

# Assam Assembly Election 2016: BJP's Rainbow Alliance

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## ABSTRACT

*During the post independence period the electoral politics of Assam had been dominated by Indian National Congress (INC) up to mid 80s except one occasion in 1978 when Janata party became the single largest by winning 63 seats in 126 member State Assembly. But towards the end of 70s the socio-political situation of the state started changing significantly with the beginning of a mass agitation by different organisation mainly All Assam Students Union( AASU) demanding deportation of illegal immigrants from the neighbouring countries who considered to be a threat to the identity of the indigenous people. This agitation was culminated with the signing of Assam Accord which gave a breakthrough to the regional politics of the state leading to the formation of the First Regional Party Government in 1985 which is considered as one of the most important political event in the history of Assam. AGP, s dominance in the politics of the state was short-lived. As a national political party BJP has been present in the electoral politics of Assam since long back without any remarkable achievement except in 1991 and 2006 when the party won 10 seats in both the assembly election. But the party gradually could catch hold of the situation capitalising its grass roots mobilisation during the last three consecutive terms of congress rule from 2006 to 2016. In this article an attempt is being made to analysis the factors and circumstances that led to the formation of BJP government in 2016.*

## 1. Introduction

It has been observed that during the 1980s governance has become a primordial issue of polity of the state across the nation. There has been a shift from multi-dimensional understanding of democracy to a one directional understanding of good governance. It was one of the major focuses of the BJP before the 2014 Lok Sabha election. The party tried to consolidate the voters on the issues of development and good governance in the 2016 assembly election in Assam against the mis- governance of Congress led government for three consecutive terms. 2016 assembly election in Assam was characterised by different factors like anti-incumbency against the three terms rule

Congress government widespread corruption that made people desperate for a change. BJP could catch hold of the situation and fought the election with well-thought and high voltage campaign. The formation of BJP government at the centre under the leadership of Narendra Modi, could also influence the perception of the voters to some extent. People looked at BJP as the only visible a viable alternative to Congress. This assembly election changes the nature of political dynamics of the state and made a political history.

The 2016 assembly election held with a total number of 1990755 electorates, which is an increase of around 18 lakhs from the 2011 election. Out of them 16891142 electorates voted in the election, which increased the poll percentage electoral history of Assam to 84.26 percentages. In this election, five national parties, 3 state parties, 29 state parties from other states put up 690 candidates along with 496 independents candidate. BJP, which contested in 89 seats secured 60 with a vote share of 29.51 percentages and

became the largest party, which was followed by Congress, which contested in 122 constituencies, won only 26 seats with a vote share of 30.96 percentages. AGP contested in 30 seats secured 14 with a vote share of 8.14 percentages, AIUDF contested in 74 seats won 13 with a vote share of 13.05 percentages, BPF, which contested in 13 Constituencies, secured 12 seats with a vote share of 3.94 percentages.

**Table 1.1: Winning Political Party Performance Assembly Election in 2016**

Party	Contested	Won	Vote Polled	Percentage
BJP	89	60	4992185	29.51%
INC	122	26	5238655	30.96%
AGP	30	14	1377482	8.14%
AIUDF	74	13	2207945	13.05%
BPF	13	12	666057	3.94%
IND	496	1	1867531	11.04%

Source: Election Commission of India, Statistical Report Assembly Election in Assam -2006

This time only one independent candidate out of 496 returned in the election rest of the parties could not manage to open their tally in this election. Congress setback and BJP's spectacular victory in 2016 election in Assam can be attributed to multiple factors and developments.

Firstly, the formation of BJP government in the centre under the leadership of Narendra Modi who had along with the party president Amit Shah made different promises during the election campaign for 2014 Lok Sabha election in Assam. This time BJP could have mobilized the voters of Assamese mainstream in the name of cultural safeguard of their identities.

BJP promised to put off the entire immigrated foreigners from Bangladesh and made the local people mainly anti-foreigner movement supporters united.

Secondly, during the latter part of the third term of congress government, there was unprecedented conflict among the party leaders. A dissident group was created under the leadership of Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, a powerful leader and minister of Tarun Gogoi's Cabinet. Both Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi and Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma stood face to face with each other and conflict started over certain issues, which could not be well settled by the party's high command leading to the joining of Dr Sarma in BJP with some of his supporters and sitting MLAs.

Thirdly, the effort of BJP to make a rainbow alliance with the local parties mainly with the AGP, BPF, ASDC and Tiwa Autonomous Council in which they succeeded in putting greater challenge to both Congress and AIUDF. BJP could project both Congress and AIUDF as the parties of religious minorities, which were projected to be the major challenge to language culture and other identities of indigenous inhabitants of Assam.

Fourthly, stagnation came in the functioning of the congress led government due to internal conflicts for which development could not be expedited as expected by the people of the state. The departments covering the primary sectors like health, education suffered as the Minister in Charge Dr. H.B Sarma could not give enough effort and time who otherwise was not interested in doing so due to his conflict with the Chief Minister.

Fifthly, another important factor, of BJP's victory in the election was the presence of the party in the state since the first assembly election in the name of Jana Sangha (BJS). The BJP workers were silently working at the grass root levels in the state to strengthen their organization. However, as a political party it could not emerge as a powerful force prior to 1991 assembly election where it was succeeded in winning 10 seats for the first time.

Sixthly, BJP could well capitalize the Hindu religious institutions and culture in the state. They appropriated the image of Srimanta Sankar Deva, a popular cultural icon of the state who prefaced Ek Saran Naam Dharma to mobilize people's sentiments. Moreover, the party workers used religious institutions like Sattras, Namghars and Temples to popularize their Hindutva ideology in the Brahmaputra Valley of the state. To catch up with the people of lower Assam area where most of the people were the devotees of Shakti Peeths,

BJP and Sangh Parivar used the symbol of Maa Kamakhya who is very much revered in Assam. They also used the image of Assamese heroes like Lachit Barphukan and historical incidents like Battle of Saraighat in their campaigning during the election process.

Seventhly, another important agenda, which helped BJP to gain majority in 2016 assembly election in Assam, was the slogans of "Jati Mati Veti" (Nationality Land Place Residence) and the propaganda of "Paribartan" (Change).

Eighthly, before the election BJP promised to give ST status to most of the indigenous communities of Assam. It helped the party in gaining support of the people from these communities.

Ninthly, another important issue for which Congress had to face setback in both 2014 Lok Sabha and 2016 assembly election was the stand of its government towards the popular people's movements, particularly the movements led by various organizations like, KMSS (Krisak Mukti Sangram Sammittee), India against Corruption, etc.

Tenthly, most important factor for BJP's gain in this election was the polarisation of people in the name of religion and communities. BJP not only targeted congress but also AIUDF as its main enemies. The leaders of the party could make people understand that AIUDF has become a challenge to the political space of the indigenous people. People were tried to be convince that AIUDF is party of religious minorities most of them are doubtful immigrants (particularly of muslim origin).

## 2. Conclusion

BJP as a political party had not been able to step into the politics of Assam for a long period of time in spite of its strategic approaches. The party has always been tried to make alliances with local regional parties mainly with AGP from the very beginning. The party won only one seats in 1985, 10 seats in 1991, 4 seats in 1996, 8 seats in 2001, and 10 seats in 2006, 5 seats in 2011. But there has been a gradual increase in the vote share of the party starting from 0.07 percentages in 1985, 6.42 percentages in 1991, 10.41 percentages in 1996, 9.35 percentages in 2001, 9.98 percentages in 2006 and 11.47 percentages in 2011 assembly election. In 2016 election party vote share increased up to 29.51 percentages almost similar to Congress party who got 30.96 percentage of vote share in this election. With a similar vote share BJP won 60 seats and Congress got 26 seats. This has happened only due to Sharpe polarisation of the voters in multi-dimensional direction.

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