612

Rangat		19583		10065		9518
Total =	75301	55723(74%)	38971	28839(74%)	35845	26884(75%)
Tahsil Nicobar						
	4912	3586(73%)	2666	1920 (72%)	2282	1666(73%)

In local body elections , the rural vote turned out is considerably more than urban votes . On an average 73% voters have casted votes in 2015 elections , which is all time highest in compared to all India average .However , the voters turned out of female is one percent more than male voters .

Elections to Gram Panchayat members & Party affiliations 2015

S. N	Name of tashil	Elected members & party affiliation											
		INC (%)		BJP (%)		CPM (%)		TDP (%)		others (%)		Indep.(%)	
2	Diglipur	47	34.4	68	49.64	8	5.84	-	-	-	-	14	10.21
3	Mayabunder	37	46.84	38	48.10	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	5.06
4	Rangat	60	43.47	65	47.10	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	9.42
5	Port Blair	31	50.00	30	48.38	-	-	-	-	-	-	01	1.63
6	Ferrarjung	62	34.08	73	40.11	-	-	2	1.09	5	2.65	40	21.98
7	L/ Andaman	8	27.58	20	68.98	-	-	-	-	-	-	01	3.43
8	Camp bell Bay	18	58.04	13	41.93	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	-
	Total	262	39.87	306	46.57	8	1.20	2	.30	5	2.65	73	11.14

The elections to 656 Gram Panchayat ward members of 70 Gram Panchayat in Andaman including Great Nicobar of Nicobar district , the BJP had won 306 seats (46.57%) and Congress got 262 (39.87%) .Whereas , by capturing 73 seats , the independent candidates had given surprised to the other parties . In Ferrargunj Tahsil , 40 seats captured by independent candidates , whereas BJP got 73 and Congress 62 respectively . The victory of independents in this tashil is mainly happened because internal revelry among party members over the selections of candidates for contesting in gram sabha member’s elections. Most of the winning independent candidates denied tickets in spite of their popularity among local people . Some time language / community feeling has strongly worked behind selection of candidates by voters .

In the local body elections, the same community / language sentiment is strongly present in all three tiers since 1995 .The results of the last two Panchayat elections in rural Andaman also proof that both Congress and BJP won majority seats in Bengali areas by sponsoring Bengali candidates .The party wants to capture three tier panchayats must be chosen Bengali candidate in Rural areas , otherwise the party could not win ..

S.N.	Name of Samities	Samity members against Political Parties								Total
		INC (%)		BJP (%)		Other (%)		Indep. (%)		
1	Diglipur	2	13.33	12	80.00	-	-	1	6.67	15
2	Mayabunder	4	50.00	4	50.00	-	-	-	-	8
3	Rangat	3	21.42	10	81.42	-	-	1	7.16	14
4	Port Blair	3	50.00	3	50.00	-	-	-	-	6
5	Ferrorjung	4	21.05	11	57.89	1	5.26	3	15.78	19
6	L/Andaman	2	40.00	3	60.00	-	-	-	-	5
7	Campbell bay	1	33.33	2	66.67	-	-	-	-	3
	Total =	19	27.14	45	64.28	1	1.42	5	7.14	70

Sources: Election Commission Notification No. 5-2 /EC/A&N/ 2015 dt. 23.09.2015.

The elections of Samiti members of all 7 Tashils in 2015 revealed that BJP had landslide victory in Diglipur Panchayat Samiti . The party has captured 12 (80%) seats out of 15 and INC got only 2 seats , one seat gone to independent . However , in Mayabunder Tahsil , both BJP & INC shared 4 seats each . In fourteen

members Rangat Panchayat Samity (PS) ,BJP captured 10 (81.42%) seats and Congress satisfied with 3 seats , one seat gone to independent .Again , the 6 members Port Blair Panchayat Samity , both Congress and BJP shared equal number of seats (3 each) .The Congress party had faced a heavy lose in Ferrargunj Panchayat Samity elections . Though once this tahsil had a strong Congress supporters , but in Panchayat elections , the party got only 4 seats and BJP captured 11(57.89%) seats .Both in Little Andaman & Campbell Bay Panchayat Samities , BJP own majority seats and formed the Samities .Above and all the results of all Panchayat Samities of Andaman has shown a great debacle for Congress party .The BJP captured all 7 Panchayat Samities . The results of Samity elections has indicated that the performance of BJP was good in Bengali dominated areas like Diglipur, Rangat , Ferrargunj and Little Andaman .The very interesting thing has come out from this elections that all the regional parties like DMK, NCP, TMC , CPM had lost their credibility among rural voters . In 2010 elections TMC had got 7 seats , but this elections , the party did not get a single seat in any area.

S.N.	Name of Tashil	Elected Pradhans Political Parties								Total
		INC	(%)	BJP	(%)	Other	(%)	Indep.	(%)	
1	Diglipur	1	6.67	14	93.33	-	-	-	-	15
2	Mayabunder	4	50.00	4	50.00	-	-	-	-	8
3	Rangat	5	35.71	7	50.00	-	-	2	14.29	14
4	Port Blair	3	50.00	3	50.00	-	-	-	-	6
5	Ferrarjung	7	31.57	12	57.90	-	-	-	-	19
6	L/Andaman	1	33.33	2	66.67	-	-	2	10.53	5
7	Campbell bay	1	33.33	2	66.67	-	-	-	-	3
	Total =	22	30.88	44	63.23	-	-	4	7.14	70

Source :E C Notification No. 5-2 /EC/A&N/ 2015 dt. 23.09.2015.Elected Pradhans -2015.

The Diglipur Block is having 15 Gram Panchayats, of which 13 Gram panchayats were captured by Bengali candidates and 14 Gram Panchayats are under BJP party . This Tahsil is basically dominated by Bengali population settled under rehabilitation schemes by government of India. Very surprising thing is once this area had a strong hold of Congress Party both parliamentary elections as well as local body . Mr. M R Bhakta , the eight time MP from Congress party was a settler in Diglipur block . In 2015 , Panchayat elections expect Paschimsagar Panchayat , all 14 Panchayats had gone under BJP .After ousted of Mr. Bhakta from Congress party , the area has become a strong hold of BJP led by another Bengali MP Mr. B P Roy. Out of 70 post of Pradhans , 44 post captured by BJP .Of which 34 post of Pradhan are from Bengali community .In Diglipur ,Little Andaman, Rangat and Port Blair Tashils are dominated by Bengali population , hence majority Pradhans are from Bengali . Of which 24 Bengali Pradhans are from BJP.

Table: Bengali representatives in three tier local governance from 1995- 2015.

Gram Panchayat	Panchayat Samities									
Year	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Total representatives	653	676	664	682	656	67	67	67	69	70
Bengali representatives	265	252	255	262	278	29	26	26	30	32
%of Bengali representatives	40.58	37.28	38.40	38.41	42.71	43.28	38.80	38.80	43.47	45.71

As the rural Andaman is Bengali dominated area, so it is reflected in local body elections .It is undeniable fact that the Bengali enjoys the rural politics by capturing the majority seats in Gram Sabha , post of Pradhans , Samity members and Zilla Parisad . The elections results of Gram Panchayats members and Samity also showing the same thing . Since 1995 first three tier Panchayat elections started , the representation of Bengali members in all level is around 38% to 43% as it is tally with its corresponding population ratio separately .

Table: Bengali representatives in three tier local governance from 1995- 2015.

	Zilla Parisad of two districts					Panchayat Pradhans				
Year	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Total representatives	30	30	30	31	35	67	67	67	69	70
Bengali representatives	16	14	12	12	15	27	25	31	32	34
%of Bengali representatives	53.33	46.66	40	38.70	44.11	40.29	37.31	46.26	46.37	48.57

As per the population ratio on the language bases of post independent census , Bengali is major linguistic group (30%- 35%) in these islands . Rural population of Bengali is more than its island's average . Hence , in rural political representative body (three tier Panchayats) , the Bengali representatives are increasing significantly in every elections . The table shown the factual data of Bengali's presence in all level in all time .In case of Zilla Parisad and post of Pradhans , the representation of Bengali is in between 37% to 53 % .In case of post of Pradhan, the percentage ratio of Bengali is increasing in every election . However , representation of Zilla Parisad of Bengali was more in 1995 elections , but its subsequent three elections , the representation has been decreased . Perhaps , in 2015 elections again it presence in both Zilla Parisads has been increased .

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is observed that in islands elections language / community feeling has strongly worked behind selection of candidates by voters . Voters sentiments towards their community was so heavy as they denied the party ideology and they choice their own community candidates. In Andaman from Lok Sabha to Panchayat elections, voters are so positive towards their own language or community rather party ideology .Like other states in Mainland India caste, sub-castes is strongly present in very elections . All political parties always follow the caste line at the time of selection of candidates .From parliament elections to Panchayats including state Legislatures dominating caste in a particular area is certainly consider at the time of selection of candidates .However , in Andaman & Nicobar constituency , no such caste card is playing by any political party . Nonetheless, in all parliamentary elections from 1967 to 2014 the sentiment of the major community is always taken into account by both Congress party and now by BJP also. Sooner or later it was realized that the dominancy of Bengali community is growing strong , the Congress party changed its strategy by denying candidature to Mr. K R Ganesan ,the seating MP from Local Born Community (This community was so strong in Island politics) , in 1977 Lok Sabha elections and welcomed Mr M R Bhakta , a settler from Diglipur Tasil , Bengali dominated area as a sure candidate .Similarly , BJP also followed the same strategy and supported Mr. Bishnu Pada Ray , the founder of the BJP in these islands as the party candidate since 1991 Lok sabha elections . He is also backing by rural Bengali voters and won the seat thrice (1999-2004, 2009- 2014 & 2014 -2019) .

The reports of Panchayati institutions in the Andaman district (both South Andaman and Middle and North Andaman) have revealed that the political representation of Bengali settlers (including non-settlers) at grass root level in Middle and North district is basically in a very good position. In North Andaman gram Panchayats, 80%-90% Panchayat constituencies and the post of Pradhan are held by the Bengalis. Similarly , in Middle Andaman which extends from Uttara to Pahalgao of Mayabundar , majority of Gram Panchayats and Post of Pradhans are held by Bengalis .But in the Panchayat of Bakultala, Rangat, Nimbutala , the Bengali settlers have lost their political grip as the non-settlers of Bengali and Non-Bengali are majority in these areas. Moreover, in panchayats of Diglipur, Kalighat, Mayabundar, Rangat , Bakultala, and Nimbutala which are commercial urban as well as administrative headquarters of the block level , the presence of Tamil , Telugu and other linguistic groups are more in number , hence Panchayat administration has gone to the non-Bengali groups. In Little Andaman out of four Gram Panchayats , 2 are fully under the control of Bengali as these villages have been developed by Bengali settlers . Both Havelock and Neil island are absolutely inhabited by Bengali settlers . Hence , all the Panchayats and post of Pradhans belong to Bengali . The political picture in South Andaman block is something different .The Panchayat Ferrergunj , Shoal Bay , Guptapara ,Chouldari, Humphrygunj and Tushnabad are the old settlement of Bengali people ,but over the time ,a good number of non-settlers of other communities have settled down . Therefore, all these Panchayats are being represented by multi-ethnic communities .Nonetheless , a good number of Bengali members are found in these Gram Panchayats.

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