

**CHANGING CONTOURS OF A FEDERAL POLITY IN NORTH EAST
INDIA: THE RISE OF THE BJP IN ASSAM, MANIPUR AND
ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

*Thesis submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

TARUN GOGOI



**CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY**

NEW DELHI 110067

INDIA

2021



JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

New Delhi-110067

Telephone No : 011-26704413 Fax : 011-26741504

email : cpsjnu09@gmail.com

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, **Changing Contours of a Federal Polity in North East India: The Rise of the BJP in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh**, submitted by **Mr. Tarun Gogoi** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, has not been previously submitted in part or in full for any other degree of this university or any other university/institution.

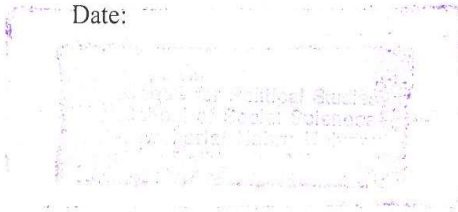
We recommend this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Ph.D.

Shefali Jha

Prof. Shefali Jha

(Supervisor)

Date:



Narender Kumar 05/10/21
Prof. Narender Kumar

(Chairperson) Narender Kumar
अध्यक्ष / Chairperson
राजनीतिक अध्ययन केन्द्र / Centre for Political Studies
सामाजिक विज्ञान संस्थान / School of Social Sciences
जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
Jawaharlal Nehru University
नई दिल्ली / New Delhi - 110067

*Dedicated to my
Maa Kusum Gogoi
&
My all respected Teachers*

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Acknowledgements

While writing this thesis, I must acknowledge the contributions, guidance and extensive discussions I had with the individuals without whom this research would not have been possible. In completing this work, I must acknowledge my supervisor, my family, and Lord Ganesha, who have been constant sources of positive encouragement and building up of confidence within me.

First, I would like to convey my sincere thanks to my respected supervisor Prof. Shefali Jha ma'am for her relentless guidance; without ma'am constant support and guidance, this work would not have been possible. Ma'am has always been very supportive and available to have extensive discussions over my ideas and gave me enough intellectual space to frame my ideas and help me to improve my research. For her perpetual guidance and mentoring, I will always be grateful to ma'am. The second person in this research process I have to acknowledge is Dr. Vikas Tripathi sir, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science, Gauhati University for his unwavering support that has enriched my understanding and gave me significant insights in developing my arguments in definite forms.

I deeply acknowledge and extend my sincere thanks to all my respected teachers in my academic life. My mother has always been my constant support who has sacrificed a lot to bring me to this position. It gives me immense pleasure to dedicate this work to my mother and my all-respected teachers.

While writing this thesis, I am indebted to Prof. Sandhya Goswami Baidew for her valuable suggestions during my presentation of this research in an international seminar organised by Centre for South East Asian Studies (CSEAS), Gauhati University. I want to thank Prof. Khan Kham Suan Hausing from Hyderabad University for helping me to frame my ideas during the initial phase of this research. My Research adversarial committee at the Centre Dr. Rajarshi Dasgupta Sir, Dr. Harish S. Wankhede sir, I am grateful for your valuable input during my presentations. I want to thank Prof. Dwaipayana Bhattacharyya, Prof. Anupama Roy, Prof. Asha Sarangi, Prof. Vidhu Verma, Prof. Narender Kumar and Dr. V. Bijukumar sir at Centre for Political Studies for their academic support during this research. I am grateful to Prof. S. Mangi Singh from Manipur University, and Prof. Nani Bath from Rajiv Gandhi University for

their valuable suggestions and their interviews. Both of them helped me a lot to understand the electoral politics of these two respective states. I am also grateful to Prof. Irom Gambhir Singh from Manipur University for helping me to meet many academicians, political leaders, and students for conducting my survey and interviews at Manipur. I am also thankful to prof. Sajal Nag sir from Assam University for sharing his valuable works on North East India which I could not find during this COVID19 situation.

I am also thankful to Samudra Gupta Kashyap sir for his valuable suggestions, interview and Simantik Deora for his help in accessing various information for my research. My sincere thanks to the Honourable Chief Minister of Assam Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, NEDA Convener for giving me a long interview to conduct this research. His insightful understanding, observation helps me to understand the formation of NEDA and BJP's electoral strategies in North east India.

I have to thank many RSS officials from Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh for their long interviews, sharing different reports on activities of RSS in these states. From Assam RSS spokesperson Ranjib Kumar Sharma, Biswanath district pracharak Hem Kanta Gogoi (Baba Khura) and Seva Bharti Organising Secretary Surendra Talkhedkar. My sincere thanks to MM Ashoken ji, RSS pranta pracharak, Manipur for sharing his experience and about the activities of RSS in Manipur. I would like to thank Sunil Mohanty, pranta pracharak, Arunachal Pradesh for allowing me to conduct an in-depth long telephonic interview with him during this COVID19 pandemic situation and sharing various published works on RSS in North East India.

To conduct my survey in six different universities of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, I have to thank Monoj Da, Bhaswati and Raju from Gauhati University and Jibon Jyoti, Lien Chongloi, Diksikha from Manipur University. From Assam University brother Bapukan and Partha da from Dibrugarh University. In Rajiv Gandhi University I have to thank many people, including Babu Jyoti, Pubanita, Rupam, Jyoti, Pallavi and Chalak Lowang from Arunodoy University.

In terms of collecting different primary, secondary sources I got help from many peoples. From Assam my sincere thanks to Hem Kanta Gogoi (Baba khura), Ranjib Sharma, Bhabendra Bhattacharyya (Editor, Raijor Batori, Govt. magazine), RSS officials at Keshab Dham,

Guwahati and my brother Madhujya Gogoi, SDO, Gohpur Narender Shah for giving me the electoral data of Gohpur constituency of Panchayat election. In Gohpur Ghogora tea-garden I have to thank Anil Borah, RSS Secretary, and many people for their support. For conducting my interviews, I am thankful to my elder sister Shyam Jyoti Saikia. I am grateful for her constant support, motivation and care in my JNU student life. I would like to thank Dr. Objha Borah Hazarika from Dibrugarh University for sharing her works and information on Arunachal Pradesh. In Manipur, I have to thank BJP's organisational Secretary N. Nimbus, former MLA Dr. Usham Deben for their interviews and helps in accessing information on current BJP government in Manipur. I am thankful to Assistant Publicity Officer (Press) Tenshubam Sangeeta ma'am at Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Government of Manipur for sharing different government documents, the magazines of Manipur government. My sincere thanks to our JNU library officials and NEHU library officials for their support and co-operation in collecting different secondary sources.

I would like to thank Dr. Barasa Deka ma'am, brother Monoj Das, friend Ankur Jyoti Bhuyan, Shikha Moni Borah, Anusmita Dutta for reading and correcting my different chapters. I want to give a special thanks to my brother Dr. Partha Pratim Borah (Dibrugarh University), Dr. Pranjal Protim Barua (Guwahati College), Dr. Naba Hazarika (Delhi University), Dr. Barasha Deka ma'am (Gauhati University), Dr. Poonam Kakoti Borah ma'am (Gauhati University) for their encouragement and support in my life. I am thankful to all my brothers, sisters, friends whom I met in JNU campus life and sharing a quality time with you all that will always remind me and refresh my campus life after leaving this university campus. Specially my sweet memories with my close friend Ankur and brother Monoj and Shyam baa, and Pranjal daa, Partha Daa, Naba Daa, Tribedi, Manish, Shikha, Anusmita, Rimpi, Bhanu, Tanmoy daa, Pournamy, Prety, and brother Bedanta, Nikhil, thank you all for sharing your time and company with me in my JNU life. I am really thankful to you all for your motivation and support in my life. I have to thank my roommate Nikhil Malakar for his help and support during my research work. During last days of my PhD due to CoVID-19 pandemic crisis JNU hostels were closed for several months and in that time Dr. Naba Hazarika da and Dr. Bibek Bhuyan da became my saviours for giving me all the necessary support and arranged my accommodation in Delhi. I am really grateful to both of you brothers for your help and support during that pandemic period.

My two brothers Jayanta Gogoi, Durlav Gogoi, sister-in-law Sanghamitra Gogoi and Madhusmita Gogoi, and my little niece Carolina and Dorothy thanks for your positive support and care and love. My elder sister Antorika Boruah (Mainee Baa), brother-in-law Dr. Monideep Boruah and nephew Geebarn thank you so much for your love, support and warm welcome every visit in Guwahati to feel me like my home.

I would like to thank all my respondents for giving me their valuable time to complete my surveys. All those people in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh who helped me a lot during my field works, interviews, I am grateful for your every support.

At last, I would like to thank my Lord Krishna and Goddess Saraswati for giving me such a blissful life with positive thought, courage, and self-confidence.

Tarun Gogoi

Tarun Gogoi
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi.
2021, October.

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List of Abbreviations

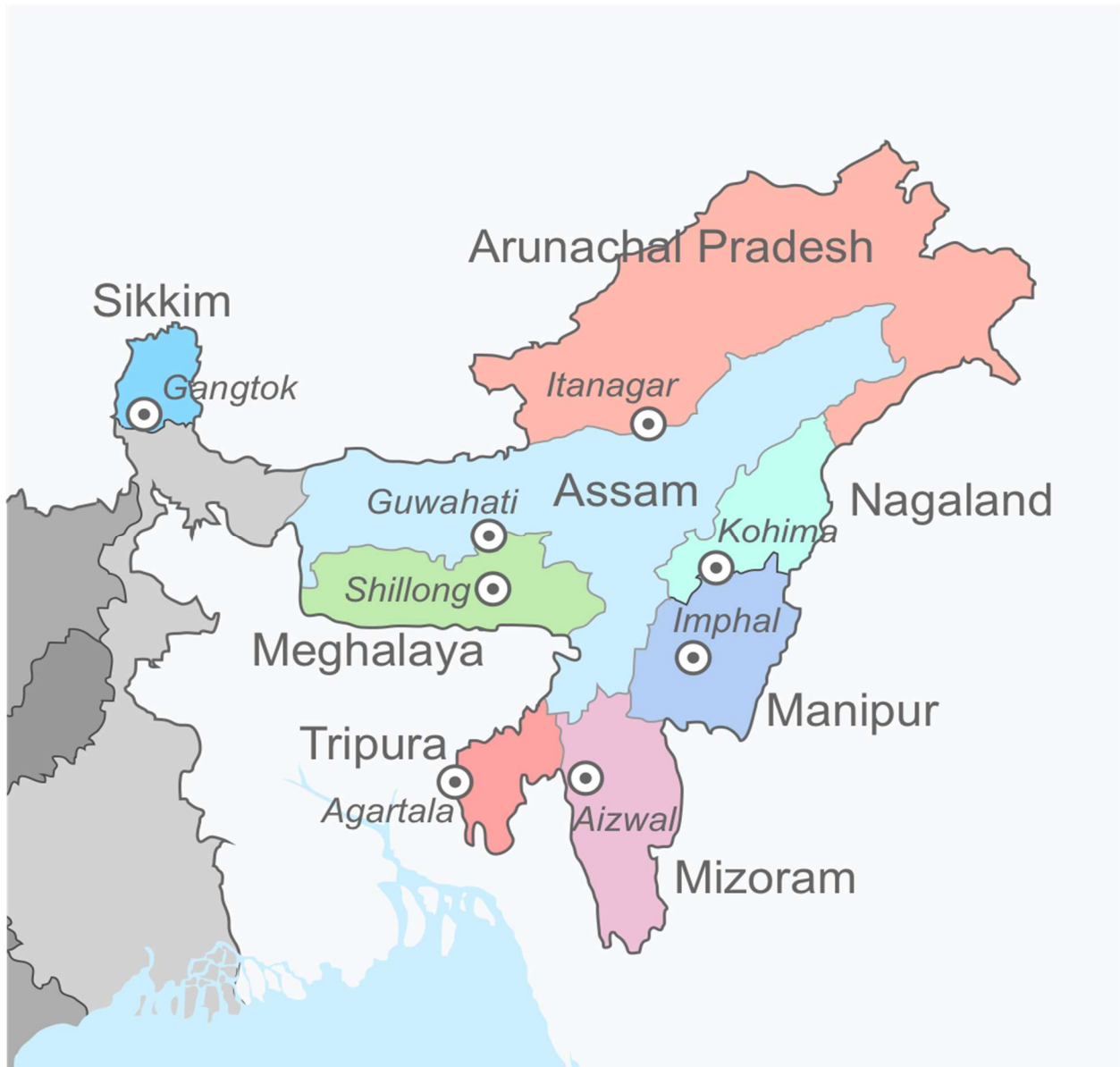
AASU	All Assam Students Union
ABSU	All Bodo Students' Union
ABVP	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad
AC	Arunachal Congress
ADC	Autonomous District Councils
AEP	Act East Policy
AIADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
AICC	All India Congress Committee
AIUDF	All India United Democratic Front
AIMIM	All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen
AGP	Asom Gana Parishad
AJYCP	Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad
APM	Anchalik Panchayat Member
AVP	Arunachal Vikash Parishad
BPF	Bodoland People's Front
BJD	Biju Janata Dal
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS	Bharatiya Jana Sangh
BMS	Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh
CAA	Citizenship Amendment Act
CAB	Citizenship Amendment Bill
CNN	Central Nyedar Nanlo
CPM	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
DoNER	Development of North Eastern Region
DPYK	Donyi-Polo Yaelam Kebang
DSY	Dhanvantari Seva Yatra

FTII	Filming and Television Institute of India
GPM	Gaon Panchayat Member
GPP	Gaon Panchayat President
HSPDP	Hill State People's Democratic Party
INC	Indian National Congress
IPFT	Indigenous People's Front of Tripura
JPC	Joint Parliamentary Committee
KMSS	Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti
LEP	Look East Policy
LJP	Lok Jana Shakti party
MC	Minority Coalition
MDMK	Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
MDPF	Manipur's Democratic People's Front
MHU	Manipur Hills Union
MLA	Member of legislative Assembly
MNF	Mizo National Front
MP	Member of Parliament
MPP	Manipur People's Party
MSCP	Manipur State Congress Party
NCRWC	National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NDC	National Development Council
NDPP	Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party
NE	North East
NEC	North Eastern Council
NEDA	North East Democratic Alliance
NEFA	North Eastern Frontier Agency
NDFB	National Democratic Front of Boroland
NER	North Eastern Region
NERPF	North East Regional Political Front

NIFCS	Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society
NITI Aayog	National Institute for Transforming India
NMO	National Medicos Organization
NPF	Naga Peoples Front
NPP	National People's Party
NRC	National Register for Citizenship
PC	Planning Commission
PDF	People's Democratic Front
PMK	Pattali Makkal Katchi
PPA	People's Party of Arunachal Pradesh
PSP	Praja Socialist Party
PTC	Plain Tribals Council
RFPS	Rangfra Faith Promotion Society
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SAD	Shiromani Akali Dal
SBP	Seva Bharti Purvanchal
SC	Surplus Coalition
SCPM	Surplus Coalition Majority Party
SDF	Sikkim Democratic Front
SKM	Sikkim Krantikari Morcha
SPMG	Single Party Majority/Minority Government
UBPO	United Bodo People's Organisation
UCC	Uniform Civil Code
UDF	United Democratic Front
UDP	United Democratic Party
ULF	United Left Front
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
UPPA	United People's Party of Arunachal Pradesh
USA	United States of America
VHP	Viswa Hindu Parishad

VKA	Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram
ZHA	Zeliang Heraka Association
ZPM	Zila Parishad Member

Political Map of North East India



Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northeast_India#/media/File%3ANortheast_india.pn

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Setting

India's North East¹ Region (NER) is crucial to understand the complex dynamics of Indian federalism in the context of party politics. India has followed a ‘demos-enabling federation’ with an asymmetrical framework to accommodate the diverse interests of its people. As a distinct case of asymmetrical federalism, India has followed two kinds of asymmetry, i.e., political and constitutional asymmetry² (Watts, 1996; Saxena, 2012, 2021). As an asymmetrical federation under constitutional asymmetry, some of the Indian states including the North East Region, get special privileges through different constitutional provisions like the fifth schedule³, sixth schedule⁴, Article 371⁵ (A-J) (Saxena, 2012, 2021; Arora et al., 2013; Hausing, 2021).

¹ North East India is officially recognised name for a region comprising seven contiguous states, however Sikkim was added as eight state through the amendment of North East Council Act in December, 2002. North East India, as an administrative region within the Indian Union consist of eight states, namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The name originated from the British occupied area named “North East Frontier of Bengal”. Alexander Mackenzie in his book *“History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes on the North East Frontier of Bengal”* published in 1884. According to J. B. Bhattacharjee, British officer H.E. Stapleton possibly first used the designation “North Eastern India” in his article “Contribution to the History and Ethnology of North Eastern India” in 1910 (Bhattacharjee, 2018, 65-71). While using the term “North East India”, there is a lot of variations among scholars. Scholars have used various designations like “North East India”, “North East India”, “Northeast India”, “North East Region” and acronyms like “NE”, “NER”. This research work will use the designation “North East India” to define this region.

² Ronald Watts (2008) makes a theoretical division of political asymmetry and constitutional asymmetry. Political asymmetry “arises from the impact of cultural, economic, social and political conditions affecting the relative power, influence and relations of different regional units with each other and with the federal government” (p.57). Constitutional asymmetry “refers specifically to differences in the status or legislative and executive powers assigned by the constitution to the different regional units” (Watts, 2008, 60).

³ Fifth Schedule of Indian Constitution under Article 244 (1) refers to the provisions relating to the administration and control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes that does not include in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

⁴ The Sixth schedule was passed by the Constituent Assembly in 1949, based on the recommendation of the Bordoloi Committee that was formed to figure out the suitable system of administration for the tribal areas in North East. Sixth Schedule refers to the provisions relating to the administration of tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram under Articles 244 (2) and 275 (1).

⁵ Article 371, A-J of the Indian Constitution is relating to granting some special provisions for 11 states of the India Union namely Gujarat and Maharashtra (Article 371), Nagaland (371 A), Assam (371 B), Manipur (371 C), Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (371 D), Andhra Pradesh (371 E), Sikkim (371 F), Mizoram (371 G), Arunachal

The Indian state since the attainment of political independence from the clutches of British colonial rule has been endeavouring to accommodate North East Regions' diverse interests through the asymmetrical federal framework by following two different routes, i.e., first, socio-cultural and political route, and second, economic and financial route (Suan, 2009; Arora et al.,2013). As a socio-cultural and political route, the special provisions under article 371 (A)⁶, (B)⁷, (C)⁸, (F)⁹, (G)¹⁰ and (H)¹¹ in terms of tribal administration introduce some important measures to accommodate this socio-cultural identity. The provision of the sixth schedule under Article 244 (2) and 275 (1) of the constitution paves the way for the administration of 'tribal areas'¹² through Autonomous District Councils or Regional Councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura. For the administration of such areas, Autonomous District Councils (ADC)¹³ having not more than thirty members have been set up and given important legislative, executive, and judicial powers.¹⁴ Similarly, under economic and financial route,

Pradesh (371 H), Goa (371 I) Karnataka (371 J). Through this Article 371 (A-J) Indian Constitution granting special provisions to these above-mentioned states to meet the needs of the backward regions of these states and protect the economic, cultural interests of this regions, combat the local challenges and protect the customary laws in these regions.

⁶ Under Article 371A, no act of Parliament shall apply to the State of Nagaland in respect of the religious or social practices of the Nagas and its customary laws and procedures, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law and ownership and transfer of land and its resources.

⁷ Under Article 371B as a special provision for Assam, the President may provide for the constitution and function of a committee of the Legislative Assembly consisting of members elected from the state's tribal areas.

⁸ Under Article 371C, the President may provide for the constitution of a committee of elected members from the Hill areas in the Assembly, and entrusted "special responsibility" to the Governor to ensure its proper functioning.

⁹ Under Article 371F as a special provision, the Sikkim Legislative Assembly shall consist of not less than 30 members. In order to protect the rights and interests of the different sections of the population of Sikkim, seats in the assembly are provided to people of these different sections.

¹⁰ Under Article 371G, no act of Parliament shall apply to the State of Mizoram in respect of religious or social practices of the Mizos and Mizo customary law and procedure, administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Mizo customary laws and ownership and transfer of lands. Mizo Legislative Assembly shall consist of not less than forty members.

¹¹ Under Article 371H, the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh shall have special responsibility with respect to law and order in the state, and the Governor shall, after consulting the Council of Ministers, exercise his individual judgement as to the action to be taken.

¹² Tribal area means area with preponderance of tribal population or where sixth schedule is applicable.

¹³ Under the Sixth schedule of the Constitution of India four North Eastern states namely Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram have ten Autonomous District Councils. In Assam, three autonomous councils are Bodoland Territorial Council, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and Dima Hasao Autonomous District Council. In Meghalaya, Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, Jaintia Hills District Autonomous District Council and Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council. In Tripura, Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council and in Mizoram, Chakma Autonomous District Council, Lai Autonomous Council and Mara Autonomous District Council.

¹⁴With these special self-governance mechanisms under India's federal framework, different tribal communities can enjoy self-governance at the grassroots level and make laws, rules and regulations in some areas like land management, forest management, water resources, agriculture and cultivation, formation of village councils, inheritance of property, the appointment of traditional chiefs and headmen, marriage and divorce, social customs,

the North East Region has been given special privilege under the 'special category state',¹⁵ which entitled them to a grant-loan ratio of 90:10 from the centre. In contrast, other states received only 30 per cent grants and 70 per cent loans from the Union as a general provision. It is important to note that the current BJP led central government has abolished the special category state status after implementing the 14th finance commission recommendation including the provision for the rise of the central tax share of earlier 32 per cent to 42 per cent for all states. However, for North Eastern states, central governments approved 100 per cent funding of some North Eastern projects through the “Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER)” (Government of India, 2021). Simultaneously, under the provisions of the “North East State Reorganisation Act 1971” North Eastern Council (NEC) was created as a sub-planning body for the development of the North Eastern region. To that end, the NEC has become the nodal agency for developing infrastructure and communication facilities in the region (DoNER, n.d.). Further, the creation of the Department for “Development of the North Eastern Region (DoNER)” in 2001 by BJP led NDA government has had a significant impact on the North East region's economic policy.

Notwithstanding the specific constitutional provisions meant for the North Eastern region, that makes it *case-sui generis* within Indian Polity, the region has been plagued by a plethora of issues including lack of infrastructural development, insurgency, greater state autonomy, ethnic assertion and conflict, citizenship issues and the demands for separate state by different tribal communities. These long-standing issues have had specific ramifications, rendering this region a troublesome one in India's federal polity. Interestingly, under political asymmetry, the eight states of this region become politically less significant due to their small number of representatives at the parliament. As Sanjib Baruah pointed, “the relatively low population of most Northeast Indian states has meant that they have little influence in national-level decision

public health etc. Such mechanism not only give self-governance among them but also protecting endangered tribal identity and recognised their rights over their land and forests.

¹⁵ Special Category Status or State was a classification made by Centre through National Development Councils to 11 states namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura and Uttarakhand. Under this special provision, these states were given special financial assistance from centre because of its geographical and socio-economic disadvantages in comparison with other Indian states. The Centre considered these states based on some conditions like- “(i) hilly and difficult terrain (ii) low population density and /or sizeable share of tribal population (iii) strategic location along borders with neighbouring countries (iv) economic and infrastructural backwardness and (v) non-viable nature of state finances”. However, following the recommendation of 14th Finance Commission, this Special Category Status cease to exist.

making” (Baruah, 2020, p.27). There are only 25 seats in Lok Sabha (Lower House) from the North East, whereas state like Uttar Pradesh has 80 seats out of 545 seats. Similarly, at the territorial chamber, i.e., Rajya Sabha (Upper House), North Eastern states share only 14 seats out of 250 seats (see **Table 1.1** for details).

Table 1.1: *Land Area, Population and Political Representation of States in North East India*

State NE	Land Area	Population	Legislative Assembly	Lok Sabha	Rajya Sabha
Arunachal Pradesh	83,743 sq. Km	13,83,727	60	2	1
Assam	78,438 sq. Km	3,12,05,576	126	14	7
Manipur	22,429 sq. Km	25,70,390	60	2	1
Meghalaya	22,327 sq. Km	29,66,889	60	2	1
Mizoram	21,081 sq. Km	10,97,206	40	1	1
Nagaland	16,579 sq. Km	19,78,502	60	1	1
Sikkim	7,096 sq. Km	6,10,577	32	1	1
Tripura	10,486 sq. Km	36,73,917	60	2	1
North East	2,62,179 sq. Km	4,54,86,784	498	25	14

Source: Census of India and Election Commission of India

Consequently, the states from this region do not have much bargaining power to raise their state issues and make a substantial impact in the national level decision-making process. As a natural outcome the North Eastern states have been historically prone towards the party in power at the Centre due to their heavy dependency on grants and funds from the central government. However, the emergence of coalition politics in Indian polity has allowed the regional and state-level political parties and their leaders to make their case by articulating their interests, thereby, party politics emerges as a significant alternative factor in this regard. Under such circumstances, the regional and state level parties have enjoyed augmented power in terms of government formation at the state and national level as well as impact on making policies.

While the national parties, in recent past, have faced stiff challenge in government formation and maintaining majority in both the houses of parliament (more particularly till 2014), in state politics too, the fragmented coalition-dominated multi-party system has forced the national parties to get closer to regional parties. As a result, the regional parties are now getting more bargaining power through coalition politics at the centre and states (Ziegfeld, 2003; Yadav,1999). In such context, North East India also becomes an important electoral

battleground between two main national parties, i.e., the Indian National Congress (INC) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), for establishing their strong electoral presence. To accomplish this end, both the parties have attempted to forge alliances with different regional and state level parties of the region at different points in time, along different lines. “In its effort to become a polity-wide party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been instrumental in making alliances with state parties” (Kumar, 2020, p.281). In North East India also, BJP has alliances with parties like Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), National People’s Party (NPP), Mizo National Front (MNF), Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM), Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) etc.

In North East India for a long decade, the Congress party dominated the electoral politics of the region. States like Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur were considered as the Congress states. However, after the General Election of 2014 gradually the electoral trend of this region has shifted to an opposite direction with BJP's miraculous electoral victory in states like Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh.

Table 1.2: *Party/Alliance forming government and the performance of BJP in assembly elections held before 2014 Lok Sabha elections and post 2014 Lok Sabha elections*

States	Before 2014 Lok Sabha elections			Post 2014 Lok Sabha elections		
	Year of Assembly election	Ruling party/Alliance	Seat share and Vote share of BJP	Year of Assembly election	Ruling party/Alliance	Seat share and vote share of BJP
Assam	2011	INC, BPF	5 (11.47)	2016	BJP, AGP, BPF	60 (29.51)
Manipur	2012	INC	0 (2.12)	2017	BJP, NPP, NPF, LJP	21 (36.28)
Meghalaya	2013	INC	0 (1.27)	2018	NPP, UPD, PDF, HSPDP, BJP	2 (9.63)
Mizoram	2013	INC	0 (0.37)	2018	MNF, BJP *	1 (8.09)
Nagaland	2013	NPF	1 (1.75)	2018	NDPP, BJP	12 (15.31)
Tripura	2013	CPM	0 (1.54)	2018	BJP, IPFT	35 (43.59)
Arunachal Pradesh	2014	INC	11 (30.97)	2019	BJP, NPP, JD (U)	41 (50.86)
Sikkim	2014	SDF	0 (0.71)	2019	SKM, BJP#	12 (1.62)

Source: Data compiled from various Newspapers the Hindustan Times, Economic Times, The Indian Express, Author’s interview with NEDA Convener Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and Election Commission of India’s statistical report on State Assembly elections of states from North East Region (2011-2019)

Note: First party in Ruling Party/alliance column refers to the single largest party in the respective state assembly elections. INC- Indian National Congress, BJP- Bharatiya Janata Party, CPM- Communist Party of India (Marxist), NPP- National People's Party, JD (U)- Janata Dal (United), AGP- Asom Gana Parishad, BPF- Bodoland People's Front, UDP- United Democratic Party, PDF- People's Democratic Front, HSPDP- Hill State

People's Democratic Party, MNF- Mizo National Front, NPF- Naga People's Front, NDPP- Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party, IPFT- Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, SDF- Sikkim Democratic Front, SKM-Sikkim Krantikari Morcha.

*In Mizoram MNF as the single largest party formed its own state government however the party gave their support to NDA at centre and become the member of NEDA.

In Sikkim during 2019 Assembly election BJP has zero seats with 1.62 per cent vote share. On 13 August, 2019 10 of Sikkim Democratic Front MLA merged with BJP and after by poll election in Nov, 2019 BJP got another two elected MLA. With the newly elected MLAs now BJP has 12 MLAs in Sikkim. SKM as the member of NEDA sharing cordial relation with BJP at centre as well as State.

In the North Eastern states for long time, BJP was considered a marginal player with little political presence. However, after the General Elections of 2014 and particularly after the Assam assembly elections of 2016, BJP emerged as the dominant political force in this region (for details see Table 1.2).

Till 2016-17, Congress was in power in five out of eight North Eastern states, including Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya; but the equation has been reversed in just about a year with the BJP and its smaller allies now ruling in all the North Eastern states (See Table 1.2). For coming to power in North East Region, BJP has adopted a dual stand from a "Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan" party to a locally electable political party. BJP has also adopted multiple strategies from selective use of Hindutva politics to development politics to establish itself as a significant player. Instead of fighting with regional parties, BJP has adopted a pragmatic approach to unite all the regional parties under North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA). The regional parties are also seen to easily accept the entry of BJP into this region for the sake of development and opportunistic politics by compromising, adjusting party agendas, and replacing alliance partners. Interestingly, with the emergence of BJP Dominant system after the 2014 general election, the electoral politics of North East India has also significantly shifted from "Congress Mukt- North East" to "BJPisation of North East India". Based on these observations, the study will attempt to look at some political dynamics to conduct this research i.e.

- BJP's electoral strategies in its rise in North East India through the formation of political coalition (NEDA), appropriation of political elites and political agendas, etc.

- BJP's localisation in North East India in terms of its ideological position as well as expansion of its electoral base through the activities of its parent organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in the region.
- BJP's developmental politics give expression to certain institutional formats for this region in terms of federal politics under NDA Regime.

1.1.1 BJP's Electoral Strategies in Terms of its Rise in North East India

As part of BJP's electoral strategy, North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) becomes one of the most significant factors for BJP to strengthen its electoral dominance by replacing INC from this region. The North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) was formed by BJP and many regional parties from North East India on 24th May 2016. The alliance was established after BJP and its alliance partners formed its first government in Assam. In NEDA, mainly 10 regional parties like “United Democratic Party (UDP) and National People's Party (NPP) – both from Meghalaya, the Mizo National Front, Naga Peoples Front, Ganashakti Party, Manipur Democratic People's Front, Manipur People's Party, Bodo People's Front, Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), Sikkim Democratic Front, Asom Gana Parishad” (Kashyap, 2016a) first joined the political coalition. However, some of these alliance partners already exit the alliance over different issues. Among these regional parties, some of them earlier formed a bilateral alliance with Congress party too.

NEDA was the first-time initiative undertaken by a national party in this region as a political forum to promote the collective interest of the North Eastern states. For BJP, "NEDA is not just a political alliance, but also a regional alliance, geo-cultural alliance. It is a platform that is boosting the cultural integration across the North East" (BJP, 2018). After the formation of this alliance, NEDA convener Dr. Himanta Biswa Sharma mentioned, “For improving coordination among NDA partners in NE states and strengthening our base in the region, we have formed North East Democratic Alliance today. We will lay emphasis on good governance, speedy development in states where NDA partners are in power in the NE region” (Hindustan Times, 2016). Under the banner of NEDA, it is said that “All pending issues can be resolved amicably and a united effort can be made for development of each state” (The Telegraph, 2019).

Before the formation of NEDA, the regional parties of this region had their own forum i.e., North East Regional Political Front,¹⁶ which did not have any national back up. BJP with their agenda of development politics got electoral support from this political coalition during both general election and assembly elections. With the creation of NEDA, most of its member parties joined BJP led political coalition for the development of this region.

1.1.2 BJP's Localisation or BJPisation in North East India

While discussing the BJP's emergence as a major political force in North East India, BJP is seen deviating from its dominant narrative of “Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan” to make itself a locally electable political entity in the region. The party has done the same by adopting regional and local narratives as part of their agenda in the North East. By adopting such a dual stand, BJP has succeeded in establishing their strong political presence by bringing non-congress, non-left political parties under the banner of NEDA in the region. Instead of playing with religious card alone, BJP is accentuating on identity politics and protection of cultural, traditional values of tribal people from illegal immigration. For this purpose, BJP has popularised the slogans like- “the last battle of Saraighat”¹⁷ “*Jati-Mati-Bheti*”¹⁸ (Community-Land and Base), “*Chalo Paltai*”¹⁹ (Let's change). BJP is also promoting Tribal leaders, Heroes like Rani Gaidinlu, Lachit Barphukan, cultural icon Bhupen Hazarika and socio-cultural and religious icon like Saint Sankardeva for BJP's electoral expansion as well as rural-urban penetration into this region. However, after becoming a dominant player by replacing the Congress party from this region, BJP is seen imposing its majoritarian agendas in this region. Malini Bhattacharjee (2016) points out how BJP became successful in penetrating in this

¹⁶ The North East Regional Political Front (NERPF) is a political coalition that was formed on 21st October, 2013 by eleven political parties in North East India which was not active at present. The motive of the political front was to protect the interest of the people of the region. Assam's former Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was the chief advisor of the front.

¹⁷ The Last battle of Saraighat was fought between Ahom of Assam led by Commander-in-chief Lachit Borphukan and Mughal invader in 1671. This was the last battle fought between Ahom and Mughals at Saraighat in Guwahati where Ahom defeated the Mughals. In 2016, BJP centred its strategy for the legislative assembly elections on this historic battle, focusing on issues of illegal migration.

¹⁸ “Jati, Mati, Bheti,” meaning “community, land and base” was one of the popular slogans by BJP party during 2016 Assam Legislative Assembly Election. Through this slogan, the party promised to protect the protecting the indigenous people of the state and their land rights.

¹⁹ During 2018 Tripura Legislative Assembly election, BJP gave this slogan “Cholo Paltai” (Lets Change), and urged the people to vote the BJP to power to transform Tripura.

region as an emerging political force through its political machine i.e., RSS, with its organisational basis appearing significant for BJP's expansion in this region.

1.1.3 BJP and Federal politics in North East India

While discussing BJP's phenomenal growth in North East region, it is argued that in terms of development discourse in North East India, BJP has successfully garnered more credit which they have successfully converted into electoral performance compared to Congress party. In the name of development politics, BJP has taken special initiative to increase air, railway, road and connectivity in the North East under their mission of Make in North East. BJP also knew it very well that through religious communal politics, they could not establish itself as a major political force by replacing long standing ruling Congress party. That is why BJP from the very start showed its strong commitment of all-round development in this region. Strategically BJP has targeted road connectivity, bridge construction, expansion of railway service from different remote areas of this region to national capital. BJP as its development politics “emphasised on increasing coordination among the states of the region as NEDA's primary objective, and identified development and connectivity as two key solutions to the woes of the region” (Kashyap, 2016b). Through NEDA, they committed to make an effort to integrate the region with South East Asian countries and boost the Act East policy of the NDA government. In such context; it is interesting to study the BJP as an emerging political force in North east India in terms of its development politics towards this region through activities of Ministry of DoNER and North Eastern Council.

1.2 Review of Literature

This research work will address a wide spectrum of literature relating to the study of Indian federalism, party system, coalition politics, electoral studies, North East India studies. This study will examine the changing contours of India's federal polity under BJP as the dominant national polity-wide party from the time period of 1999 to 2019's present government. As a case study, this thesis will concentrate on three specific states from India's North East region, i.e., Assam, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh, that have received relatively little attention in this field. To have a clear understanding of the research problem, the literature relating to the present study has been designed in a thematic way as

- Political Parties in Federal System: From the Perspective of India.
- BJP as Dominant National Party in India's Federal Polity.
- Electoral Politics of North East India.

1.2.1 Political Parties in Federal System: From the Perspective of India

Political parties are essential to the functioning of the federation. Political parties and party systems are usually not part of the constitution of a polity, but they play a critical role in determining how a written constitution operates in practice. Some federations' function and character have changed dramatically as the political party system has evolved, even though the constitution may be unchanged. Federal theorists William Riker (1964, 1975), Daniel Elazar (1987), George Anderson (2008), Ronald Watts (1996, 2006), Pradeep Chhibber and Ken Kollman (2004), Eve Hepburn and Klaus Detterbeck (2013), etc. have discussed the linkage between federalism and political parties.

William Riker (1964, 1975) is the pioneer in this field who for the first time systematically emphasised the party system's significance in terms of measuring the dynamics of federalism. For Riker, “the structure of political parties parallels the structure of federalism” as “one can measure federalism by measuring parties” (Riker, 1975, p. 137). Riker mainly emphasised on political centralisation, i.e., the location of power to measure federalism. Riker points out; political power is a factor in maintaining balance in centre-state relations. Each federation has some centralising elements that he categorised as fully centralised federation and partially-centralised federation, and party system become the crucial factor in defining, examining the actual locus of decision-making, changing from the constituent units to the central government. Riker systematically examined, “where parties are fully-centralised, the federation is also fully centralised. (e.g., Former Soviet Union, Mexico) and where parties are decentralised, their federation is also partially centralised or decentralised” (Riker, 1975). Federalist theorist Daniel Elazar (1987) also emphasised the co-relation between political parties, party system, and federal system. He also found that the nature of a “federal system is the direct result of the role of political parties” (Elazar, 1987). The transformation of the parties or party system impacts the functioning of a federal system. By comparing the federal systems of the United States, India, Germany, etc., in terms of political control, Elazar recommended non-centralised parties or party systems necessary for the federal government's proper functioning (Elazar,

1987, p. 221). Pradeep Chhibber and Ken Kollman (2004) through their work “*The Formation of National Party Systems, Federalism and Party Competition in Canada, Great Britain, India, and the United States*” tried to “establish a link between federalism and the formation of national and regional parties in a comparative perspective. It places contemporary party politics in the four examined countries in historical and comparative perspectives and provides a compelling account of long-term changes in these countries” (Chhibber & Kollman, 2004). This work mainly examines the fact that federalism influences a party system's dynamics and stability. The changes in the party system cause centralisation or provincialisation in a polity. Regarding the formation of political parties, countries like India have found how social cleavages factor play a vital role in forming a political party. Eve Hepburn and Klaus Detterbeck (2013) examined how the political parties become the instrument of both national integration as well as challenges of regionalism. They have shown how “political parties have responded to state structural change and the strengthening of the territorial dimension of politics” (Hepburn & Detterbeck, 2013). In their words, "the repositioning and reorganisation of parties at the regional level heralds a new type of political representation in multi-level states" (Hepburn & Detterbeck, 2013, p.89).

Though many federal theorists attempted to build a strong linkage between federalism and the party system in general and from a comparative perspective, there is still very little reference about India. Most of these studies focused on the western model of federations like the United States, Germany, etc. Federal theorists A.H. Birch (1966), Alfred Stepan (1999), Carl J. Friedrich (1968) made a very systematic inclusive study to include most of the presently existing federations in this regard. A.H. Birch's (1966) work "Approaches to the Study of Federalism" for the first time provided a systematic realistic understanding of federalism by classifying four major approaches of federalism, i.e., institutional approach, sociological approach, dynamic approach, and bargain approach of federalism. Birch's analysis helps us to understand the theoretical framework of federalism in the context of contemporary political development. Alfred Stepan (1999), a renowned authority on democratic thought in his famous article "Federalism and Democracy: Beyond the U.S. model" has developed various models of federalism or federations with a comparative perspective to accommodate new political development of federalism among all other developed, developing countries in the world. Alfred Stepan has developed these models by challenging Riker's generalisation of federation

predominantly based on the American model. He has discussed various models of federalism by its origin, structure, and societal component as well as power relation, i.e., from the source of origin coming-together, holding together, putting-together federation, from the structure and power relations as demos-constraining, demos-enabling federation and from societal, constitutional perspective as symmetrical and asymmetrical federalism. By developing this model, Stepan tried to justify the historical, political background of a state to adopt a specific type of federation that distinguishes each other model of federations.

Carl J. Friedrich (1968) developed the dynamic approach of federalism in his work *“Trends of Federalism in Theory and Practice”*. Through this approach, Friedrich tried to build up a flexible model of federalism that could be applied to fit the newly formed federal system after post-war political development. He had made a systematic comparative approach among federal countries and opposed the static pattern of federalism that finds federalism's essence with legal, structural, constitutional framework. This dynamic approach helps us understand the political development of Indian federalism, which considers "federalism as the process, an evolving pattern of changing relationship rather than a static design regulated by strict and unalterable rules" (Friedrich, 1968, p. 7).

Among federal theorists, however, India does not get much of attention in terms of building an alternative theoretical model of federalism from a comparative perspective, except few federal theorists.²⁰ Among them, many of the scholars focus more on the functional aspect of federalism in the Indian context, where scholars such as Ronald Watts, Subrata K Mitra, Douglas Verney, Alfred Stepan, Carl J. Friedrich, Rekha Saxena through their works tried to build up an alternative model of Indian federalism in comparison with other western models. On the other hand, scholars including Balveer Arora, M.P. Singh, Subrata K. Mitra, Katharine Adeney, Lawrence Saez, Douglas Verney, K.K. Kailash (2016), Bidyut Chakrabarty (2006), S.K. Jain (1994) and others have, through their scholarly works, discussed the changing

²⁰ For details see the works of Ronald Watts (1996, 1998, 2006), William Riker (1964, 1975), Alfred Stepan (1999, 2001), Carl J Friedrich (1968), Daniel Elazar (1987), Douglas Verney (1995, 2003,2004,2011), M.P. Singh (2003), Rekha Saxena (2006, 2007, 2010,2012 2013), Lawrence Saez (2002), Katharine Adeney (2006,2007, 2015), Subrata K Mitra (2000, 2010), B.D. Dua & M.P. Singh (2003), Balveer Arora (1995,,2000,2002,2003, 2004, 2013), Gurpreet Mahajan (2007), Louise Tillin(2007,2013), Chanchal Kumar Sharma & Wilfried Swenden (2017), Kham Khan Suan and Harihar Bhattacharya (2017), Akther Majeed (2005)

dimension of Indian federalism through party politics which may well be understood through the dynamic approach of federalism.

While discussing the existing literature on Indian federalism in terms of understanding India's federal process, Subrata K. Mitra (2000) observes some general conditions to the successful working of India's federal process, that includes elite accommodation and public involvement, which reflect the democratic trends and an atmosphere of 'completion and collusion' between intergovernmental agencies and also referred to Ronald Watt's "role and impact of political parties including their number, their character and relations among federal, state and local level" (Watts, 1998, p.130).

Observing this existing literature will help us clarify the theoretical understanding of Indian federalism from the dynamic approach of federalism.

1.2.2 BJP as Dominant National Party in India's Federal Polity

In India, political parties have significantly influenced the nature and working of India's federal process. As a result, since the first general election to the recent 2019 general election, India has gone through a major transformation from a one-party dominant "Congress system" to fragmented coalition dominated multi-party system. The rise of BJP in Indian politics is an important political development. BJP as the dominant national party has a long political history that started with its predecessor Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951 and manifested in recent decades through Hindutva politics and eventually with coalitionable accommodative politics under NDA federal coalition. With its phenomenal electoral victory in the general election of 2014, after a long interval BJP has reintroduced the dominant party style government after 1984's Congress party led Rajiv Gandhi government. There is a large number of literatures about BJP in Indian politics contributed by renowned scholars, political analysts, journalists, party leaders. Most of these works focus on political history, internal party politics, political biography, party agendas, and description of party activities, that pays little attention to federal aspects. Some significant works on BJP ²¹ contributed by scholars like Thomas Blom Hansen

²¹ Thomas Blom Hansen and Christophe Jaffrelot (1998) edited *The BJP and the Compulsion of Politics in India*, Christophe Jaffrelot (1998) *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, Bruce Desmond Graham's (1990) *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh*, Yogendra K. Malik and V.B. Singh's (1994) *Hindu nationalists in India: the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party*, Partha S. Ghosh (1999) *BJP and the Evolution of Hindu Nationalism: From Periphery to Centre*, C.P. Bhambhri (2001) *Bharatiya*

and Christophe Jaffrelot, Bruce Desmond Graham, Katharine Adeney etc. help us to understand the BJP as a dominant national party from a multi-dimensional perspective in Indian politics. Most of these works primarily used historical, analytical narrative approaches that emphasised electoral studies of BJP. Many of them tried to examine the rise and growth of BJP at the state levels; yet with little reference about the North East India's states to understand BJP's expansion in this region. This study is an attempt to fill this gap.²² This study will do a comparative study to understand the rise of BJP in North Eastern states mainly Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.

Christophe Jaffrelot (2013), C.P. Bhambhri (2001), Partha S. Ghosh (1999), while discussing the evolution of BJP as political parties, mainly found three transitional phases; First, BJP as a moderate party with liberal attitude under Vajpayee's leadership from 1980 to 1989, second, BJP as a radical, extremist party with Hindu –Nationalist agenda under the leadership guidance of L.K. Advani from 1989 to 1998, and third, BJP as a relatively moderate party under the compulsion of coalition politics ranging the period from 1998 to 2004. After the 2014 general election, BJP is seen as a dominant polity-wide national party with its 19 state governments formed by itself as singular, dominant, and minor party with its alliance partners at the state level. Therefore, this present study will incorporate this new dimension while studying BJP as a dominant national party in India's federal polity. Lawrence Saez, Katharine Adeney (2005) examines the “emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India and how its Hindu Nationalist agenda has been affected by the constraints of being a dominant member of a coalition government” (Saez & Adeney, 2005). Katharine Adeney (2005) discussed how

Janata Party: Periphery To Centre and Lawrence Saez, Katharine Adeney (2005) edited *Coalition Politics and Hindu Nationalism*

²² Kumar (2017) argues that state as a conceptual category and state politics as issue of research have garnered academic attention only recently in Indian academia. He identifies three phases of state-specific studies. The first generation (marking the post-1967 general election period) of state specific literature primarily consolidated the theme through state specific chapters in edited volumes by scholars like Iqbal Narine, Myron Weiner, John R Wood, Francine Frankel and others. The second generation of literature was an improvised and detailed version to the extent that besides unfolding the political processes and behaviour of state politics in empirical sense, inter-state comparative study was also undertaken. However, Kumar pleads for a third generation of state studies that should be based on comparative method, but with a nuanced understanding of the intra-state issues. It's worth mentioning that the issues of electoral politics have been dealt with in the context of North East states only on individual state centric consideration. While BJP's consolidation and rise in the region in recent period has been an electoral reality, there has not been any significant research that undertakes a comparative study of the same taking the states of the region in view. It is in this light, this study seeks to fill that gap by bringing a comparative study of the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur vis-à-vis the rise of BJP.

“Hindu Nationalism has historically had a mixed attitude to federal form of government” and how BJP's Hindu Nationalist agendas has been constrained under the compulsion of coalition politics at centre. Adeney also found how BJP has to compromise its party agendas, ideologies for making coalition with regionally based political parties. BJP has adopted various accommodative approaches. It has changed the Union and states' tax-raising powers by favouring 'a fair share of central revenues' allocation among states. It has created new states, making provisions for giving official status to some languages, etc. Katharine Adeney (2015) in her article "A move to majoritarianism? Challenges of representation in South Asia" in *Representation*, argued “BJP was quick to adopt the new realities of coalition politics, realising that its message of Hindutva would not appeal to a pan-Indian base”. Adeney and Louise Tillin (2013) in their studies found how “BJP has embraced federalism and to some extent, the regional diversity of India”.

E. Sridharan (2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2010, 2014), in his several works on BJP has explained the expansion of BJP from central to state-level very systematically. He is one of the pioneer scholars on Indian politics who has carried out systematic empirical studies of electoral politics and coalition politics both at national and state level.

After 2014 and 2019 general election, many scholars have explained the major transformation of India's party system with the BJP's spectacular rise in both national and state level as the dominant national party. Prashant Jha (2017) in his book “*How The BJP Wins: Inside India's Greatest Election Machine*” analysed how BJP has won 2014 general election by using different techniques including a specific reference to Machine Politics. He analysed how its strong network of organisation mainly *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) worked for BJP as election machine in mobilising votes for BJP. The techniques of using social media to reach large young audience, creation of multi-level caste-coalition, and policy of social engineering helped BJP tremendously. In his analysis, he found how BJP has changed the nature of political contestation in India through a mix of strategies (Jha, 2017, p.227). Neera Chandhoke (2014) termed it as the return of “One party Dominant system”, Pratap Bhanu Mehta (2016) termed it as “BJP Dominant System”, Suhash Palshikar (2017) mentioned it as “India's Second Dominant Party system” whereas Pradeep Chhibber and Rahul Verma (2018) explained it as starting of a “Fourth party system”. It is seen that there is a vast difference of BJP before and

after 2014 general election (GE). Before 2014 GE, BJP with its multi-party minority coalition government at centre strictly followed “Coalition Dharma” and the party was constrained by its alliance partners in terms of maintaining its core party ideology and agendas (Adeney, 2005). However, after 2014 and mainly 2019 GE, BJP is seen asserting its dominance both ideologically and politically that significantly affect the federal process of India (Vaishnav et al., 2019). BJP “has sought to centralise political power and assert its ideological hegemony that led to political majoritarianism as well as electoral authoritarianism” (Verma et al., 2019). Chatterji, Hansen and Jaffrelot (2019) in their edited works “*Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism is Changing*” has discussed after 2014 general election how the Hindu nationalist dominance established a majoritarian state in India. They have also examined. “how, the political and social dominance of the BJP and the plethora of Hindu nationalist organisations are shifting the relationship between the Indian state and its diverse people and communities” (Chatterji et al., 2019, p.2). Yamini Aiyar and Louise Tillin (2020) in their work “One Nation, BJP, and the future of Indian federalism” discussed, “how the electoral mandate received by the BJP in May 2019 has enabled the party to deepen policy shifts towards centralization- across the political, administrative and fiscal fields- that were already in evidence in the later stages of Narendra Modi’s first term in office” (Aiyar & Tillin, 2020, p.12).

An extensive engagement with the existing literatures on BJP will help this work to understand the electoral rise of BJP and its impact on Indian federalism.

1.2.3 Electoral Politics of North East India

There is a substantial pool of scholarly works on North East India studies which mainly focuses broad range of topics from ethnicity, homeland politics to insurgency, social movements, identity politics and state politics. No study on North East India can ever be complete sans an extensive reading on Alexander Mackenzie's work “*The North East Frontier of India*”, original title, “*History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal*”. The book gives a comprehensive account of the social and political evolution of the North East in utmost detail. Alexander Mackenzie first used the term "North East Frontier" to identify “Assam including the adjoining hill areas and then princely states Manipur and Tripura” (Haokip, 2011, p. 111). The term "North East" came to be used by British both in political, administrative, as well as academic construction.

While going through the existing literature on electoral politics of North East India, this study has found a significant number of prominent works that help to understand the electoral dynamics of the region.²³ Although, these scholarly works are crucial to understand the dynamics of electoral politics of the region, most of these works focus on the time period from 1950s to 1990's that renders it difficult to trace the contemporary political development of this region in terms of current electoral politics. The existing literature primarily deals with state-specific issues and state politics instead of following a comparative perspective with little engagement on federal aspects and systematic electoral studies. S. K. Chaube's (1973) "*Hill Politics in North East India*" has become the pioneer in this field that explains the political history of North East India, the course of hill politics and the role of traditional chief in the state politics. S.K. Chaube in his work "deals with the social and political evolution and the emergence of autonomy movements in the hills of North East India". P.S. Dutta's edited book "*Electoral Politics in North East India*" discussed different aspects of electoral dynamics in the plains and hills of North East. It covers a period of about four decades from 1946 to 1983 and focuses on the political parties and people of North East at three level i.e., the election of House of People, the legislative assembly and the autonomous district. Similarly, Dr. B.C. Bhuyan's (1989) edited book "*Political Development of the North East India*" discusses "the role of regional political parties and state politics in North East India along with leadership's role of political parties in North East India". Bhuyan dealt with "the growth and development of regional political parties and state politics in North East India". B. Pakem's (1999) work "*Coalition Politics in North East India*" primarily examined how the experiment of coalition politics in North East region is not much successful due to a wide range of issues i.e., insurgency activities, ethnic movements, student movements, community consideration rather than consideration of political ideologies. Another factor he has observed in this context i.e.,

²³ Among these scholarly works on North East India, some prominent works B.K. Roy Burma, Federalism in Perspective: Problems and Prospects for North East India, *Mainstream*, August 1993, S:K. Chaube (1973) *Hill Politics in Northeast India*, V. Venkata Rao (1993) *A Century of Tribal Politics in North East India*, 1874-1974, B.B. Kumar (1996) *Reorganisation of North East India*, B. Datta Ray and S.P. Agrawal(1996) edited *Reorganisation of North East India Since 1947*, B. Pakem (1999) *Coalition Politics in North East India*, P.S. Dutta (1986) edited *Electoral Politics in North East India*, Majid Husain (1998) edited *North East India in Transition*, Dr. B.C. Bhuyan (1989) *Political Development of the North East India*, L.S. Gassah (1992) edited *Regional Political Parties in North East India*, P.S. Dutta (1995) edited *The North East and the Indian State: Paradoxes of a Periphery*, *Working of Parliamentary Democracy and Electoral Politics in Northeast India* edited by Girin Phukan and Adil-ul-yasin, etc. help us to understand the North East from a multi-dimensional perspective.

at national level is that there has been no institutionalisation of coalition politics in North East India. Sanjib Baruah in his recent work *“In the Name of the Nation: India and Its Northeast”* discusses the political development in North East India after 2014 general election. Baruah found the significant role of RSS and its affiliates that have made significant inroads into the region. For him, RSS “have been a key force behind the spate of recent electoral success of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)” (Baruah,2020, p. 16).

Sandhya Goswami (2003, 2004, 2009, 2011, 2020), a renowned expert on Electoral politics of North East India has analysed the changing electoral trends in Assam including the political discourse of Congress party as well as Asom Gana Parishad- BJP's coalition politics. Her works clearly reflect how this alliance has helped BJP in earning a secular flavour as well as garnering support from regional leaders. Goswami argues that AGP-BJP alliance might give a new Hindutva thrust to Assamese Nationalism. In a way BJP is benefited through this alliance with AGP which helped them to come closer to different ethnic tribal groups. For Goswami this realignment in the relationship between various social groups has made contemporary Assam a vital laboratory of politics of ethnicities (Goswami, 2004). In an article "Understanding the Political Shift in Assam: Withering Congress Dominance" with Vikas Tripathi, Goswami (2015) has discussed how “2014 Lok Sabha election marked a significant shift with the BJP making significant inroads” In this article the authors have observed “four major trends in this political shift” i.e.

First, the dominance of the Congress Party is challenged; second, the leading regional party, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) has stagnated, electorally; third, the All-India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) remains regionally concentrated and draws major electoral dividend in a polarised contest; and, fourth, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is gaining across the regions in the state. (Goswami & Tripathi, 2015, p.67)

Sandhya Goswami in her latest work *“Assam Politics in Post-Congress Era: 1985 and Beyond”* has discussed how “the state has seen a remarkable paradigm shift in the trajectory of state politics with the landslide victory of the BJP in the assembly election of 2016 and later in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections by ushering in a new phase of polarized politics in the state” (Goswami, 2020, p.4).

Nani Gopal Mahanta (2014) in his article "Lok Sabha Elections in Assam: Shifting of Traditional Vote Bases to BJP" has discussed the "tectonic shift in Assam's electoral politics in the parliamentary elections with the Bharatiya Janata Party emerging as the strongest party, stitching together a support base which encompasses different social groups" (Mahanta, 2014, p.14). His studies show how the overwhelming victory of BJP significantly marks a "new phase of polarised politics in Assam". Mahanta (2014) is of the opinion that "Assam has witnessed an unprecedented growth of the BJP at the cost of Congress and regional force like Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)" (Mahanta, 2014, p.20). Udayon Misra (2016) in his articles "Victory for Identity Politics, Not Hindutva in Assam" has discussed the electoral strategy of BJP in Assam. For him though BJP is famous for its Hindutva politics in mainland Indian politics, in North East, specifically in Assam, the electoral victory for BJP in this region is not because of Hindutva politics but other factors including the party's "success in garnering the support of regional forces like AGP, Bodoland People's Front (BPF) and Rabha, Tiwa and other plain tribal organisation that gave them a secular flavour". At the same time the politics of development card and identity politics and technique of head-hunting²⁴, appropriation of religious, cultural icon has further helped the BJP to establish itself as dominant national player by replacing Congress party from this region. Akhil Ranjan Dutta (2017) in one of his articles "BJP's Electoral Victory in Assam, 2016: Co-opting the khilonjiyas" in *Social Change* has portrayed a different picture in comparison to the views offered by Udayon Misra and Nani Gopal Mahanta about BJP's emergence in this region. For Dutta "the landslide victory of BJP in Assam's 2016 assembly election provokes diametrically opposite interpretation. BJP's victory reveals a consolidation of Hindutva forces in the state" (Dutta, 2017, p.1). For Dutta "Hindu consolidation through different agencies and institutions, gained momentum in the state with the present electoral victory of BJP in both 2014's Lok Sabha as well as Assam's 2016 Assembly election; it was the highly emotive campaign for the protection of the rights of the Khilonjiyas (the indigenous) that assured victory for the BJP-led alliance" (Dutta, 2017, p.1). Akhil Ranjan Dutta in his latest work "*Hindutva Regime in Assam: Saffron in the Rainbow*" has discussed, how the BJP -led regime in Assam after coming to power has "added

²⁴ In this work by "technique of head-hunting" means the act or practice of trying to destroy the power, position, or influence of one's competitors or foes. For coming to power, how BJP has playing an instrumental role in defection politics and appropriating political elites from other political parties for its electoral benefit.

new vulnerabilities to Assam by infusing religious polarizations and communal distrusts” (Dutta, 2021a, p.3). He also points out, after coming to power in Assam how BJP’s “promises took almost a U-turn. The core Hindutva agenda came to the forefront through the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB), 2016” (Dutta, 2021a, p.3).

Malini Bhattacharjee (2016) in her article "Tracing the Emergence and Consolidation of Hindutva in Assam" has examined how Hindu nationalism has spread throughout this region mainly in Assam. Her study reveals how the “Hindutva activists have from the very beginning adopted different novel strategies for navigation through the complex particularities of this region in order to establish itself in the cultural and political imagination of the people” (Bhattacharjee, 2016). Bhattacharjee’s analysis is significant to understand the instrumentality of the broad network of Sangh Parivar in Assam today and the way it has worked as election machine for BJP to establish its strong electoral presence in this region. Rajat Sethi & Shubhrastha's (2017) book “*The Last Battle of Saraighat: The Story of the BJP's Rise in the North East*” clearly shows the factors of BJP's phenomenal growth in this region. Different electoral strategies of BJP in this region such as co-option of leader through headhunting technique, macro and micro strategies, strong organisational network who work for BJP as election machine, formation of rainbow coalition with different regional tribal political parties have helped BJP to establish itself as dominant national player in this region. Being an integral part of BJP's electoral campaign in North East, the authors have written this book based on their first-hand experience and observation. For them, “2016 Assam election was the result of meticulous planning, careful and consistent groundwork and a creative campaign strategy done by broad organisational network of BJP” (Sethi and Shubhrastha, 2017). Monoj Kumar Nath in his recent work “The Muslim question in Assam and Northeast India” has also discussed how “the origin and success of AUIF have helped majoritarian politics of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to grow, even though Assam’s demographic structure and socio-cultural tradition is not favourable for the growth of BJP in the state” (Nath, 2021, p.2).

V. Bijukumar (2016) in his article "BJP’s Mobilisation and Consolidation in North East India” has discussed the overall electoral growth of BJP in this region from initially being a non-entity with very little political presence to a dominant national player with the help of its strong organisational network of sangh parivar or Hindu nationalist forces. Bijukumar has adopted a comparative perspective to discuss the BJP’s political mobilisation in all of the eight North

East India's states. His study shows how BJP has adopted multiple strategies to mobilise different ethnic communities and strengthen its support base. He also argued that the BJP's attempt to denigrate the cultural diversity of North East India by forcing them to assimilate into the Hindutva cultural fold would endanger the social fabric of the region. On the other hand, V. Bijukumar in his work "*Parties and Electoral Politics in Northeast India*" has attempted to "highlight the trajectory of politics of the North Eastern States from ethno-regionalism to Hindu nationalism" (Bijukumar, 2019). He asserts, "in spite of the existence of ethno-regional political parties and organisations and everyday ethnic assertions and self-determination, the national parties played a vital role in the electoral politics of these states" (Bijukumar, 2019).

Various articles and commentaries published across different newspapers are also an important gateway to understand the recent dynamics of electoral politics of North East. As for instance, the pieces by Christophe Jaffrelot, Sanjib Baruah, Sanjay Hazarika, Samudra Gupta Kashyap, Simantik Dowera and others have contributed a lot in creating a discourse on the recent political discourse. Christophe Jaffrelot (2016) in his article "BJP's Assam win is proof Hindutva has reached areas where it was marginal" in the Indian Express on 11 June 2016 has discussed "BJP's strategy pertaining to its Hindu nationalist discourse" and how the party has "adjusted to the local variant of Hindu culture through vernacularisation process by promoting Assamese religious icon Srimanta Shankardev" (Jaffrelot, 2016). Sanjib Baruah in his article "In the Northeast, an uneasy new alliance" in the Indian Express newspaper on 14 July, 2016 has discussed "the formal launching of the BJP-led North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) – a equivalent of the NDA which shows BJP's impressive capacity to learn both from its success and failure". For Baruah, "what has inspired the formation of this BJP-led alliance of regional parties, at least to some extent, is the narrative of an ideological victory in Assam because of the successful harnessing of regional aspirations" (Barua, 2016). Samudra Gupta Kashyap, a well-known journalist from North East India at the Indian express, wrote several articles about BJP's emergence in North East India. In one of his articles "Behind the BJP's spectacular success in Northeast, years of silent work by Sangh" published on 27 March, 2017 in the Indian Express has discussed how "BJP's spectacular success in Northeast is the result of its strong organisational network of various Sangh wing's philanthropic working activities throughout the entire regions" (Kashyap, 2017).

However, it must be argued that most of these scholars have adopted a state specific perspective to understand the state politics of this region that have very little engagement on federal aspects as well as systematic electoral studies with a comparative perspective. This work primarily seeks to fill that gap by adopting a comparative approach for understanding the recent political discourse vis-à-vis the rise of BJP in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur within the larger framework of a federal polity. It's worth mentioning that the issues of electoral politics have been dealt with in the context of North East states only on individual state centric consideration. While BJP's consolidation and rise in the region in recent period has been an electoral reality, there has not been any significant research that undertakes a comparative study of the same taking the states of the region in view. It is in this light, this study seeks to fill that gap by bringing a comparative study of the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur vis-à-vis the rise of BJP.

Based on these existing literatures on federalism and party system from India and electoral politics of North east India, this study will follow Riker's idea of measuring federalism with party system in Indian context to understand the BJP dominant system and its political expansion in the North East region.

1.3 Objectives of the study

This study aims at examining the emergence of BJP as a dominant political force in India's North Eastern states by observing the shifting trends of electoral politics in North East India's states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur. The study mainly concentrates on the changing contours of federal polity under BJP and its strategy for coming to power both at the centre and states, with specific focus on the phenomenal political expansion in India's North Eastern Region.

The specific objectives of the research can be summarised as follows:

- To understand the rise of BJP as the second dominant-party system or BJP Dominant system in India and its impact on Indian federalism.
- To examine the causes and outcomes of changing the political landscape of North East India through the current emergence of BJP as a viable alternative to the Congress regime.

- Based on the coalition lacuna created by Congress, this study attempts to explore the strategic formation of NEDA by recognising and accommodating political aspirations of various regional parties.
- To study the shifting trends of electoral politics in the North Eastern States from 1999 to recent 2014 Lok Sabha and latest State Assembly Elections in India's North Eastern States.
- To examine the factors, cause of emergence, and transformation of BJP as dominant national parties in the North Eastern States mainly in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.
- To analyse BJP's federal politics and its impingement on India's North East Region.

1.4 Research Questions

- How did the BJP emerge as a dominant polity-wide party with its BJP Dominant system in India's parliamentary federation after 2014 General election?
- What are the factors that have helped BJP in emerging as a dominant national party in North East India?
- How did the BJP manage to oust Congress's dominance and tilt the political axis in their favour by the strategic formation of NEDA to recognise and accommodate the political aspirations of various regional parties in North East India?
- Why and how does change of party in power at the centre bring corresponding changes in party in power at state level in North East India?
- How does BJP's parent organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh help BJP in expanding its electoral base in North East Region, specifically in Assam, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh?
- In the name of federal politics, How BJP is trying to consolidate its position in terms of a developmental aspect of the North East Region?

1.5 Hypotheses

- With the rise of BJP dominant system after 2014 general election, BJP as the polity-wide party sought to centralise political power and assert its majoritarian nationalism in Indian federalism.

- BJP by adopting multiple political strategies (like alliance politics, appropriation of cultural politics and development politics) has emerged as the dominant national party in North East India.
- The BJP, while making an electoral alliance with other political parties in North East India, is gradually taking a dual ideological stand and transforming itself in terms of appropriating other party's agendas to become a locally electable political entity.
- The change of party in power at the centre brings corresponding change in party in power at state level in North East India.
- In the name of federal politics, BJP is trying to consolidate its position as a dominant political force in North East India by giving expression to institutional format (Like DoNER) to develop this region.

1.6 Methodology

This study will primarily examine the impact of political parties as an extra-constitutional factor to influence the nature and working of a federal polity like India. Based on existing literature, the study is based on the theoretical proposition of William Riker (1964, 1975) to measure federalism with political parties or party system. By following this theoretical proposition in an Indian context, the study will try to find the causal relation between the two variables, i.e., political parties as an independent variable and Indian federal system as a dependent variable. The study mainly concentrates on the political aspect of Indian federalism under BJP and its strategy for coming to power both at centre and states, particularly its phenomenal growth in India's North East region. For this research, this study has purposively selected three North Eastern states i.e., Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh to understand the rise of BJP as dominant national party in North East India. These three states can be considered as significant case study to understand the recent rise of BJP in the North East region from a comparative perspective by following some specific research questions for a better understanding of it. To understand the rise of BJP as dominant national player in North East India with a comparative perspective, this study has introspected some common factors or variables like BJP's electoral strategy through coalition and defection politics, BJP's localisation and socio-cultural appropriation through its parent organisation Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh and BJP's development politics for its political consolidation. Although, it's difficult to examine the rise of a national party in a multi-diverse region like North East India from a comparative perspective, however, Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh significantly help to understand the common factors like the issue of "Ruling Party Syndrome", defection politics, coalition politics and role of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in BJP's rise in these North Eastern states.

This study has followed a mixed-method research design for this research. To examine the primary research questions as a qualitative research method, a series semi-structured interviews have been conducted with political leaders and experts from North East India and the field experiment observation method as a part of this study. The nature of the study also encompasses field observation to examine how are the activities of BJP's parent organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh helping the BJP in expanding its electoral base in North East Region and specifically in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh?

Employing the quantitative method of research, this study has surveyed the youth voters across several selected universities of North East India like Assam University, Gauhati University, Dibrugarh University (Assam), Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunodoi University (Arunachal Pradesh), and Manipur University with purposive sampling. The survey was conducted with 120 students where 65 are male and 55 are female respondents from the age group of 18 years to 35 years. The study has purposively chosen the youth voters who has the potential to be extremely influential in the country like India. According to Election Commission of India's data, India has about more than 45 million youth voters since 2014. As a young country, India has almost 34 percent youth population. During 2014 general election, youth voters played a significant role in political change in India. This study has chosen the youth voters from North East India to examine the level of participation, political awareness and their view on recent political change in North East India. As a quantitative research method, this study has also followed empirical data based analytical approach by using statistical data of the Election Commission of India about general election and state assembly elections in India's North Eastern states.

The research is based on primary and secondary sources of information. Primary sources of information were collected from Government Reports, acts, rules, public documents,

manifestoes, and party documents. To supplement the findings, interviews of the respondents were carried out. Interviews were based on a semi-structured questionnaire, which reflected the general political perceptions, mobilisation, and activities of political parties. For this purpose, a series of field-based investigations were carried out in Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh with a structural formal, informal interview with political leaders, the party spoke persons from different political parties and political analysts, experts on this field in the context of North East India. For ethical considerations, during interviews, data collections the author has taken permission and consent of participants to use their name and views in this research.

1.7 Outline of the Study

This study examines the emergence of BJP as a dominant political force in North East India by observing the shifting trend of electoral politics in North East India's states, specifically the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur. While discussing BJP's rise as a formidable player in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur, this work mainly looks into three political dynamics. Firstly, alliance or coalition strategy and co-opting leaders from other parties by BJP in North East India. Secondly, BJP's socio-cultural appropriation through its parent organisation RSS for establishing its ideological and cultural footprint in these states and third, BJP's development politics in North East Region. For this purpose, the study has discussed two variables, i.e., BJP's socio-cultural appropriation in terms of ideology through its parental organisation RSS in these states in chapter three and BJP's developmental politics in North Eastern region in chapter seven. In chapters five and six, this study focuses on BJP's electoral strategy in these three specific states regarding its coalition politics or alliance with other parties and co-opting leaders from other parties for its electoral gain.

The first introduction chapter mainly discusses the background of the proposed research, research question, aims and objectives, literature review, hypotheses and research methodologies and outline of this study. The second chapter titled *The BJP Dominant System in Indian Federalism* examines the rise of BJP Dominant system in India mainly after the 2014 general election and its impact on Indian federalism. This chapter has explained how political parties become the significant intervening variable in Indian democracy to influence the nature and working of India's federal process.

The third chapter titled *BJP as an emerging political force in India's North East Region*, is an attempt to make a clear framework about how this study has examined the BJP's emergence in this region through the context of dynamic federalism. Addressing some major research questions, this chapter seeks to trace the factors that have helped BJP in North East India to emerge as a dominant national party in this region. This chapter examines the strategies and party politics adopted by BJP to come to power as a dominant political force in North East India. This chapter also seeks to explore some important questions like how has BJP shaped its North Indian Identity in the North East Region to transform itself into a locally electable political entity. Another important question i.e., how and why regional parties under the banner of BJP led the NEDA political coalition to support party like BJP despite having radical ideology and party agendas to expand their support base. This chapter primarily looks at different political dimensions in the context of BJP's rise in North East India. Based on this framework, this study attempts to understand the emergence of BJP in terms of their electoral rise, their political interaction, policies, strategies in India's North Eastern states, focussing mainly three states as case studies i.e., Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur.

The fourth chapter titled *Understanding the BJP and RSS Symbiosis in North East India*, explores the symbiotic relationship between BJP and RSS as same ideological organisation or network of Sangh Parivar. The main aim of this chapter is to find the linkage between the two in terms of rise of BJP as political wings of Hindu Nationalist Force and how RSS becomes an instrumental factor in BJP's rise in North East India where since pre- independence period RSS became a significant player through its different social-welfare activities. The fifth chapter titled *BJP in Assam: Entry into the gateway of North East India*, discusses BJP's consolidation and rise in Assam in both parliamentary as well as state assembly election, from initially being a marginal player to its emerging as a dominant player. The chapter also seeks to engage with the kind of strategy, technique, political interaction that BJP has adopted in this specific state and to what extent they have had their impact on other North East India's states in terms of BJP's electoral alliance, appropriation of regional agendas, taking of dual ideological stand for its electoral gain. Based on the third chapter's framework to examine BJP's emergence in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, the sixth chapter titled *BJP in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur: Temporal Rise?* discusses BJP's electoral expansion and its multi-level electoral strategies in its penetration of Hindutva politics in these two states. For a long time,

Manipur was considered as another big Congress bastion in the region where BJP successfully replaced Congress by making an electoral adjustment with different political parties. In the North Eastern Region, apart from Assam, the BJP built up its strong base in Arunachal Pradesh and over the years, the BJP's vote share has increased and the party has made inroads into the electoral base of the Congress. To examine the BJP's emergence into this region, Arunachal Pradesh is important for us because the activities of political leaders in Arunachal Pradesh are not based on any ideological plank. The ideology of the leaders swings with time and directly relates to the formation of government in New Delhi. By analysing these two states' electoral politics in the context of BJP's rise, the study will get to know some basic questions like-Why and how do changes of a party in power at the centre bring corresponding changes in party in power at the state level in North East India?

The seventh chapter titled *BJP and Federal Politics in North East India* has tried to understand the role of BJP in the North East region in terms of its political activities, governmental policies under two NDA governments i.e. from 1999-2004 and present 2019 government. This chapter examines BJP government's initiative of the creation of "Ministry of DoNER (Development of North Eastern Region)" and restructuring the North East Council as a regional planning body and also in the name of "Make in North East India" mission how BJP government is playing a significant role to consolidate its strong political position in this regions. This chapter also tries to examine the propose hypothesis, i.e., in the name of federal politics, BJP is trying to consolidate its position as dominant political force in North East India by giving expression to certain institutional format (Like DoNER) for development of this region. The concluding chapter i.e., chapter 8 sums up the arguments and issues

Chapter 2

The BJP Dominant System in Indian Federalism

2.1 Introduction

Political parties play a significant role in influencing the nature and working of India's parliamentary federation. The nature of democratic politics has developed along with the political process where political parties have become central to understanding the dynamic nature of contemporary Indian politics. India as a federal polity has evolved along with its party system. The transition from the constitutionally created centralised federation during one party dominant "Congress System"¹ to a gradually more federal polity with the federalisation of party system where coalition politics has brought a new dimension to it, can be referred as "new federalism"² (Friedrich, 1968; Riker, 1964, 1975; Watts, 2006; Arora, 2000, 2008; Arora & Kailash, 2016). In India, political parties not only altered the basic premise of inter-governmental relations but also developed a new way of organising inter-state and centre-state relations (Majeed, 2004). Political parties are not only instrumental to the state structural change but also can be seen as a factor in strengthening the territorial dimension of politics (Hepburn & Detterbeck, 2013). In terms of political parties' role within a federal polity, there is a considerable difference between federations with a multi-party system like India and federations with a two-party system like the United States of America.³ In India's federal

¹ The term "Congress System" is coined by renowned scholar Rajni Kothari (1964) to describe the dominant monopoly power position of the Congress party both at centre as well as state level under its one-party dominant system.

² By "new federalism" in Indian context, experts on Indian politics are mainly referring to the development of centre-state relations from centralized federation to a more federal polity by empowering states with more power through greater involvement in national decision-making process and reduced central intervention over state affairs.

³ In terms of role of political parties as a significant factor of influence in the nature and working of a federal polity, among the federations there is a huge different between multi-party federation like India and federation with two party system like USA. In USA under two party system, there the regional units of two national parties are very strong where as in India, the regional units of national parties within states are weak. In many states in Indian Union like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha etc. regional parties become stronger compare to national parties. So, in federation like USA with two party system, the federal structure remains strong due to strong

process, among all other factors, political parties have become the most crucial factor influencing the kind of government that is being formed. It is essential to examine the difference between the governance of the dominant party style versus multi-party minority coalition government in such a context. India has experienced different types of governments at the Centre formed by different political parties since the first general election in 1952 to the 2019 general elections.

Table 2.1: *Governments at Centre Since 1952*

Government	Time Period	Type of Government	Governing Parties*
Congress	1952-1957	SPMG	1
Congress	1957-1962	SPMG	1
Congress	1962-1967	SPMG	1
Congress	1967-1971	SPMG	1
Congress	1971-1977	SPMG	1
Janata Party	1977-1980	SC	2
Congress	1980-1984	SPMG	1
Congress	1984-1989	SPMG	1
National Front	1989-1991	MC	5
Congress	1991-1996	SPMG	1
BJP led Coalition	1996-1996	MC	6
United Front	1996-1998	MC	13
BJP(NDA-I)	1998-1999	MC	26
NDA-II	1999-2004	MC	23
Congress (UPA-I)	2004-2009	MC	20
UPA-II	2009-2014	MC	21
NDA-III	2014-2019	SCMP	29
NDA-IV	2019-Present	SCMP	23

Source: Sridharan (2012 b), News Papers and Election Commission of India's Election's Data.

Note-MC- Minority Coalition, SPMG- Single Party Majority/Minority Government, SCMP-Surplus Coalition Majority Party, SC-Surplus Coalition, NDA- National Democratic Alliance, UPA-United Progressive Alliance. *Governing Parties refers to the number of parties forming the as single-party majority or multi-party coalition governments.

India has mainly two different government models at the Centre, i.e., dominant party style government with a single-party majority and multi-party minority coalition government at Centre. From 1952 to 1977, and 1980-1989, the Congress party formed the single-party majority dominant party style government. The other government model, i.e., multi-party

position of regional units of its two political parties whereas federation like India with multi-party system, due to strong political presence, influence of regional parties compares to the regional units of national parties, the federal structure become weak and it led to more bargaining power of regional parties under the compulsion of coalition politics.

coalition government as a form of minority or surplus coalition was first formed in 1977 with the formation of the Janata Party government with five different political parties (mainly a surplus coalition of two parties). From 1989 to 1991 under National Front and from 1996 to 2014,⁴ India has various multi-party coalition governments formed by different political coalitions. United Front from 1996-1998 with 13 political parties, NDA from 1998-2004 with more than 20 state parties, and UPA from 2004 to 2014 with more than 20 different political parties formed such multi-party minority coalition government. In the 2014 general election, BJP as a single party won an absolute majority with 282 seats. However, BJP has formed a surplus coalition government at the Centre with 29 political parties. Though this government is formed as a form of a surplus coalition but from its activities, political control, it can be considered the dominant party style of government. After the 2019 general election, BJP, with an absolute majority, has continued its NDA surplus coalition government at Centre.

This government formation process at the Centre by two dominant national parties mainly proves that the dominance of political parties in power "lies not just in forming a majority government at the national level but also in the control of a vast majority of states legislative assembly by the party alongside its parliamentary majority" (Sharma, 2017, p.15). In such context, this study examines the rise of BJP as a significant political force in India's North Eastern states by observing the shifting trend of electoral politics in North East India's states precisely three states, i.e., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur. The first part of this chapter explains how political parties become the significant intervening variable in Indian democracy to influence the nature and working of India's federal process. The second section will try to understand the transition of India's party system from the Congress System to the present BJP dominant system in India. The third section of this study will examine India's BJP dominant system, its nature and growth, and its impact and role in Indian federalism.

⁴ After 2014 general election although we have seen BJP party led surplus coalition government at centre from 2014-2019 and 2019- present

2.2 Party System and Indian Federalism

India represents a unique experimental model of federation, i.e., parliamentary federation with republican⁵ features. As a parliamentary federation, India is centralised from constitutional perspective, holding-together⁶ from the source of origin, asymmetrical⁷ from sociological perspective, and demos-enabling with the people's role regarding broader representation, participation, and greater say in policymaking and law making. According to the dynamic approach of federalism developed by Carl J. Friedrich, India's federal process is created by a process that is still evolving. India adopted a form of hybrid model⁸, i.e., parliamentary federation as the most suitable institutional governmental set up where we find a combination of two contradictory models, i.e., parliamentarism based on centralisation of power and federalism based on decentralisation (theoretically non-centralisation) of power (Chakrabarty, 2006). India's federal political system is created by a process that was started after the British had left the unitary nature of administrative legacy that reflects in India's Constitution along with federal nature. It was continued by Indian National Congress after India's independence under its Congress system,⁹ and it gradually moved towards non-centralised federation or more federal polity contributed by the various factors like political process, constitutional amendment, the reactive role of the judiciary, and economic liberalisation after 1991, etc. Among these factors, the political process has contributed a lot to develop and evolve its federal process.

As a parliamentary federation, there is a considerable gap between the constitutional setup and operational reality (Watts, 2006, p. 202). India's Constitution made India a strong centralised federation where the Centre has a strong dominant position over its state governments. As a

⁵ India is a parliamentary federation with republic nature where the head executive i.e. President is elected by people indirectly which makes it different from other parliamentary federations like Canada, Australia where head of state is based on monarchy.

⁶ Alfred Stepan divides federations on the basis of their origin, formation which mark a demarcation with classical federation USA

⁷ Charles D. Tarlton coined the term 'Asymmetry' in federal studies and in Indian context the term asymmetrical is applied in the context of its sociological diversity, heterogeneity in terms of language, religion, culture, race, ethnicity and other factors like geographical size, regional economic disparity etc.

⁸ By defining hybrid model India adopted a mixed model by combining two kinds of ideology i.e. federalism and parliamentarism referred by Ronald Watts, Douglas Verney, M.P. Singh etc.

⁹ Rajni Kothari coined the term 'Congress System' to define the one party dominant system in India from 1947-67.

result, states have a minimal role, but political practices have changed the way the Constitution operates. So, to understand India's federal process along with the structural nature of the federal political system, the nature of the political process is also essential which has played a very significant role in its transition. The Party system becomes an integral part as a non-constitutional and informal body based on conventions in a federal parliamentary system like India. In this context, it is appropriate to mention William H. Riker's efforts to measure federalism (1957, 1964) with the party system. He mainly emphasised political centralisation, i.e., the location of power to measure federalism. Riker marked political power as a factor of Centre-state relations. For him, every federation has some amount of centralising element, which he categorised as the fully-centralised federation and partially-centralised federation. For Riker, the party system becomes the crucial factor in defining “the actual locus of decision-making power that changes from the govt. of the constituent to the central government” (Riker, 1975). For Riker (1975) fully centralised federation refers to that federation where the vast majority of significant political decisions are made at the Centre where the state's right is quite meaningless. For example, Riker mentioned the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Mexico as a fully centralised federation. And Partially-centralized federation where many significant political decisions are made by constituent governments where the notion of state or provincial rights is meaningful. E.g., Canada, Australia, India, and even the USA fit into this category. With these two types of federation, he made several efforts to measure federalism with the party system. For Riker (1975), “the structure of parties parallels the structure of federations”, where parties are “fully-centralised”, the federation is also fully centralised. (e.g., Former Soviet Union, Mexico) and where parties are decentralised federation also partially centralised. It is because of the “perfect correlation of two extreme categories of federation with the party system” (Riker, 1975). One can measure federalism by parties. Riker defines party centralisation in two standards i.e.

- i) Whether or not the party in control of the national govt. is in control of the constituent govt. If National controlling party can not win in state or province's election, then it can hardly hope to bring a centralised party structure of a centralised constitution.
- ii) Whether or not party discipline exists on legislative and executive matter. If party members can act together, then they can hope to centralise, otherwise not. (Riker, 1975)

In this connection Riker mentioned, how India showed a decreasing centralisation tendency constitutionally and politically as the state governments and state politicians assert themselves, especially since the death of Nehru (Riker, 1975).¹⁰ Here, the party system can be seen as the intervening variable that influences the working of the federal process of countries like India. As a constitutionally asymmetrical and centralised federation, India's federal process itself contributes to evolve its party system in such a way to fit with its federal structure. Since independence, India has undergone a significant transformation in its party system from a dominant one-party system to a fragmented multi-party system. Especially coalition politics brings a new dimension in its political system, leading to 'new federalism'¹¹ in the Indian context. Many scholars on Indian politics defined India's party system through their observation from different times, mainly Rajni Kothari (1964) described India's party system from 1947-67 as "*Congress System*," Yogendra Yadav (1999) defined after the 1989 era as "*Post-Congress polity*," Balveer Arora (2000) described it as "*Binodal party system*" by looking at the period after 1996. India's party system dramatically shifts in its development where many factors contributed to evolve its federalised party system¹². India, as a centralised federation, Centre has a powerful dominant position over its state. The Centre can exercise its dominance in administrative, legislative, fiscal, and political matters that create centralising tendencies in various issues. Because of this centralising tendency and issues like regional disparity, unequal development among states, state autonomy, demand for greater economic independence among states, and also societal factors like the existence of multi-diversity based on distinct identities, caste, religion, ethnicity, language, etc. contributed to growth its multi-party system.

After the 1989 general election, the emergence of mandalisation, dalitisation, and hinduisation contributed to ethno-religious identities' assertion. A resurgence of newly empowered social groups led to the emergence of various political parties. India has many

¹⁰ Here Riker mainly meant, after Nehru's death, how the monopoly of the Congress party under One party dominant system has declined with the rise of regional parties in both general and state assembly elections.

¹¹ By new federalism in Indian context is meant changes in India's federal process after 1989 with the emergence of fragmented multi-party coalition government.

¹² By federalized party system, means to the rise of fragmented multi-party system with polity wide party, single state party, multi-state party

political parties such as a single state party, multi-state party, and polity-wide party¹³. The election commission of India has categorised parties as "National Parties, State parties, and Unrecognised registered parties". Rekha Saxena and M. P. Singh (1996) highlighted some significant factors that helped to rise of different regional parties as the green revolution, electoral rise of OBC and Hindu-based political campaign, micro-regional agitation for Statehood, and autonomy. In this regard, Harihar Bhattacharya (2005) mentioned the impact of regionalism as the most potent force in Indian politics after independence. Bhattacharya argues, "Regionalism is rooted in India's manifold diversity of languages, cultures, tribes, communities, religions and so on, and encouraged by the regional concentration of those identity markers, and fuelled by a sense of regional deprivation" (Bhattacharya, 2005, p.2). Because of the factors like the sense of regional deprivation, "long-term neglect in development and resource distribution" led to formation of different state-based regional parties (Bhattacharya,2005). James Manor (1995) also explained the identity factors grounded in religion, language, tribal identities contributing to the rise of regional parties in India.

2.3 India in Transition: From Congress System to BJP Dominant System

Since independence with the first general election in 1952 to the recent 2019 general election, India has gone through a major transformation from a single-party dominant (Congress) system to a fragmented coalition-dominated multi-party system. This change in party system has altered the basic premise of inter-governmental relations and created new dimensions, which have influenced the nature and working of India's federal polity (Arora et al., 2013; Rudolph and Rudolph, 2002; Singh, 2002; Singh & Saxena, 1996; Majeed, 2004). Scholars have defined four distinctive phases of the "party system" in India since its first general election, i.e., 1952. The dominance of the Congress party had marked the first two phases of India's party system from 1952-1989. The third phase of the party system started with the 1989 general election with the breaking of One-party dominance and the emergence of a "post-Congress polity" (Yadav, 1999). From 1996-2014 the Indian party system got divided into two central poles lead by two main national parties INC and BJP, which led to the "Binodal Party system" in India. The fourth phase of the party system in India began with the 2014 general election. After

¹³ Scholars like Balveer Arora, E. Sridharan, K.K. Kailash categorized political parties on the basis of their location and support base

30 years, BJP after Congress as a national party returned to power as the single largest party with an absolute majority. In these four different phases of the party system, India has experienced two dominant-party systems led by two main national parties i.e., INC and BJP. Indian National Congress from 1952-1989 under its Congress system and BJP from 2014 general election as the rise of the “second dominant party system in India”.

2.3.1 The First Phase: From 1947-1967

A dominant one-party System marks the first phase of the party system in India. From independence to 1967, Congress was in a dominant position both at the Centre and the States by securing an absolute majority in parliament and state assembly elections. Rajni Kothari (1964, 1967) termed this period as 'Congress system' because of Indian National Congress Party's strong monopoly position at both Centre and state levels. Congress dominated both national and state politics in holding office and mobilising participation. During this period in most states, excluding Kerala and Tamilnadu, INC became the single largest party in both general and state assembly elections and formed its state governments. However, after 1967 the dominance of the Congress party in most of the state elections gradually declined. Table 2.2 shows the Congress Party's vote share and seat share in the general elections during this one-party dominant system. During this period, Congress secured more than 70 per cent seat share with more than 40 per cent vote shares until 1967.

Table 2.2: *INC's electoral performance in General Elections (1952-1967)*

Year	1952	1957	1962	1967
Congress seat %	74.43	75.71	73.98	54.84
Congress vote %	45	47.78	44.72	40.78

Source: Election Commission of India’s statistical data on general elections from 1952-1967

In this phase, the Congress party along with the charismatic leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, strengthened the Centre, and India's federal nature was built up by political homogeneity. British left India with its unitary nature of administrative legacy along with a structurally centralised federal system. Indian National Congress continued this for a long decade, i.e., continuously for more than 20 years. Under this “single-party dominance system, the Centre's

relationship with a particular state depended on the political structure of its leadership” (Maheshwari, 1987). During this phase, India's federal system was developed with the one-party system, reflected in constitutional and political practices as a purely strong centralised federation. In this period, the most important central dominance over the state could be seen under Planning Commission, and National Development Council's role, with K. Santhanam (1963) terming it as 'Super Cabinet.' Before the setup of these two informal bodies, the Congress Working Committee played a significant role in coordinating centre-state relations. Central government entirely dominated the state governments and received their full cooperation. During this phase, there was no organised opposition from outside, and Nehru was successful in upholding its 'consensus politics' (Jain, 1994). In this phase, Indian states had a minimal role. They had to surrender most of their authority to the Centre and most of the government's decision to administration was controlled by the Centre. The centralising tendency in India's federal process increased at an optimum level during this one-party dominant system. Ashutosh Kumar argues,

... the Congress being the dominant party under the “Congress system,” politics and the economy at the state level at the time were very much guided by the “dominant center” with the “high command” pulling the key strings of power. At that time, states were “regarded as little more than subordinate components of a highly centralised governmental structure” and there was little realization that they were “evolving as powerful political arenas in their own right.” (Kumar, 2017, p.288)

This phase can be regarded as paramount federalism in the Indian context. Myron Weiner (1967), in his "*Party building in a New Nation: The Indian National Congress*," analysed mainly some factors of success of Indian National Congress during this period as – proper organisational maintenance, congruence between the head of the party and party members on different issues, government policies and Congress party's adaptive qualities to accommodate new demands and participation in the party's political process and performance and relevance at the local or constituency level.

2.3.2 *The Second Phase: From 1967-1989*

The second phase started with the 4th general election in 1967 that intensely reduced the Congress party's overwhelming monopoly. The coalition politics that had started with the 1967 election replaced the one-party dominant system. It paved the way for the emergence of a multi-party system with the rise of regional parties. This phase can be regarded as a very crucial point in Indian federalism, which for the first time marked a clear distinction between constitutional structural setup and operational reality of India's federal process. During this period, India experienced the non-congress government both at the Centre and states as coalition government with the rise of regional parties. The states became proactive and assertive of its rights. The states demanded greater state autonomy and economic independence and questioned the constitutional provisions relating to Centre-state relations. The Centre faced a lot of confrontation from state governments, resulting in insurgent movements in different parts of India like Punjab and North East India. The Centre also employed authoritarian rule to control such issues. The most infamous national emergency from 1975 to 1977 challenged the country's federal structure and deinstitutionalises political parties. Most importantly, it led to the rise of the secession militant movement in different parts of India.

In the 1967th fourth general election, Indian National Congress lost its hegemonic position from earlier 73 per cent seat share to 54.42 per cent seat share with 40.78 per cent vote share. The fourth general election and assembly elections in 1967 drastically changed the political landscape of India. In 1967 Congress party lost power in six state assembly elections. In three states, it lost its majority, which resulted in formation of non-Congress coalition government by the anti-congress coalition called *Samyukta Vidhayak Dal* (SVD). It had started a trend towards developing bipolarisation of India's party system, i.e., Congress versus non-Congress (Sridharan, 2012). However, during this period, the most significant political development was forming the first non-congress government at the Centre through a surplus coalition by five political parties under Janata Party in 1977. This Janata Party coalition at the Centre also influenced many state elections in states like Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, etc., where first-time non-Congress government was formed. After the collapse of the Janata Party government at the Centre in 1979, Congress party came to power as the dominant national party at the Centre and most of the states.

2.3.3 Third Phase: From 1989-2014

The third phase in India's party system started with the 1989 general election. In this significant election, the Congress party lost its monopoly position. 1989 marked a watershed in Indian political system by introducing a fragmented multi-party system with the federalisation of party system where coalition became inherent to form a national government at the Centre. Although in the 2014 and 2019 general elections, BJP got an absolute majority, still it followed a surplus coalition government model.

There is a major consensus among scholars on Indian Politics that India has become more federal after the post-1989 era which they referred as “era of federal coalition” (Arora, 2000; Arora et al., 2013). Scholars considered this era of federal coalition as the turning point of India's federal process, which has shifted the centre-state relation from centralised federation to more federal polity. It has marked a new culture of power-sharing through the different informal mechanisms to accommodate the interest of coalition partners. “The participation of many regional parties in the coalition government at the Centre from 1989 indicates the reinforcement of a significant shift from centralised governance towards a shared rule” (Khan,2003, p.182). After 1989 and mainly from 1996, the coalition became an inevitable both at the Centre and the state level. The coalition politics compelled the national parties to come closer to regional state parties for government formation at the national level. Since 1989 to 2014, there is no any single party has an absolute majority to form a single-party majority government at Centre. However, from 1991- 1996 Congress party formed a minority government at Centre with the support of other political parties. The National Parties have to depend on the regional parties for the government formation process at the Centre. In comparison with one party dominant majority government, the state parties must have a more significant role in the multi-party coalition government. For example, the coalition government at the Centre is mainly based on the Common Minimum Programme decided by all partners of the coalition. This power-sharing formula helped maintain a stable harmonious cordial Centre-state relation by accommodating regional aspirations and countrywide needs. "This has affected not only the party politics and legislative configuration but also the nature of the political coalition, inter-governmental relation and nature of the distribution of responsibilities among government at different levels" (Majeed,2004).

Table 2.3: *Federal Coalitions in India's Federal Polity from 1989 to 2019*

Federal Coalition (FC)-Year	National Front 1989	BJP led 1996	United Front I 1996	United Front II 1997	NDA I 1998	NDA II 1999	UPA I 2004	UPA II 2009	NDA III 2014	NDA IV 2019
Strength	283	195	318	318	285	303	338	322	336	353
Total Parties	10	5	13	13	20	21	27	20	29	23
State Parties	4	3	8	8	18	19	22	16	28	22
Executive Coalition	5	2	9	9	10	10	9	6	6	5
Legislative Coalition	5	3	4	4	10	11	18	14	23	19
Total Ministers	39	12	39	42	43	70	67	79	69	58
Ministers from State Parties	3	1	21	24	13	16	20	16	6	4
Largest Party's Seat & Per cent in FC	JD 143 (50.53)	BJP 161 (82.57)	INC 140 (44.02)	INC 140 (44.02)	BJP 182 (63.86)	BJP 182 (60.07)	INC 145 (42.90)	INC 206 (63.98)	BJP 282 (83.93)	BJP 303 (85.83)
Coalitionable parties' seat & per cent in FC	140 (49.47)	34 (17.43)	178 (55.98)	178 (55.98)	103 (36.14)	121 (39.93)	193 (57.10)	116 (36.02)	54 (16.07)	50 (14.16)
Duration (days)	343	16	324	332	572	1683	1826	1830	1824	-
Type of Coalition	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	MC	SC	SC

Note: **Executive Coalition**-Parties joining the council of minister as governing party, **Legislative Coalition**-parties supporting the government in parliament without joining cabinet. Largest party and coalitionable parties' seat share per centage is based on total strength of federal coalition. **MC**-Minority Coalition (Coalition maker party does not have a single-party majority) **SC**-Surplus Coalition (Coalition maker parties have a single-party majority to form government).

Sources: Author's calculation based on the main ideas of Arora (2000, 2003a, 2015) & Kailash (2007, 2013, 2016), M.P. Singh (2001) drawing from different sources. Data for total number of political parties in federal coalitions have been taken from Table 1.4-6 in E. Sridharan (2012a, 2012 b) however the data has been updated from different internet sources e.g. <http://www.indiavotes.com> and from Indian Recorder. The information regarding total strength, state parties, largest parties and coalitionable parties seats has been calculated from election commission of India's statistical reports on general election from 1989-2014 available at http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/ElectionStatistics.aspx. Data regarding total ministers, ministers from state parties, legislative coalition and executive coalitions have been taken from different sources like Ruparelia (2015), Indian Recorder (from 1996-1999), India Year Book (1999, 2004, 2009, 2014) and different media sources (The Hindu, Times of India, The Hindustan Times, The Indian Express) and websites <https://www.rediff.com/election/1999/oct/13portfo.htm> & <http://www.rediff.com/election/2004/may/22man.htm> and Author has calculated the duration of coalition government at Centre from <http://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/former-prime-ministers/>.

2.4 The Fourth Phase: The “BJP Dominant System” or India's “Second Dominant Party System”

The fourth phase of party system has started with the 2014 general election, where after 30 years again a national party won the federal election with an absolute majority. BJP, as the polity-wide party, claimed a landslide victory with absolute majority continuously in two consecutive Lok Sabha elections, i.e., 2014 and 2019. Scholars defined this electoral development as the emergence of India's Second Dominant Party System (Palshikar, 2017), BJP Dominant System (Mehta, 2016), and starting of a “fourth party system” (Chhibber & Verma, 2018). However, with the 2014 and 2019 phenomenal electoral victory, "BJP is asserting its dominance across India's multi-level party system since 2014" (Schakel et al., 2019, p.331). For Chhibber and Verma (2019), "the resounding electoral success of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2019, howsoever unexpected, is the result of an ideological shift in Indian politics" (Chhibber & Verma, 2019, p.131). BJP as a Hindu nationalist party, scholars also see its rise in the recent two Lok Sabha elections as the rise of political majoritarianism and electoral authoritarianism (Jaffrelot et al., 2019; Chhibber & Verma, 2019). Some scholars also defined this phase as the return to One-party dominant system (Chandhoke, 2014). However, the dominance of BJP has a significant difference in terms of its structure, nature, and growth from the Congress party.

The rise of BJP in Indian Politics is significant political development after independence because of mainly four reasons. First BJP as a Hindu Nationalist party is following its predecessor BJS's footsteps to polarise India's electoral politics on religious line. Secondly, as a strong alternative to the INC in national as well as state politics from 1980 to the present time. Thirdly in the era of compulsion of coalition politics with the emergence of federal coalition in 'Binodal Party system,'¹⁴ BJP became a strong dominant coalition-maker party with a new power-sharing mechanism of 'NDA' (National Democratic Alliance). Fourthly, after the Congress party, BJP becomes the only second national party to win the federal election with an absolute majority and established a BJP Dominant system in Indian Politics.

¹⁴ Scholars Like Balveer Arora categorized India's Party system after 1998 as Bi-nodal system by highlighting the new political development under two main polity wide party i.e. Congress and BJP with their own coalition bloc i.e. UPA and NDA

Different scholars defined, categorised the BJP as a party based on its ideology, nature of its activities, the structure of the party as Hindu Nationalist Party, Communal Party, Pragmatic and opportunistic party, and cadre-based, centrist-right wing party. In this categorisation, the dominant perspective about BJP as a Hindu nationalist party with right-wing ideology established an alternative model of one-party dominated "BJP Dominant system" in India's party system. To define BJP as a party, Suhas Palshikar argues,

the BJP became a party of different meanings for different sections. To its core constituency, it continued to be a party of Hindutva; to the OBCs, it represented a vehicle of political power, a vehicle articulating and absorbing their democratic upsurge; for power seekers, it was a convenient platform offering the possibility of tactical use of the Hindutva weapon when required; for devout Hindus, it represented the religious assertion of the Hindu religion; to the new and upwardly-mobile lower-middle sections, the party represented new possibilities of economic benefit. (Palshikar, 2015, p.724)

Since its predecessor BJS's time, BJP has a strong linkage with its parental organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in terms of both ideology and organisational base. BJP is committed to the ideology of "Hindu nationalism" with the motto of "*one nation, one culture, one race.*" It highly emphasizes on preserving India's ancient culture and values with value-based politics through the idea of Hindutva, which they defined as "*way of life.*" They have faith in integral humanism, which was formulated by Deen Dayal Upadhaya in 1965. BJP is committed to "nationalism and national interest, democracy and Gandhian approach of socio-economic issues" for establishing an egalitarian exploitation free society based on the religious belief of 'positive secularism' with the motto of "*Sarva Dharma Sambhava*" (all religions are equal). BJP structured as a cadre-based party. According to BJP's constitution BJP believes in mainly five principles or ideologies, i.e., "Nationalism and national integration, Democracy, Gandhian socialism, Positive Secularism and Value-based politics" (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2004, p. 1).

BJP since its birth has a dynamic political history as a Hindu nationalist party in Indian politics. Simultaneously, under the compulsion of coalition politics, BJP became a moderate, pragmatic party by compromising its radical core party agenda through the Common Minimum

Programme (CMP). BJP has started its political journey with its predecessor Bharatiya Jana Sangh (Indian People's Union) in 1951 from Hindutva politics to a popular coalition-maker party to a one-party dominant "BJP Dominant system". Palshikar points out, "BJP historically represented the twin constituencies of political Hindutva (or Hindu nationalism) and anti-Congressism" (Palshikar, 2015, p.723). Scholars have defined different transitional phases of BJP from the 1980s to the present time regarding its strategy, practicing ideology and coalition politics. Based on existing literature before the 2014 general election, we can identify three transitional phases of BJP in Indian politics, i.e., From 1980-1989 BJP as a moderate Party with liberal attitude under Vajpayee's leadership and from 1989 to 1998 BJP as radical, extremist party with radical Hindu-nationalist agenda under the leadership of L.K. Advani and thirdly from 1998 to 2004 BJP as relatively moderate party under the compulsion of coalition Politics (Jaffrelot, 2013) and present political development initiates a new transitional phase of BJP, i.e. the rise of the "second dominant party system" or a "BJP Dominant system". Pradeep Chhibber and Rahul Verma (2019) points out the reason of this rise of BJP as "the increasing size of the middle class and a new form of political majoritarianism, delinked from a religious Hindu nationalism, helped the BJP shed its tag as an upper caste party mainly confined to the Hindi heartland" (Chhibber & Verma, 2019, p.131).

The electoral performance of BJP in the Lok Sabha elections from its first general election to the recent 2019 election has shown its phenomenal growth. BJP has started its electoral performance with two seats and 7.74 per cent vote share in 1984 election to 303 seats with 37.4 vote share in 2019 election (see Table 2.4) which signifies its profound electoral strategies in Indian politics. Despite being a 'politically untouchable'¹⁵ party for long time, BJP has become successful in converting itself as one of the successful coalition-maker parties with the formation of NDA in 1999.

¹⁵ After 1990 BJP's radical Hindu nationalist agenda and its role in demolishing Babri Mosque, other political parties strongly criticize its activities of communal politics and they make an attitude towards BJP as political untouchables.

Table 2.4: *BJP in Lok Sabha Elections*

Year	1984	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019
Total contested seats	224	225	468	471	388	339	364	433	428	436
Seats Won	2	85	120	161	182	182	138	116	282	303
Seat Share (%)	0.38	16.06	23.03	29.65	33.51	33.51	25.41	21.36	51.93	55.80
Vote Share (%)	7.74	11.36	20.11	20.29	25.59	23.75	22.16	18.8	31.34	37.4

Source: Compiled data from Election Commission of India

Figure 2.1 above shows the rapidly increasing level of vote share and seat share of BJP in the Lok Sabha Elections from 1984 to 2019. It has started from below 10 per cent to above 30 per cent vote share and at the same time from 7.74 per cent to 51.93 per cent seat share in Lok Sabha elections. In terms of understanding BJP's territorial expansion as a polity-wide party in all over India, BJP has been successful in winning single party absolute majority in the 2014 and 2019 general election as a dominant national party with remarkable electoral presence in all five regions as analysed in the Table 2.5.

Figure 2.1: *BJP's Electoral Performance in Lok Sabha Elections: 1984-2019*

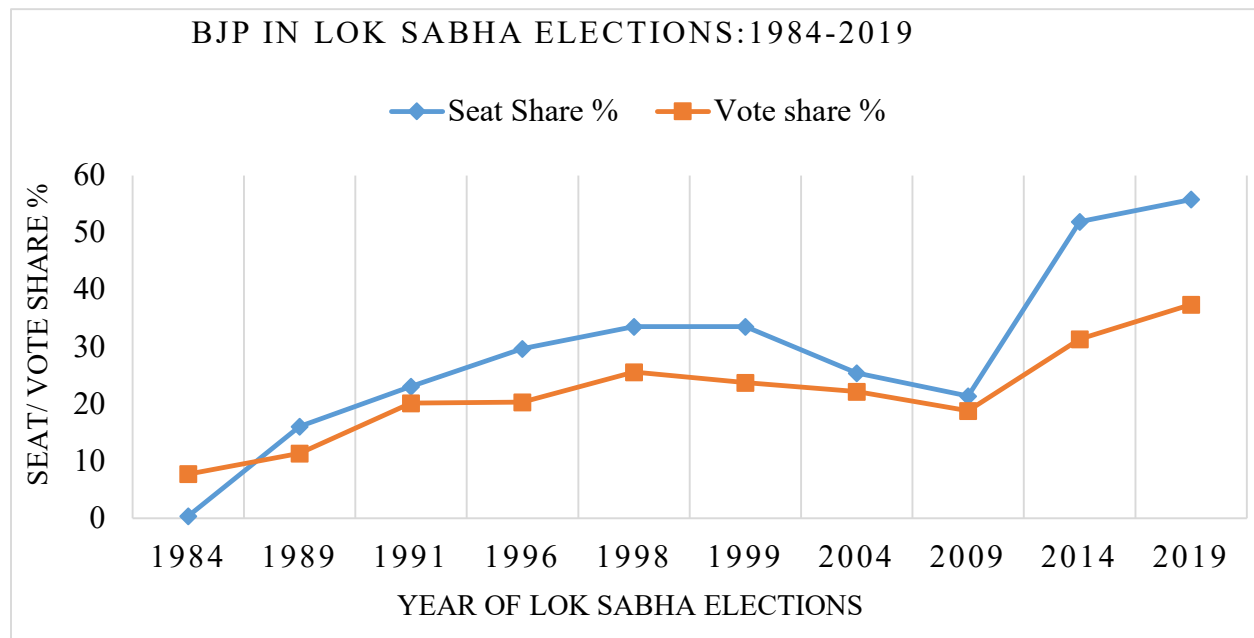


Table 2.5: BJP's electoral performance in Lok Sabha Elections, 1984-2019 (Zone wise) *

Zones (Seats) Year	North (220)	South (132)	West (78)	East (88)	North East (25)	All India (543)
1984	0	1	1	0	-	2
1989	63	0	22	0	0	85
1991	87	5	26	0	2	120
1996	120	6	34	0	1	161
1998	128	20	25	7	1	181
1999	115	19	35	11	2	182
2004	70	18	28	18	4	138
2009	46	20	27	19	4	116
2014	174	22	53	25	8	282
2019	163	29	51	46	14	303

Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India's statistical report on the general election from 1984-2019 available at [http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/ElectionStatistics.aspx]

Note: **North Zone** -consist of total 220 seats including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Chandigarh, Delhi NCT, Bihar, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. **South Zone**- consist of 132 seats including Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala, Lakshadweep, and Andaman & Nicobar Island. **East Zone** consists of a total of 88 seats including West Bengal, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand. **North East Zone** consists of total 25 seats including Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. **West Zone**- consist of 78 seats including Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu.

Table 2.5 shows the electoral presence of BJP in five different zones in the general election since 1984 to recent 2019 general election. BJP won a single party absolute majority for the first time in the 2014 general election as a dominant national party in India with a strong electoral presence in all the regions. Only from 1998 general election, BJP established its impressive electoral presence in all the regions by proving as a polity-wide national party.

Region wise, BJP has a strong electoral support base in North India which has the largest number of Lok Sabha seats. In North region, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Delhi NCT, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, BJP has strong support base. Similarly, in West Region also mainly two-state Gujarat, Maharashtra, BJP has strong support base. However, BJP has been a marginal player in East and North East region; out of total 113 Lok Sabha seats from this region, BJP could win hardly two seats to 33 seats till 2014 general election. Only in 2019 general election, BJP has won 60 seats from these two regions. In the North East Region

only in Assam BJP made its impressive electoral presence from 1991 general and state elections. BJP has a very poor support base in the South region also, where out of 132 seats BJP hardly managed to win 6-29 seats. Arithmetically, East (include North East) and South region as a whole share 245 seats out of 543 Lok Sabha seats and BJP usually win average 40 seats from these two regions. On the other hand, in North and West India, BJP has strong electoral support base which shares 220 and 78 Lok Sabha seats (total 298 seats), where from 1989 to 2019's general election, BJP won more than 80 per cent seats in its total seats won in every Lok Sabha elections. This makes it clear that BJP for its electoral expansion in East and South region has to go for electoral alliance, seats adjustment with different regional political parties. For example in Assam BJP makes electoral alliance with regional parties like Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Bodoland People's Front (BPF), In Arunachal Pradesh with Arunachal Congress (AC) and People's Party of Arunachal Pradesh (PPA), in Sikkim with Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) and Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM), in Mizoram with Mizo National Front (MNF), in Tamil Nadu with All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIDMK), Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK). BJP as the coalition-maker party used coalition as the significant strategy for its electoral gains and expanded their support base and even in government formation at Centre in 1996, 1998, 1999-2004 and recently 2014 and 2019 NDA government also. Table 2.6 shows the government formation at Centre by BJP from 1998 multi-party minority coalition government to present 2019 NDA surplus coalition government. In these BJP led coalition governments, regional parties have played a significant role in government formation at Centre until 1999-2004 NDA federal coalition. In 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, although BJP has its absolute majority, still BJP has maintained a surplus coalition government with its pre-poll alliance partners. This new development in the center's government formation process necessitates a significant point to understand the rise of the BJP Dominant system in Indian politics.

Table2.6: *BJP led NDA Coalition Government (federal coalition) at Centre from 1998-2019*

Federal Coalition	Strength	Total Party	Type of Coalition	Executive Coalition	Legislative Coalition	State Parties in Coalition	BJP's seat & % in F.C.	Alliance parties seats & %
NDA-I 1998-1999	285	26	Minority Coalition	12	14	20	182 (63.86 %)	103 (36.14 %)
NDA-II 1999-2004	303	23	Minority Coalition	14	9	19	182 (60.07 %)	121 (39.93 %)
NDA-III 2014-2019	336	29	Surplus Coalition	6	23	28	282 (83.93%)	54 (16.07 %)
NDA-IV 2019-Till	353	23	Surplus Coalition	5	18	22	303 (85.83 %)	50 (14.16%)

Source: Author's calculation based on different sources like election commission of India's election reports, newspaper The Hindu, Times of India and Wikipedia.org; E. Sridharan (2012), 'Coalition and Democratic Deepening in India', in E. Sridharan (ed.) *Coalition Politics and Democratic Consolidation in Asia*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, pp.20-73

Note: **Minority Coalition**- where coalition maker party has no majority seats to form government, and so they depend on upon other parties for government formation. **Surplus Coalition**-where coalition maker party itself has single party majority but still they practicing coalition. **Executive Coalition**- Coalition consist of those parties who formed council of minister as governing parties. **Legislative Coalition**- Coalition consist of those parties who support as legislative parties on the floor of parliament.

2.4.1 *BJP at Centre*

Till now at national level, BJP has formed its government for five times. The first BJP led government at the Centre lasted only for 13 days with the help of six political parties. The second BJP led NDA-I government survived only for one year. However, the NDA-II from 1999-2004 become the first coalition government at Centre to complete its full term. During this period six unstable coalition governments formed under different political coalition of various political parties as National Front, United Front, and BJP led coalition. Kailash (2007) explained how these political coalitions could not handle the middle game¹⁶ of coalition politics which resulted in unstable coalition government at the Centre from 1989 to 1998. After 1998 general election India has experienced with 'binodal party system'¹⁷ where two central polity-wide parties; BJP and Congress were playing a leading role as main coalition-maker party to organise coalition and assemble the 'coalitionable' parties through two main pools or

¹⁶ K.K. Kailash in his article 'middle game of coalition politics' mention about the technique and arrangements of coalition politics to make a stable successful coalition government which each coalition government at centre practice.

¹⁷ Balveer Arora defined India's party system after 1998 as binodal party system lead by two polity-wide party i.e. Congress and BJP

node as a device of power sharing mechanism under NDA led by BJP and UPA led by Congress (Arora, 2000). In this era of federal coalition, only National Democratic Alliance (NDA) for the first time formed a stable as well as successful coalition government at Centre.

After the 1996 general election, despite being the largest party in parliament, BJP failed to assemble potential allies to form a stable BJP led coalition government at Centre. Except few political parties¹⁸ others did not support BJP due to its radical Hindutva image. After completing 13 days on 1 June, 1996 BJP led coalition government had to resign from the ministry. This compelled BJP to rethink its party's position on its core radical ideological stand and its electoral strategy. In an interview with L.K. Advani by Outlook on 25th October, Advani considers BJP's moderate liberal phase under the compulsion of coalition politics:

'...though we were the largest party, we failed to form a government. It was felt that on an ideological basis we could not go further. So we embarked on the courses of alliance based coalitions...!' (Outlook, 1999 cited in Jaffrelot & Hansen, 1998)

By adopting a moderate stand for broader acceptability, BJP had sacrificed their party's core ideology and radical agendas¹⁹. BJP projected their Hindutva ideology instead of religious nationalism to cultural nationalism.²⁰ BJP also used the moderate image of Atal Bihari Vajpayee as party's Prime Ministerial Candidate in 1998 general election with the slogan like “Stable government and able Prime Minister” and “Better government and Stable government.” BJP by adopting this moderate stand easily attracted many regional parties from different regions for pre-poll as well as post-poll alliance in 1998 general election. In the 1998 Lok Sabha election, BJP became the single largest party with 182 seats and formed its first NDA government at Centre with 26 political parties, including three independent candidates. In this coalition government, as mentioned in Table 2.6 BJP as the coalition maker party shared 63.86 per cent seat share and its alliance partners with 103 seats shared 36.14 per cent seat share. On March 18, 1998 BJP with its alliance partners made a Common Minimum Programme (CMP) named “National Agenda for Government”, which became the basis of Vajpayee's 1998 NDA government. BJP for the first time did not include any controversial

¹⁸ Only four political parties Shiv Sena, Shiromani Akali dal, Samata Party and Haryana Vikas party gave their support to BJP led coalition government in 1996.

¹⁹ Core radical agendas like an abrogation of Article 370 and implementation of uniform civil code for all.

²⁰ In 1998's Party's manifesto BJP mention Hindutva as cultural nationalism.

radical issues relating to the party's own core agenda. However, this coalition government survived only for one year when one of its major alliance partners AIADMK withdrew its support from the government. Although this coalition government survived only one year, BJP succeeded to overcome its 'political untouchable' status to a popular coalition maker party.

The third government by BJP at Centre i.e., NDA-II (1999-2004) became the first successful multi-party minority coalition government in India for completing its full term. Before this, no other coalition government could complete its full term at the Centre. NDA-II was mainly a pre-poll political coalition with 21 state parties where later on two more political parties²¹ joined through the post-poll alliance. NDA-II as the broad-based grand coalition jointly shared 303 seats where BJP as coalition maker party alone shared 182 seats and its alliance parties collectively shared 121 seats. By nature, NDA-II was a minority coalition so regional parties as alliance partners of this coalition had greater role in bargaining power and influence over national-level decision-making and power-sharing in the federal cabinet. BJP had moderated their core party agendas and maintained different mechanisms as Common Minimum Programme, Group of Minister, Empowered Group of Minister, Cabinet committee in its federal cabinet to manage this coalition. As a result, the balance between regional aspiration and national unity was intake during this time. Scholars have observed that during this multi-party minority coalition government, BJP as a national party was more accommodative, moderate political party. As Katherine Adeney (2015) observed, "the BJP was quick to adopt the new realities of coalition politics, realising that its message of Hindutva would not appeal to a pan-Indian base" (Adeney, 2015, p.10).

After the 2014 general election BJP as the dominant polity-wide party is seen asserting its majoritarianism both ideologically and politically. In the 2014 general election, BJP became the largest party with the absolute majority of 282 seats and 31.34 per cent vote share. After 30 years, for the first time in the national election, BJP as a national party achieved such phenomenal victory. BJP formed a pre-poll alliance with more than 20 regional parties in this election. After this election result, BJP formed a surplus coalition government at Centre with total 336 seats on 26 May, 2014 under the Prime Ministership of Narendra Modi. As a surplus

²¹ Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) and Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) joined NDA II federal coalition through post poll alliance.

coalition, BJP shares 282 seats with 83.93 per cent seat share in NDA federal coalition whereas its alliance partner collectively shares 54 seats with 16.07 per cent seat share. In this NDA-III government, BJP awarded ministerial berth to five of its major alliance partner including, Shiv Sena, Shiromani Akali Dal, Lok Janashakti Party, Telegu Desham Party, BLSP. Similarly, in the 2019 general election, BJP again came back to power with 303 seats and 37.4 per cent vote share alone as the single largest party. BJP again formed another surplus coalition government at Centre along with more than 20 regional parties with 353 seats. In their NDA-IV surplus coalition government, BJP had shared four ministries with its alliance partners Shiv Sena, Shiromani Akali Dal, Lok Janashakti Party and RPI (A). Compared to the earlier coalition government formed by BJP at the Centre, the 2014 and 2019 BJP governments can be seen as dominant party style government. Before 2014 BJP had to maintain a multi-party minority coalition government at centre. As a result, the party was constrained by its alliance partners. After 2014 general election, BJP with single party majority although maintained a surplus coalition government, BJP is seen imposing its own party core agendas in a majoritarian way. By asserting its ideological hegemony, the party started maintaining a dominant party-style government at the centre.

2.4.2 BJP in States

After the phenomenal victory in two recent Lok Sabha elections, BJP has become the dominant polity-wide party at the national level. BJP also has won many state Assembly elections after 2014 general election. Before 2014 general election BJP had a significant support base both in national and state elections only in North and West regions however, after 2014, BJP became the ruling party in many states in other regions like East, North East regions. As of April 2020, BJP becomes the single largest party and with a formidable majority, formed its state government in 12 states (see Table 2.7) i.e., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Goa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand and in Haryana BJP shared the power with Jananayak Janata Party (JJP). In six other states BJP has shared its power as a junior alliance partner with ruling alliance. In Bihar, BJP shared power with Janata dal (United) and Lok Jana Shakti Party (LJP), in Meghalaya

with NPP and UDP, PDF, HSPDP, in Mizoram with MNF, in Nagaland with NDPP, in Sikkim with SKM, in Tamil Nadu with AIADMK although BJP does not have any seats.

Table 2.7: *BJP and its alliance partner's ruling present state governments*

State	Last Election	Largest Party	Governing Party	Government Since
Arunachal Pradesh	2019	BJP	BJP (41), JD (U) (7), NPP (4)	16-09-2016
Assam	2016	BJP	BJP (62), AGP (14), BPF (12)	19-05-2016
Bihar	2017	JD (U)	JD (U), BJP (54), LJP (2)	27-07-2017
Gujarat	2017	BJP	BJP	28-02-1998
Goa	2017	BJP	BJP, MGP	06-03-2017
Haryana	2019	BJP	BJP (40), JJP (10)	19-10-2014
Himachal Pradesh	2017	BJP	BJP (44)	18-12-2017
Karnataka	2019	BJP	BJP (117), BSP (1)	26-07-2019
Manipur	2017	BJP	BJP (31), NPP, NPF, LJP	11-03-2017
Madhya Pradesh	2018	BJP	BJP, BSP, SP	-03-2020
Meghalaya	2018	NPP	NPP, UDP, PDP, BJP, HSDP	06-03-2018
Mizoram	2018	MNF	MNF, BJP	15-12-2018
Nagaland	2018	NDPP	NDPP, BJP	08-03-2018
Sikkim	2019	SKM	SKM	23-05-2019
Tamil Nadu	2016	AIADMK	AIADMK	19-02-2019
Tripura	2018	BJP	BJP, IPFT	09-03-2018
Uttar Pradesh	2017	BJP	BJP, AD (S), NP	11-03-2017
Uttarakhand	2017	BJP	BJP (56)	11-03-2017

Source: Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_current_Indian_ruling_and_opposition_parties]

At the same time since 2014, BJP was in power as the largest party in Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Maharashtra and it was alliance partner with TDP in Andhra Pradesh, PDP in Jammu & Kashmir, BJD in Odisha and SAD in Punjab. However, in states like Telangana, Kerala, West Bengal and union territory Puducherry, BJP has never been in power. In recent 2021 assembly election at West Bengal, for the first time BJP has won 77 seats with 38.13 per cent vote share. In North East India region also, BJP has phenomenal growth as the dominant national ruling party after 2014 general election. Before 2014 general election BJP was just a nowhere party with a marginal support base. After 2014's electoral victory, BJP has replaced INC from most of these states and formed their government as the largest party or alliance partner with other major regional parties in the North East region.

2.5 BJP in Indian Federalism: Dominant Party style to political majoritarianism

Katharine Adeney (2005) argues, "Hindu Nationalism has historically had a mixed attitude to the federal form of government" (Adeney, 2005, p. 98). Adeney further argues, "Hindu nationalist thought favours a strong centre, being committed to the unity of the Hindu nation, but is simultaneously committed to the decentralisation of authority to panchayat" (Adeney, 2005, p. 99). Therefore, the Hindu nationalists instead of favouring a 'multi-national' federalism interested to established a 'national' federalism in India (O'leary, 2003, p.6 cited in Adeney, 2005, p.99). Before BJP, its predecessor BJS had advocated a strong centre for preserving *Akhand Bharat* 's national unity and integrity. In its first manifesto published on 29th October 1951, BJS showed its commitment to a unitary form of government as more appropriate than a federal one (Bharatiya Jana Sangh, 1973, p.49). At the same time, BJS also supported decentralisation of political power at the lowest level in Village Panchayat, municipalities and corporate levels. After the 1967 general election, BJS had gradually moderated its stand on the unitary form of government and recognised the importance of stable centre-state relations and demanded an appointment of an Inter State Council. However, its stand on Jammu and Kashmir issue remained same.

During its initial period, BJP showed its serious concern for centre-state relations. In the Srinagar Conclave of opposition parties assembled to discuss Centre-state relation in October, 1983, BJP emphasised on reviewing the financial, administrative and political matters in terms of centre-state relations. The BJP and Lok dal under the banner of "National Democratic Alliance" convened for a national consensus on Centre-state relations. The BJP emphasised on wide range of issues like setting up of an Inter-State Council under article 263 of the Constitution, the importance of the Governor's role in stable centre-state relations, more autonomy and responsibility to Planning Commission and more autonomy and participation of states in formulation and implementation of Five Years Planning (Dubey & Chawla, 2014).

In its first election manifesto in 1984, BJP has elaborately mentioned centre-state's relation as an important issue. In their manifesto BJP acknowledged the federal nature of Indian government and envisaged strong states with strong Centre. Indeed, BJP showed their state commitment to restore the balance between Centre and states through supporting and

strengthening governments, appointing state governor in consultation with the state governments, giving the states a fairer share of Central revenue, and increasing financial power of the states. The party also committed to “constitute an Inter State Council under Article 263 to settle All Inter-State and State-Centre disputes” (Bharatiya Janata Party, 1984). Before 2014 BJP as a ruling party as Katharine Adeney (2005) points out, was constrained by its alliance partners. For political power BJP became a moderate party to maintain a balance between regional aspiration and national need. Along with party agendas, the party even adjusted its electoral campaign strategies to accommodate the regional aspirations. Yamini Aiyar and Louise Tillin also points out,

The BJP’s approach to federalism itself has changed as its role in the party system changed. When first in power at the Center (1998-2004), the BJP governed at the helm of a coalition government within a regionalized party landscape. In order to come to power, it had adopted a more accommodative approach to regional diversity. (Aiyar & Tillin, 2020, p.132)

In this context Palshikar and Yadav analysed "throughout the 1990s both Congress and BJP had been forced to adopt state specific and region-specific campaign strategies due to the 'regionalisation of the political space and the right of the state as the main theatre for political competition" (Yadav & Palshikar, 2008). As a result of “coalition compulsions- BJP had to enter into coalitions with many state parties that did not agree with the BJP's Hindutva politics so it toned down its Hindutva rhetoric” (Palshikar, 2015, p. 725). Therefore, before 2014 for BJP, it was difficult to materialise their Hindu nationalist thought. BJP also understood it very well that they cannot come to power at the Centre using its Hindu nationalist thought in action. "To come to power at centre required entering alliance with regional based parties to expand the size of a future coalition" (Sridharan & Varshney, 2001, p.216). Through using a pragmatic policy BJP formed its government in 1996, 1998 and 1999 government. As a significant step in this pragmatic policy, BJP had dropped its controversial party agendas from its party manifesto. As a result, there were no major tensions in centre-state relations during these NDA regimes in terms of central intervention, using article 356 or imposition of President's rule. As Adeney points out, "Hindu Nationalist attitudes to federal design and centre-state relations have been adaptive and accommodative in the past"(Adeney, 2005, p.102). During that period

BJP's manifesto also extensively focused on federal harmony and stable centre-state relationship through its various commitments.

Table 2.8 helps in understanding BJP's attitude towards federal design and centre-state relations and their stand on core party agendas from 1998 to 2019 General elections. For our reference, this study has just covered the BJP's election manifesto during its ruling period. The 1998-, 1999- and 2004-party manifesto of BJP had strongly emphasised on centre-state relations focusing on wide range of issues such as- (i) creation of a commission to review the Constitution of India, (ii) steps towards prevention of misuse of Article 356 of the Constitution, (iii) commitment to the devolution of more financial and administrative power and function of the state, (iv) increase the allocation of resources to the states,

Table 2.8: BJP's major common Agendas relating to Centre-state relations and Party's ideologies in Manifestos

Year	Main Agendas relating to centre-state relations and Party Ideologies
1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Appoint a Commission to review the Constitution of India. b) Necessary steps to prevent misuse of Article 356. c) Create Uttaranchal, Jharkhand, Vidarbha and Chhattisgarh as separate States. Full Statehood for Delhi. d) Abrogate Article 370 of the Constitution. e) Immediately follow the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission f) Consult State Governments before appointing Governors and consider ways and means of preventing misuse of Raj Bhavans for political purposes. g) Increase allocation of resources to the States in real terms- increase the States' share of gross proceeds of Central Tax revenues to 33 per cent.
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Commitment to the devolution of more financial and administrative powers and functions to the States. b) Take suitable steps to ensure harmonious Centre-State relations in light of the Sarkaria Commission's recommendations and effect decentralisation right up to the grassroots level by activating and involving Panchayats and local bodies. c) A Backward Area Commission for each state of the Union to identify least developed areas and recommend comprehensive measures for their development shall be instituted. d) A Committee to study the feasibility of treating all 19 languages included in Schedule 8 of the Constitution as official languages. e) Set up a National Judicial Committee to recommend judicial appointments in High Court and Supreme Court. f) Establishing a National Registrar of Citizenship and a multi-purpose identity card for all citizens.

2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) BJP will place Centre-State relations on an even keel through the process of consultation and strive for harmonious Centre-State relations. b) Team India shall not be limited to the Prime Minister led team sitting in Delhi, but will also include Chief Ministers and other functionaries as equal partners. c) Ensure fiscal autonomy of States while urging financial discipline. d) Create 'Regional Councils of States', with common problems and concerns, with a view to seeking solutions that are applicable across a group of states. e) Given the unique status of Union Territories (UTs), they will receive special attention. We will focus on developing and strengthening the economy of UTs. f) The moribund forums like 'National Development Council' and 'Inter-State Council' will be revived and made into active bodies. g) BJP has always stood for greater decentralisation through smaller States. h) BJP reiterates its stand on the Article 370, and will discuss this with all stakeholders and remains committed to the abrogation of this article. i) BJP will set up a National Judicial Commission for the appointment of judges in higher judiciary. j) BJP reiterates its stand to explore all possibilities within the framework of the Constitution to facilitate the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. k) BJP reiterates its stand to draft a Uniform Civil Code, drawing upon the best traditions and harmonising them with the modern times.
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Committed to the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Bill for the protection of individuals of religious minority communities from neighbouring countries escaping persecution. Hindus, Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs escaping persecution from India's neighbouring countries will be given citizenship in India. b) BJP is committed to annulling Article 35A of the Constitution of India as the provision is discriminatory against non-permanent residents and women of Jammu and Kashmir. BJP believes that Article 35A is an obstacle in the development of the state. BJP will take all steps to ensure a safe and peaceful environment for all residents of the state. c) BJP reiterate its stand on Ram Mandir. The Party will explore all possibilities within the framework of the Constitution and all necessary efforts to facilitate the expeditious construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. d) BJP reiterates its stand to draft a Uniform Civil Code, drawing upon the best traditions and harmonising them with the modern times. e) BJP will ensure greater involvement of the states in all aspects of policy making and governance thereby strengthening federalism. It will also ensure implementation of the 14th Finance Commission's recommendations.

Source: Party manifestos of Bharatiya Janata Party 1998, 1999, 2014 and 2019

(v) implementation of the recommendations of Sarkaria Commission, (vi) creation of new states like Uttaranchal, Jharkhand, Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh and giving full Statehood to Delhi, (vii) ensure fiscal autonomy of the states, (viii) create "Regional Councils of States" etc. At the same time BJP also selectively expressed their commitment to own core party agendas like- (i) abrogation of Article 370, (ii) Construction of Ram Temple, (iii) implementation of Uniform Civil Code etc. However, in comparison with BJP's 2019 party manifesto, we have seen a significant difference in BJP's attitude towards its core party agendas. In the 2019 party manifesto BJP strongly expressed its commitment to enact Citizenship Amendment Bill for giving citizenship to religious minority communities excluding Muslim from neighbouring countries in the name of persecution and its commitment to construct Ram temple, abrogation of Article 35 (A) and Article 370 and implementation of Uniform Civil Code.

In terms of implementing these agendas, after coming to power BJP has adopted many initiatives, enactments. Based on these agendas, there is a significant difference in BJP's attitude, party position, and government style before and after 2014 general elections. In terms of reducing central intervention during the NDA federal coalition government, we could see comparatively fewer impositions of president's rule. During this NDA regime after 2014 general election NDA government used Article 356 about ten times²². From independence to present time total 115 times president rule has been imposed. Only after 1994's Bommai judgment, the use of this anti-federal article has decreased. On 22 February 2000, BJP led the NDA government appointed "National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC)" under Justice Venkatachaliah to review the working of the Constitution. NDA also tried to accommodate various regional aspiration, demands in terms of giving Statehood, recognising the new official language, including many tribal communities into the list of Schedule Tribes under the Constitution. NDA after 1956's linguistic Reorganisation of states and in 1971's North East State Reorganization, took bold initiative to respond the regional demands by creating three new states in 2000 from 1 to 15 November as Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh

²² The centre had imposed Presidents rule about 10 times during the present BJP led NDA governments after 2014 general election. The First was imposed in Andhra Pradesh from 28 February to June 8, 2014, then in Maharashtra(2014, 28 September) and (2019, November), Jammu and Kashmir (2015, January 9) and(2016, January 8), (2018, June), Delhi (2014, February 14 to 2015, February 13), Arunachal Pradesh (2016, January 25), Uttarakhand (2016, March 27) and (2016, 22 April)

through 84th Amendment, 2000. NDA also gave their support to various Statehood's demand by advocating greater decentralisation through small states. In response to this BJP led NDA government's greater initiative, Louis Tillin in her book *“Remapping India: New States and Their Political Origin”* mentioned Chhattisgarh's first Chief Minister Ajit Jogi's remarked "if Congress government had been ruling then they would never have got the government, Congress did not open the floodgates; there were around 50 other demand for statehood" (Tillin, 2013).

BJP led NDA government also recognised four new languages as official language through the 92nd Amendment Act, 2003. The NDA regime amended the eight schedules by including Bodo, Dogri, Santali and Maithili as official language which was supported by different states governments and peoples of those linguistic communities. NDA government also took a significant initiative to improve the condition of tribal people in India by forming a separate ministry of tribal affairs under the NDA government. The party also included new 42 tribal communities as Schedule Tribes through SC & ST Amendment Act 2002.

For the development of North East region, the BJP government first set up a separate “department of North East Region (Ministry of DoNER)” in September 2001. The BJP government also restructured North Eastern Council by including Sikkim as eight North Eastern states and empowered North Eastern Council as “the regional planning body for the North East Region of India” (MDoNER, n.d.). In Assam also NDA resolved the Bodo People's problem by signing a Memorandum of Settlement with Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), an armed group who demanded separate Bodo state. According to the MoS Bodo people established Bodoland Territorial Council as an autonomous council which led to peace settlement of Bodo problem in Assam. After this historic accord, on 27th January, 2020, Narendra Modi led NDA government signed a tripartite accord between the representatives of different Bodo organisations include the All-Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU), the United Bodo People’s Organisation (UBPO) and all the four factions of the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) with Central and Assam Government. The Accord facilitated a new model of power sharing and governance in Assam within the provisions of Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. “This model reduces the dependence of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), constituted under the Sixth Schedule, on the State government for funds, provides

scope for expansion of the territory...” (Talukdar, 2020). Signing this accord is significant for Bodoland because “The peace accord has brought the curtain down on over three decades of insurgency in Bodoland areas, which is critical for the return of peace in the Bodo heartland” (Talukdar, 2020).

To strengthen fiscal decentralisation, BJP led NDA government in 2015 accepted the 14th Finance Commission's recommendation of raising the shares of states in central taxes from earlier 32 per cent to 42 per cent. Finance Commission on their report mentioned this change as "this higher tax devolution will allow states greater autonomy in finance and design the schemes as per their needs and requirements" (Finance Commission of India, 2015). NDA government also to reduced central intervention over the state on the financial matter and giving more financial freedom to states by reducing centrally sponsored scheme from 72 to 27 and out of 27, central government will fully fund 10 central schemes like MNREGA, National Social Assistance Programme (old age pension) umbrella programme for the welfare of ST, SC, OBC and Differently abled, etc. and remaining schemes centre will provide 60 per cent funds to the states. However, despite these all reforms, still greater decentralisation is a big question for Indian federalism.

After 2014 Lok Sabha elections, India again re-enters a period of single party dominance at national level with BJP's phenomenal electoral victory. As Tillin (2017) observes, with the rise of BJP Dominant system, India moved towards a majoritarian nationalism and federalism become a critical arena within which political and institutional checks and balances become crucial to understand this. BJP is imposing its majoritarian agendas and a significant centralisation can be seen in political as well as administrative and financial matters (Tillin, 2017; Sharma and Swenden, 2018; Kailash, 2019). During this period, if we examine the nature of centre-state relations and level of centralisation in Indian federalism under BJP dominant party system; there is no such major difference between Congress system versus BJP dominant system. In terms of political use of anti-federal article-356 or President's rule, like Congress, BJP government also used this anti-federal article for partisan purposes many times during this period. For example, in Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Governor's critical role in favouring the party in power at Centre to form its government at state led to court-led intervention and became a strong controversy. Same way in Jammu and Kashmir also before

the formation of BJP-PDP coalition government, central government controlled the state for long period under President's rule after assembly election results to prevent another alliance from forming the government at state.

During this BJP dominant system, the government and opposition relation in Indian federalism is also very crucial factor to understand the centre-state relations. During this period, the central government has intervened and controlled the autonomy of the states mainly the opposition states by using centrally controlled institutions like Income Tax Department, Enforcement Directorate (Kailash, 2019). Through these centrally controlled agencies BJP government selectively targeted the opposition leaders in different states. So it is seen that BJP's slogan for '*Congress-Mukt Bharat*' and 'Team India' or co-operative federalism does not go together in this context.

As a significant step of economic decentralisation, in 2015 NDA government replaced “Planning Commission” by forming “NITI Aayog i.e., National Institute for Transforming India” as a government's think tank, facilitating greater involvement and participation of states in economic policy making process. It adopted a total opposition stand of Planning Commission by empowering the states regarding economic policy making through adopting a 'bottom-up' approach instead 'top-down approach in decision making. In earlier, Planning Commission acts the super-cabinet to influence states in financial issues controlled by central governments where states have a very limited minimal role so through NITI Aayog; it is believed that state will have a major role economic policy making. In response to this formation of NITI Aayog, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi said,

This is all towards the fulfilment of my promise of co-operative federalism. We have decided to involve states in discussing and planning national priorities... This is our strategy to take the country to a faster and yet inclusive growth trajectory through co-operative federalism which is real and true federalism. (Times of India, 2015)

Planning Commission was replaced by the NITI Aayog with the purpose of deepening the centre-state relation to strengthen cooperative federalism in India. However, in practice NITI Aayog failed to achieve this goal in practice (Sharma and Swenden, 2018; Aiyar and Tillin, 2020). According to Aiyar and Tillin (2020), "NITI Aayog emerged not as a platform for

dispute resolution and political deliberation but as a technocratic space responding to a Union government mandate rather than political cooperation from states" (Aiyar & Tillin, 2020, p.127). In fact, as both the author further argued, instead of fiscal decentralisation the NITI Aayog increased centralisation in two ways. First, NITI Aayog "created mechanism for establishing direct lines of accountability between New Delhi and administrative districts" (Aiyar & Tillin, 2020, p.127). Under the NITI Aayog's flagship programme "Aspirational Districts" allowed "the Government of India to forge a direct connect with district administrators, thereby bypassing the states in ways that allowed direct monitoring and influencing of the administrative process" (Aiyar & Tillin, 2020, p.127). Second, the NITI Aayog "unexpectedly created an institutional vacuum by closing off institutional spaces for negotiation over plan funds" (Aiyar & Tillin, 2020, p.127). When Planning Commission was operational, along with commission, the "National Development Council (NDC)" worked as a significant institutional platform for the states. Through this NDC the Chief Ministers could negotiate with the central government over plan allocations which were considered as part of political negotiation and deliberation during the budgetary process. However, "NITI Aayog was designed to function without any financial powers and no institutional mechanism was created to replace (or embed the NDC)" (Aiyar & Tillin, 2020, pp.127-128).

After 2014 general election with the BJP dominant system, "the state governments started becoming more and more aligned to the party at the Centre" (Venkataramakrishnan, 2020). After Congress dominance in the 1960's and early 70's, this was the first time India has experienced "the emergence of a dominant national party where many state governments were increasingly aligned with the centre government. This led to the Centre to use its administrative and fiscal centralising power to deepen centralisation because now there is no counterpart in the political landscape" (Venkataramakrishnan, 2020). In this context, K K Kailash (2019) argues, after coming to power as a dominant force, BJP also doing the same as Congress had done during its one-party dominance system. As Kailash pointed,

The noises from the states during 2014-19 have been muted since the BJP, like the Congress in its dominant phase, is in power in most of the states. This congruence, on the one hand, shuts the voices from the states and on the other hand, creates space for centre-state relations to be worked through intra-party channels, bypassing conventional institutional mechanisms. However, when we look at non-BJP ruled

states and their reactions, another picture emerges. For them, the Centre is still unfriendly, uncooperative and intrusive. (2019)

2.6 The Nature of BJP Dominant System in Indian federalism

After the 2014 and 2019 general elections, scholars have observed a major transformation in India's party system from a competitive multi-party coalition-dominated system (1989-2014) to a new dominant party system centred around the recent rise of BJP as the dominant national party. As of 2019, BJP is India's largest political party in terms of its dominance in parliament and state assembly elections. Scholars observe this change as India's second dominant-party system or fourth party system of India or BJP dominant system (Palshikar, 2017; Chhibber & Verma, 2018; Mehta, 2016). As Rahul Verma (2019) points out, "the social and geographical expansion of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since 2014 has altered the political landscape resulting in further marginalisation of the Congress, the decimation of the Left front, and the decline in the strength of state-level parties" (Verma, 2019).

In terms of understanding the nature of BJP's one-party dominance, there is a vast difference between the BJP before and BJP after 2014 general election. Before 2014, BJP as the national party, under the compulsion of coalition politics, followed the "coalition dharma" strictly to maintain their multi-party minority coalition government. The party was even ready to sacrifice its core ideology, party agendas for the sake of power. However, after the 2014 general election with the single party absolute majority position in the national election, BJP started maintaining a dominant party-style government with a surplus coalition at the Centre. However, in some states where they have majority formed their state governments and where they do not have the majority, the party even did not hesitate to become a junior partner for expanding its political presence in that state. After 2014, under the one-party dominant system, BJP has sought to centralise political power and asserted its ideological hegemony that led to political majoritarianism to electoral authoritarianism (Verma, 2019; Chatterji et al., 2019). Vaishnav (2019) point out How BJP has managed to assert its dominance ideologically with its "twin emphasis on 'Hindu Nationalism' and a 'new developmentalism'" (Vaishnav, 2019, p.13). After coming to power within six months, BJP has enacted major legislation to materialise its long-standing core party agendas from abolition of Article 370 to enactment of

Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019. There is a vast difference between this BJP dominant system and Congress dominant system in terms of understanding the nature of this second dominant party system. Verma et al. (2020) mentioned how BJP is setting up a new political culture not just by co-opting the civil society groups and local elites but also its opponents (Verma et al., 2020). Verma et al, further argued,

The party also has developed a significant resource advantage in terms of campaign finance and driving media narrative. This has coincided with the BJP-led government unabashedly promoting an ideological agenda that will re-define majority-minority relations on the ground, re-ignite the debate on citizenship norms, dramatically alter the federal balance of power, and construct a new political culture. (Verma et al., 2020)

Rahul Verma, Neelanjan Sircar and Gilles Verniers (2020) analysed the BJP Dominant system from three points of view i.e., ideological centrality, the disjuncture between state and national election, and the changing social basis of politics. A critical nature of the BJP Dominant system is its ideological hegemony with political majoritarianism. After coming to power within six months, BJP legislated some significant enactments that proved its ideological hegemony in a dominant party-style government. To fulfill their long-standing ideological projects, BJP has abolished article 370 to remove the special constitutional status enjoyed by Jammu and Kashmir since its formation. The same way BJP also enacted the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019. Through this act, in the name of persecuted minorities, Indian government will give the citizenship status to illegal Hindu, Christian, Jain, Sikh religious people in neighbouring country like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh etc. This act deliberately excluded the Muslim people, Tamil people of Sri Lanka and Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar. The same way BJP's stand on implementing the National Register for Citizenship can also be seen as party's bold move towards imposing a strong ideological hegemony with a political majoritarianism. In this ideological majoritarianism, BJP has retained a high level of popular support from masses. Chhibber and Verma (2019), in this context, argued, "The BJP succeeded because it was able to consolidate those on the 'right', that is, citizens who do not want the state intervening in social norms, redistributing property, recognising minorities, and who equate democracy with majoritarian values" (Chhibber & Verma, 2019, p. 138).

Another important nature of this current BJP dominant system is that unlike the Congress system, the electoral dominance of BJP as a dominant national party at the national level does not extend to the state level at large. After 2014 general election, though BJP won many state elections, simultaneously BJP lost many state elections where it performed very well in the national election. In states like Haryana, Delhi, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, BJP has performed very well in the national election, while BJP failed to continue this dominant position in state elections. However, as argued by Aiyar and Tillin (2020) it is true that "the consolidation of the BJP's dominance in the national parliament has been accompanied by its growing control of state legislative assemblies during its first phase in power" (2020, p. 120). As we have seen till April, 2021, BJP as the single largest party with formidable majority formed government in 12 states and six states with its coalition partners.

Another significant nature of this new party system is the transformation of BJP's social base (Chhibber & Verma, 2019). As a Hindi heart land party, BJP has traditionally received support from major section of upper caste Hindu voters, middle class, urban voters with more education and media exposure. However, during these recent elections, "the share of the upper-caste vote within BJP's Hindu social coalition has continuously declined while the proportion of the other backward castes (OBCs), scheduled castes (SCs), and scheduled tribes (STs) voting for it have increased" (Chhibber & Verma, 2019, p.139).

In this BJP Dominant system, BJP expanded its geographical reach and broadened its social coalition. BJP also through head hunting technique brought politicians from other parties for their own benefit. At the same time, the dominant national party BJP has successfully achieved greater acceptability of its ideological influence/ majoritarianism among Indian voters (Chhibber & Verma, 2019).

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to understand the emergence of BJP Dominant system and its impact on Indian federalism. Since first general election to the recent 2019 general election, India's party system has gone through a major transformation from a one-party dominant "Congress system" to a fragmented coalition dominant multi-party system. This changes in party system not only altered the basic premise of inter-governmental relations but also created

new dimensions that influence the nature and working of India's federal polity. After 2019 general election, BJP became India's largest political party in terms of its dominance in parliament and state assembly elections. After the 2019 general elections, BJP as the single largest polity-wide party with absolute majority not only control the national politics but also dominate large number of legislative assemblies which creates a new form of dominant system i.e., BJP Dominant system. BJP under its BJP Dominant system not only expanded its geographical reach and broadened its social coalition up to region like North East India but also succeed to centralise political power by asserting its ideological hegemony that led to political majoritarianism in India.

Chapter 3

BJP as an emerging political force in India's North East Region

3.1 Introduction

The 2019 general election again marked a “second dominant party system in India” (Palshikar 2017) in the wake of BJP's landslide victory with 303 seats and 37.4 per cent vote share. BJP led NDA federal coalition as a whole won 353 seats with 45 per cent vote share. BJP's phenomenal growth as a polity-wide party in the last two elections (2014 and 2019 General Election) and many state elections marked a “BJP Dominant system” in India (Mehta 2016). India is the largest democratic country with a parliamentary federation, and, political parties play a crucial role in influencing the nature and working of its political system (Arora et al., 2013). In course of the transition from “Congress system” (Kothari 1964) to “BJP-dominant system” or “India’s second dominant party system”, India has experienced a new trend of democratic politics where political party’s dominance not only depend on its control over parliamentary majority at national level but also in the control of majority of state legislative assembly by the same party (Sharma, 2017). In this context, BJP’s territorial expansion as a polity-wide party in national and state elections, except the South region, is a spectacular phenomenon in Indian politics. Within this context, India’s North East region also becomes significant, where BJP has witnessed a spectacular rise as the dominant national party in recent period. BJP with its Hindu Nationalist ideology remained a marginal player for a long time in most of the Christian-dominated tribal-majority states in North East India. However, from the 2014 general election to the recent 2019 general election, the North East region has experienced a tectonic shift with the unexpected growth of a saffron party in general and state assembly elections. BJP has, within a very short period, replaced the Congress dominance from this region. At this backdrop, this chapter seeks to engage with the changing political landscape of North East India in the context of BJP’s rise as a dominant national party in this region.

3.2 BJP in North East India: Journey from a Marginal Player to Formidable Force

Notwithstanding BJP's rise in India's North East region, the party still has to struggle hard to open its account in general elections in the states of North East, excluding Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. However, for the first time, in the recently held 2019 Lok Sabha election, the party has won seats in Tripura and Manipur too. On an historical note, BJP as a national party opened its account for the first time in North East by winning two seats in Assam in the 1991 Lok Sabha election. Arunachal became the second state in this region where BJP established its electoral base by winning all two seats for the first time in the 2004 general election. Until the 2014 General election, BJP could not win any single seat in all other North Eastern states. For many decades Congress party remained the dominant national player in this region. Table 3.1 clearly shows the political performance of the two main polity-wide national parties in this region.

Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are the only two states in North East India where BJP has successfully established its significant footprint as a dominant national party in general elections. In the 2014 general election, BJP won 7 seats in Assam and one in Arunachal Pradesh making it a total of eight seats with more than 30 per cent vote share in the region. On the other hand, the Indian National Congress could not perform well, limiting itself to only eight seats. Assam was among the states that experienced spectacular, phenomenal changes in the 2014 general election. For the first-time BJP as the strongest party won 7 out of 14 seats with the highest ever vote share of 36.5 per cent. As Nani Gopal Mahanta observed, "The overwhelming victory of BJP significantly marks a new phase of polarised politics in Assam" (Mahanta, 2014, p.19). The 2019 general election became a turning point for BJP in North East India. For the first time, BJP emerged as a dominant player with 14 seats, whereas Congress Party has had to limit itself to just six seats in North East India.

Before the 2014 General elections, in most of the North Eastern states, Congress remained a dominant national party regularly winning double digits out of a total of 25 seats in every general election. Mainly in states like Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, the Congress party had a strong support base as a national party.

Table 3.1: *General Elections Result in North East India from 1991-2019*

Year	Party	Seats Won
1991	BJP	2
	INC	16
	Regional Parties	5
	Other Parties	2
1996	BJP	1
	INC	10
	Regional Parties	7
	Other Parties	7
1998	BJP	1
	INC	13
	Regional Parties	6
	Other Parties	5
1999	BJP	2
	INC	14
	Regional Parties	4
	Other Parties	5
2004	BJP	4
	INC	11
	Regional Parties	6
	Other Parties	4
2009	BJP	4
	INC	13
	Regional Parties	5
	Other Parties	3
2014	BJP	8
	INC	8
	Regional Parties	6
	Other Parties	3
2019	BJP	14
	INC	4
	Regional Parties	6
	Other Parties	1

Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India's statistical report on the general election from 1991-2019 available at [<https://eci.gov.in/statistical-report/statistical-reports/>]

Tripura is the only state in the North East where CPI (M) has had strong dominance till the 2014 general election, capturing all two seats in every general election. In North East India, Sikkim is the only state where regional parties, mainly Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) and Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM), have dominated general and state elections.

BJP's electoral performance in state assembly elections of the North Eastern states till the 2014 General Election was that of a marginal player. In States like Assam, BJP could manage to win primarily 1-10 seats. On the other hand, in states like Sikkim, Mizoram, and especially

Tripura before the 2018 assembly election, BJP could not even win single seats in state assembly elections. Although, prior to the general election of 2014, BJP appeared only as a marginal player with a tiny number of seats and small vote share in most of the North Eastern states, in the post-2014 General election period, in the wake of BJP’s spectacular electoral victory under Narendra Modi’s leadership, BJP has managed to win many seats with augmented vote share in recent assembly elections. The vote share of BJP in the last Assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh (2019), Assam (2016), Manipur (2017) and Tripura (2018) has rapidly increased to 50.88 %, 29.51 %, 36.28 %, and 43 %, respectively, which is much more than the highest vote share ever before in these states. **Table 3.2** clearly shows BJP’s electoral performance in all states’ assembly elections in North East India.

Table 3.2: *BJP’s Political Performance in the state election in North East India’s States*

State	Year of Election, Seats won, Vote share								
Arunachal Pradesh	Year	1984	1995	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019	
	Seats	1	0	0	9	3	11	41	
	Vote	(0.45)	(3.37)	(10.83)	(19.00)	(5.21)	(30.97)	(50.88)	
Assam	Year	1985	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
	Seats	0	10	4	8	10	5	60	60
	Vote	(1.07)	(6.55)	(10.41)	(9.35)	(11.98)	(11.47)	(29.51)	(33.21)
Manipur	Year	1984	1990	1995	2000	2002	2007	2012	2017
	Seats	0	0	1	6	4	0	0	21
	Vote	(0.71)	(1.87)	(3.35)	(11.28)	(9.55)	(0.85)	(2.12)	(36.28)
Meghalaya	Year	1993	1998	2003	2008	2013	2018		
	Seats	0	3	2	1	0	2		
	Vote	(3.68)	(5.010)	(5.42)	(2.67)	(1.27)	(9.6)		
Mizoram	Year	1993	1998	2003	2008	2013	2018		
	Seats	0	0	0	0	0	1		
	Vote	(3.11)	(2.50)	(1.87)	(0.44)	(0.37)	(8.09)		
Nagaland	Year	1987	1993	2003	2008	2013	2018		
	Seats	0	0	7	2	1	12		
	Vote	(0.19)	(0.35)	(10.88)	(5.35)	(1.75)	(15.3)		
Sikkim	Year	1994	2004	2009	2014	2019			
	Seats	0	0	0	0	0			
	Vote	(0.16)	(0.34)	(0.78)	(0.71)	1.62			
Tripura	Year	1983	1988	1993	1998	2003	2008	2013	2018
	Seats	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	35
	Vote	(0.06)	(0.15)	(2.02)	(5.87)	(1.32)	(1.49)	(1.54)	(43.0)

Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India’s statistical report on state assembly elections in all the North East India’s state from 1984 to 2018 available at [http://eci.nic.in/eci_main1/ElectionStatistics.aspx]

Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland are the six main states in the North East region where the Congress party remained in power as the strongest

dominant national party. The politics of Manipur is generally marked by a high level of political instability where the Indian National Congress is the only dominant party like other states in this region (Singh, 2017). Sikkim and Tripura are the only two states in this region where Congress failed to establish its stronghold. In Tripura, though Congress was in power from 1967 to 1977 and 1992-1993, CPM continued to be the dominant party by forming government between 1978 to 2018 (barring the period 1992-93). In the entire North East, Sikkim is the only state where regional party appeared dominant since its formation, with, BJP's alliance partner Sikkim Democratic Front remaining in power since 1994 as the single largest party.

3.3 BJP and *Congress-Mukt* North East Mission: Strategy and Politics

Within the changing context of electoral politics in the North East, BJP is the newcomer in establishing a significant mark as a dominant party. To enter the political landscape of North East India, BJP's first step was to oust the Congress from this region with their "Congress Free North East India" mission. BJP, as a Hindi heartland party with Hindu nationalist ideology, understood this well that only with the help of religious cards they cannot establish themselves as a dominant party. Consequently, the party has adopted multiple strategies for making inroads in the states of the region. As for instance the party adopted the strategy of using Hindutva politics in Hindu majority states like Assam, Manipur, and Tripura for their electoral gain. Meanwhile, in other Christian-dominated states like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, instead of resorting to overt Hindutva politics, the party has picked up other agendas so that it could establish itself as a significant player. As a strategy, BJP has tried to ensure that Congress would be isolated and fight the election alone (Jha, 2017). With their poor political performance in this region, BJP understood that it could not consolidate its strength without allying with regional parties. Instead of fighting with regional players, BJP chose to play a facilitator's role in terms of exploiting the anti-congress sentiment, and by taking an insider perspective, BJP projected its image as popular coalition maker party in an accommodative way, so that it gets support from all regional parties including secular, Christian, tribal and other ethnic groups.

3.3.1 NEDA as a Strategic Move of BJP in North East India

As part of BJP’s electoral strategy, NEDA becomes one of the most significant factors in North East India to consolidate its position by replacing INC from this region. North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) is primarily a political coalition under the BJP led NDA federal coalition formed on 24 May 2016 by BJP and more than ten regional parties. For BJP, “NEDA is not just a political alliance, but also a regional alliance, geo-cultural alliance. It is a platform that is boosting the cultural integration across the North East” (BJP, 2018). BJP president Amit Shah, in one of the meetings with NEDA partners, made the point that NEDA will not be a mere political platform but will also try to “culturally unite” the North East, which has over 200 social groups and 180 languages and establish its emotional link with the rest of the Indian landscape (Shah,2017).

On 23 May 2016, BJP formed its first government in Assam along with its two alliance partners. One day after, BJP’s then national chief Amit Shah along with the Chief Ministers of North Eastern states formed NEDA as the grand alliance between BJP and most of the regional parties from the region. “Chief Ministers of North East Sarbananda Sonowal (Assam), Kalikho Pul (Arunachal Pradesh), T.R. Zeliang (Nagaland), and Pawan Kumar Chamling (Sikkim), along with some regional parties' presidents joined hand with BJP to form NEDA as a first political coalition” in North East backed up by a National Party (Kashyap, 2016).

Table 3.3: BJP led NEDA –State-wise Alliance Partners

NEDA	Arunachal Pradesh	Assam	Manipur	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Sikkim	Tripura
Present Members	NPP JD (U)	AGP UPPL	NPF-M NPP	NPP	MNF	NDPP	SKM	IPFT
Past Members	PPA	BPF GSP	MPEP MDPF	UDP	—	NPF*	SDF	—

Note: * NPF was an alliance partner of NEDA since 2016, but in 2018 Nagaland State Assembly Election BJP made an electoral adjustment with newly formed former Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio-led NDPP party. Although in Nagaland NPF is not part of NEDA, but in Manipur, the Manipur unit of NPF remain part of NEDA

****Full name of Political Parties:** AGP- Asom Gana Parishad, BPF- Bodoland People's Front, GSP- Ganashakti Party, IPFT-Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, MDPF- Manipur Democratic People's Front, MNF- Mizo National Front, MPP- Manipur Peoples Party, NDPP- Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party, NPP- National People's Party NPF- Naga People's Front, NPF-M – Naga People's Front- Manipur, PPA- People's Party of Arunachal, SDF- Sikkim Democratic Front, SKM- Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, UDP- United Democratic Party.

In its first sitting along with its already existing alliance partners “Assam Gana Parishad (AGP), Bodoland People’s Front (BPPF), Naga People’s Front (NPF), six other regional parties including United Democratic Party (UDP), National People’s Party (NPP), Mizo National Party (MNF), Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) and Indigenous People’s Front of Tripura (IPFT) and Ganashakti joined the political coalition” (Kashyap, 2016).

Before this political coalition, “most of these regional parties were part of the North East Regional Political Front (NERPF)”(Kashyap, 2016). During the 2014 general election, they gave their support to BJP led NDA. Himanta Biswa Sarma, a former Congress politician from Assam, then a cabinet minister and now Chief Minister of Assam was appointed as the front's convener. Under the NEDA banner, BJP seems to have taken an accommodative approach in terms of getting support from its alliance partners for its electoral gain. At NEDA’s first conclave on 13 July 2016, BJP president Amit Shah “assured all the partners that their participation and role in NEDA would be as important as BJP’s” (Shah, 2016).

While mentioning NEDA's objectives, Amit Shah tweeted, “Main objective of the NEDA will be all-round development of North East and better co-ordination among the states and central govt.” (Shah, 2016). In the third conclave of NEDA, BJP president Amit Shah emphasised, “Modi government has brought development and peace in the North East region and NEDA has played a positive role in this. The motto of NEDA is not just making North East Congress free but to bring this region in the mainstream of the country's development” (Shah, 2018). NEDA’s convener Himanta Biswa Sarma credited the BJP’s initiative to unite the North Eastern states into one common platform by recognising its importance in national politics. In a way, NEDA's idea is to formulate a coordinated regional political, economic, and social development plan for the region. While attending the 3rd conclave of NEDA, Sarma tweeted, “Glad that for the first time in the history of the North East that six CMs of the states are sharing the stage together at #NEDA meet showing their commitment to push the region on path of development” (Sarma, 2018).

Since the formation of this political coalition, NEDA has become game changer for BJP’s spectacular electoral rise in this region within a very short period. BJP understand it very well that without the help of other regional parties, replacing the Congress party from this region would be a difficult task. At the same time, like Congress party, BJP did not have a strong

organisational support base in most of the North Eastern states. Till 2014 general election, in most of the North Eastern states excluding Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, BJP was precisely a minor player with very limited support base. Therefore, instead of fighting with those regional parties, BJP choose to play a coalition maker's role so that it could bring together all those anti-congress forces into the arena of NEDA. "Depending on Modi's image and co-option of leaders from other political parties" (Jha,2017). NEDA becomes an instrumental factor for BJP to expand its electoral base in the region. It also helped BJP to become a true polity-wide party after winning a significant number of seats in North East India. Forming such a grand political coalition helped them expand their electoral footprint in this region and remove "the Hindu nationalist party's tag by giving them a secular flavour" (Misra, 2016).

Table 3.4: Electoral performance of INC, BJP, and NEDA in 2019 General Election

State-Party	INC		BJP		NEDA	
	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote
Arunachal Pradesh (2)	0	20.69	2	58.22	2	58.22
Assam (14)	3	35.44	9	36.05	9	46.76
Manipur (2)	0	24.63	1	34.22	2	56.7
Meghalaya (2)	1	48.28	0	7.93	1	30.2
Mizoram (1)	--	---	0	5.75	1	50.64
Nagaland (1)	0	48.11	--	---	1	49.73
Sikkim (1)	0	1.13	0	4.71	1	52.47
Tripura (2)	0	25.34	2	49.03	2	53.19
Northeast India (25)	4	---	14	---	19	---

Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India's statistical report on general election 2019 available [<https://eci.gov.in/statistical-report/statistical-reports/>]

After the formation of NEDA, BJP has improved its political performance across general as well as state assembly elections in the region. In 2014 general election BJP won eight seats from North East India. In a remarkable turn of events, during 2019 general election BJP alone won 14 seats out of 25 and the total seats won by the NEDA members were 19 (See Table 3.4). On the other hand, INC is being limited to only four seats in the region. BJP, by exploiting the anti-congress sentiment in North East through this umbrella platform has succeed in materialising its "Congress-Mukt North East Mission". To be precise, in the post- 2014 GE period, the Congress has been rendered electorally ineffective in the region. In the wake of

formation of NEDA, there has been a vast visible political change in the region in matters of government formation process too. BJP has effectively become a kingmaker party in most of the North Eastern states. After 2014 general election, BJP emerged as a significant player in the government formation process in North East India.

Table 3.5: *State Government in North East India by NEDA*

State	Govt. Since	Largest party & Seats	Alliance Partners & Seats
Arunachal Pradesh	31 December 2016	BJP (41)	
Assam	10 May, 2021	BJP (60)	AGP (9), UPPL (6)
Manipur	15 March, 2017	BJP (21)	NPEP (4), NPF (4), LJP (1)
Meghalaya	6 March, 2018	NPP (19)	BJP (2), UDP (6), PDF (4), HSDP (2)
Nagaland	8 March, 2018	NDPP (16)	BJP (12), NPEP (2), JD (U) (1)
Tripura	9 March, 2018	BJP (35)	IPFT (8)

Source: Data compiled from the various newspapers The Hindustan Times, Economic Times, The Indian Express, and Election Commission of India's statistical report on state Assembly elections of states from North East region 2016-2019.

The trajectory from the 2016 Assam state election to 2019 Arunachal Pradesh's election mainly shows how BJP managed to oust Congress's dominance and tilt the political axis in their favour addressing the coalition lacunae created by Congress.

3.3.2 *The localisation of BJP or BJPisation of North East India*

While discussing the lasting legacy of BJP in Indian politics, scholar Chris Ogden (2012) mentioned two core changes done by BJP or BJP led NDA to the typography of Indian politics, i.e., "[...] a redefinition of Indian democracy from a secular and socialist basis to a more multi-faceted and fully majoritarian entity, and the entrenchment of communalism and communal politics" (Ogden, 2012, pp.22-23). The rise of BJP is a significant political development in Indian politics. BJP has a very long political history that started with its predecessor Bharatiya Jana Sangh party in 1951; the party has reflected tides of changes, with its shift from Hindutva politics to coalitionable accommodative politics and from being a politically untouchable party to a popular coalition-maker party under the NDA political coalition. In North East India, **table 3.1** and **table 3.2** shows, BJP had been a very marginal player in this region that could not consolidate its strong electoral support base on its own effort. BJP understood that without regional parties' help, they could not establish its electoral presence, so the party selectively

used different strategies to capture the power and popular imagination in North East India. At the same time, the party also understands the limitation and differences between other parts of India and North East India in terms of using their Hindutva ideology for political gain. While discussing the strategies of BJP in North East India, Prashant Jha observed, “[...] its expansion rests on a mix of three strategies- co-option of existing political elites; dilution of the ideological core; pragmatic adaption to specific realities” (Jha, 2017, p.187). While discussing the BJP’s emergence as a major political force in North East India, different scholars have given their opinions regarding its nature and strategies. One dominant discourse in this context is that as per electoral requirement, BJP has not only changed its electoral as well as social coalition, but also transformed the party itself in terms of electoral as well as political strategy. In due course the party has effected changes in party agendas and policy orientation (by forming rainbow social coalition), including adoption of strategies like social engineering, technique of headhunting, usage of development strategy by focusing on rural penetration with targeted vote bank (like Adivasi, tribal groups). Above all, the party has most importantly been benefitted by its election machine through a strong organisational network, i.e., Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The flexibility to adopt suitable strategies as per political calculations has helped the BJP to expand its base in India in general and North East in particular.

In terms of the North East, BJP is seen deviating from its narrative in the rest of the country, i.e. “Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan” party to one that accommodates regional parties and their agendas to become a locally electable political entity. BJP is seen adopting a two-pronged strategy in the North East for their electoral gain; instead of fighting with regional players, the party has projected itself as an anti-congress, anti-left force to unite all the regional parties under one common platform through the formation of North East Democratic Alliance. At the same time, BJP has been careful in not trampling the multi-diverse tradition and culture of this region. Instead, the party has been using the technique of appropriating other party’s agendas, *inter alia* focus on localisation of identity and flexibility of their core party ideology so that it could become popular national party by garnering support from outside its traditional vote banks, including Christian, tribal, and other ethnic groups (Shah, 2017). For the North East region, BJP has wisely relied on the localisation of the Party’s identity and ideology from a heartland cow belt party to reconcile its national agendas with the local populace’s

demographic and sensitivities (Daga, 2018). In North East India, though BJP selectively used Hindutva politics in Hindu dominated states like Assam, Manipur, and Tripura, in case of other four Christian dominated states Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, BJP didn't take its position on Hindutva and beef, which might have become a deviating factor in its electoral consolidation. Therefore, BJP has overcome these problems by reiterating its respect for local customs and traditions. As such, the party has showcased a different variant of its ideological tone in North East in comparison to the ones that is seen in rest of India (mainly North India).

In the inaugural ceremony of the Hornbill festival and 50th anniversary of the creation of Nagaland at Kisama in December 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked the gathering to join him in chanting the Naga nationalist slogan '*Kuknalim*' meaning 'victory to Nagalim.' Whereas for the rest of the country, Modi's preferred slogan is '*Bharat Mata Ki Jai*' (Deka, 2018). In this larger narrative of the BJP's mission for the North East, BJP is ready to localise its party identity, adopt flexibility of its party ideology to make the itself acceptable as a party of the North Eastern natives.

BJP's deviation from its mainstream ideological commitment in North East India is also visible from its stand in the Christian-dominated states of the region *vis-à-vis* the debate on beef ban. BJP deliberately did not push its anti-beef agenda in the North East in the name of respecting the cultural diversity of this region. Though in other parts of India, the party has taken a stern stand on beef agenda, the BJP-led NEDA governments did not implement any legislation related to cow slaughtering. As a point of reference, one may cite the case of Uttar Pradesh and Gujrat where strict rules regarding cow slaughtering were imposed in these two BJP ruling states (Parven, 2017; Hindustan times, 2017). "All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM)" chief Asaduddin Owaisi criticising BJP's dual stand on beef agendas said, "BJP's hypocrisy is that in Uttar Pradesh cow is mummy but, in the Northeast, its yummy" (ANI, 2017).

The localisation of BJP and its ideology may also be understood in reference to its specific engagement route in the assembly elections of the region. As a matter of fact, before the Tripura state election, "BJP came up with the depiction of Bharat Mata in the traditional attire of the four major tribal communities of Tripura with Mongoloid face, i.e., the Tripuris, the Reangs,

the Chakmas, and the Debbarmas”, to connect North East India as their project of integration with rest of India (The Tribune, 2017). Usually, “Bharat Mata is the national personification of India as Mother Goddess, more specifically Goddess Durga depicted in a saffron sari holding an Indian national flag and accompanied by a lion. BJP used this as a mark of symbolic integrity and oneness to connect it culturally with the rest of the country” (The Tribune, 2017). Sunil Deodhar, BJP’s in-charge for Tripura, speaking to *The Indian Express* in this context, said,

“The idea is to counter the sense of alienation these tribes feel from the rest of the country. They too are a part of Bharat and Bharat Mata is theirs too. Each tribe has their unique culture and their unique dress, and we wanted to respect that” (Ghosal, 2017).

The depiction of Bharat Mata in traditional attire of different tribal communities of North East not merely helped BJP to appeal state’s Bengali Hindu population; simultaneously, the tribes in North East India were also influenced to chant ‘*Bharat Mata Ki Jai*’ which showed the imposition of cultural majoritarian hegemony (Chakravarty, 2017). As Sunil Deodhar, BJP in-charge of Tripura, said,

The Mongoloid communities of the northeast too worship Durga but we do not see the goddess in their traditional attire. We have therefore decided to depict Bharat Mata in the traditional attires of all the 300 tribal communities in the region (The Tribune, 2017).

BJP has technically used “local tribal symbols, icons, local historical figures and emphasized strands of their story to fit into the grand narrative of Hindu Nationalism, thereby enlisting them in the project of patriotism” (Chakravarty, 2017). For example, in Nagaland and Manipur BJP strategically appropriated Naga Spiritual leader freedom fighter Rani Gaidinlu and Manipuri’s prince Tikendrajit Singh and in Meghalaya U Tirot Singh, a Khasi chief who fought the British in the 18th century.

Christophe Jaffrelot (2016) analysed a critical facet of BJP’s strategy about its Hindu nationalist discourse in the 2016 Assam state election. As part of the strategy, “BJP has adjusted to the local variant of Hindu culture, and in this vernacularisation process”, BJP has appropriated Sankardeva, a 16th-century socio-religious reformer of Assam who was against

Brahminical orthodoxy. As Malini Bhattacharjee observed, “Hindutva activists have therefore, from the very beginning, adopted novel strategies for navigating through the complex particularities of this region in order to establish itself in the cultural and political imagination of the people” (Bhattacharjee, 2016, pp.86-87).

During the Assam election, BJP started the election in the name of the “Last battle of Saraighat”, a war in which the Ahom under the leadership of Lachit Barphukan defeated the Mughals in 1761, symbolising this as Hindu victory over Muslim invaders (Sethi & Shubhrastha, 2017). In 2016, BJP centred its strategy for the legislative assembly elections on this historic battle, focusing on issues of illegal migration. BJP is also popularising another slogan in the name of identity politics, i.e., *Jati-Mati-Bheti* (Community- Land and Base) (Misra, 2014). “Jati, Mati, Bheti,” meaning “community, land and base” was one of the popular slogans by BJP party during 2016 Assam Legislative Assembly Election. Through this slogan, the party promised to protect the indigenous people of the state and their land rights. During 2018 Tripura Legislative Assembly election, BJP gave this slogan “Cholo Paltai” (Let's Change), and urged the people to vote the BJP to power to transform Tripura. This shows how BJP is trying to appropriate local agendas, issues that helped to make it as a locally electable political party in Northeast India.

As Pralay Kanungo argued, “Hindutva, in terms of strategy, shows admirable powers of adaptability—swinging from volatile and violent, to soft and silent—depending on the specificity of the context” (Kanungo, 2011, p. 91). BJP’s success story in North East India is credited because of its hard work done by its organisational network of Sangh Parivar. In this context, BJP’s general secretary Ram Madhav in his article “Leader, Cadre, Parivar” in *The Indian Express* has discussed the factors which strengthen BJP as its distinct ideology, cadre-based party structure, and political accommodation (Madhav, 2018). For him, leader, cadre, Parivar are the secrets of BJP’s growth and success. In North East India, the organisational network of BJP, i.e., Sangh Parivar, has made inroads to these states through different social welfare programs. Pralay Kanungo, while discussing the Hindutva’s entrenchment in Arunachal Pradesh, validated the silent constructive work of the RSS and how that has helped BJP turning the state into a Hindutva stronghold. Over the last three decades, the Sangh Parivar has been silently mediating with different tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh through its various cultural organisations and consolidating its support base (Kanungo, 2011, p. 91). The Hindutva

adherents in Arunachal Pradesh started working through educational sectors. In other states in the North East too, Sangh Parivar appeared as the pivotal factor of BJP's rise. While speaking with the Indian Express regarding electoral victory in Manipur and Nagaland Jagadamba Mall, a veteran RSS Organiser who has spent 40 years in Nagaland said, "It is a fact that BJP worked hard. But one must also remember that various Sangh wings have been working very hard for years." he further added, "... Tribal people, irrespective of their religious faith, particularly trust and respect our welfare programmes. This trust was definitely converted to votes" (Kashyap, 2017).

Although initially BJP was seen deviating from its "Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan" ideology with adoption of a more regionalised, accommodative narrative for emerging as a locally electable political entity, after capturing power in most of the North Eastern states, the party is seen imposing majoritarian agendas in this region. In this context, Akhil Ranjan Dutta points out that after coming to power in Assam BJP's "promises took almost a U-turn. The core Hindutva agenda came to the forefront through the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB), 2016" (Dutta, 2021, p.3).

3.3.3 Dependency, Defection and Rise of BJP in North East India

As this work has discussed, North East India is case-sui generis in Indian federalism. India has followed a demos-enabling federation with an asymmetrical framework to accommodate all diverse identities, minimising regional differences, and protect the cultural, linguistic, religious interests of the different minorities and aboriginal tribal communities by making a special arrangement under asymmetrical federalism. As part of constitutional asymmetry through different constitutional provisions the North Eastern states get special privileges in tribal administration and also protecting endangered tribal identity and recognised their rights over their land and forests. However, under political asymmetry the eight states of this region become politically less significant due to its small number of representatives at parliament. As a result, compare to other politically significant states, the all-North Eastern states don't have much bargaining power in terms of raising their state issues as well as making substantial impact in the national level decision making process. Because of this political asymmetry, the North Eastern states having a natural inclination towards the party in power at the Centre due to their heavy dependency on grants and financial aids from the central government. This dependency syndrome has significantly influenced the electoral politics of North East India.

Because of this dependency syndrome the defection politics, party changing trends among politicians, the changes of alliance partners and government changes along with central government is common in North East India.

The first party changing trend or defection politics was seen in North East India during the formation of Janata Party government at Centre in 1977. For example, in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, the state government was changed immediately after the formation of Janata Government at centre. During Vajpayee led BJP's NDA coalition government also, state government was changed in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur.

At the same time after 2014 general election, the North East India has also witnessed a spectacular rise of BJP as the dominant national party in the region. Till 2019 general election, BJP has succeeded to fulfil its "Congress-Mukt North East India" mission by forming state governments in most of the states from this region along with its alliance partners. As a ruling party, BJP has successfully formed North East Democratic Alliance with many regional parties of this region. Many regional parties also easily accepted BJP as their alliance partner by replacing their earlier alliance partners. This has not only limited with making alliance partners and forming government at the states but also during this time many politicians have switched their party to join BJP and contesting election as BJP candidate. BJP's significant strategy of co-opting existing political leaders from other political parties proved to be quite successful in ousting the dominance of Congress party from this region. BJP for its electoral benefit became remarkably adaptable and accommodative towards bringing the political leaders from other political parties and rewarded them with new positions and responsibilities. The North Eastern states like Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, BJP has been instrumental in defection politics, which resulted in massive defection among political leaders. Many of them left their original Party and joined the BJP government in the state. For example, the current chief minister of the three states that this study has taken as case study for this research are also outcome of defection politics. Assam's Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma was from Congress party. Before joining BJP, he was an important cabinet minister of former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi's government. Similarly, N. Biren Singh also was from Congress party before becoming Chief Minister of Manipur. Arunachal Pradesh's chief minister Pema Khandu, former Congress Chief Minister Darji Khandu's son Pema Khandu also changed his

party two times before joining BJP. In 2016, 16 September along with 43 MLA's Pema Khandu first defected to People's Party of Arunachal Pradesh (PPA) and for the second time on 21st December, 2016 Khandu and 43 MLAs joined BJP and formed BJP government through defection politics. In North East India after 2014 general election, dependency syndrome with defection politics also has important role in BJP's significant rise in this region.

3.3.4 BJP and Politics of Development in North East India

Though the North East region is one of the richest regions in terms of natural resources, it remains peripheral and neglected and continues to lag behind in India's development agenda. As an isolated and inaccessible underdeveloped region, North East India still struggles with many problems, from infrastructure problems to low capital investment and illegal infiltration to human security issues. With very limited transport and communication facilities, the region is far behind the per capita index and overall development compared to the national average. Nevertheless, most of the North Eastern states have recorded better human development index indicators in literacy, sanitation, gender rights than other parts of India (Datta, 2018). Under the asymmetrical federal arrangements, the states of this region are somehow less effective in influencing the national government due to its tiny number of political representations at parliament with small population compared to other politically significant states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, etc.

During the P.V. Narasimha Rao led Congress government in 1990, the central government introduced Look East Policy (LEP) to accelerate development and growth of the North East by strengthening bilateral cooperation with Southeast Asian Countries through ASEAN regional forum. Although LEP initiated significant cooperation with ASEAN member countries, the North East remained on the backburner. North East continued to face poverty, unemployment, and insurgency issues along with backward infrastructure issues. However, after the 2014 General election, the most neglected North East Region has come into focus not only in the political calculation of BJP, Congress, and other regional parties but also due to BJP's exceptional attention to the region. After coming to power, Modi government has rechristened 'Look East Policy' to 'Act East Policy' by giving utmost priority to North East India through "various plans at bilateral and regional levels to develop and strengthen connectivity of North

East with ASEAN countries through trade, culture, people to people contact and physical infrastructure including road, air, and telecommunication” (PIB, 2015).

BJP understands it very well that unlike other parts of India, BJP cannot play with their Hindutva politics alone for political consolidation in this region. To that end, strategically, BJP questioned the misrule of Congress party in this region, issues like poor governance, systemic corruption, inadequate infrastructure facilities, and poor delivery of public services. During an election campaign in Assam, “Modi blamed the Indian National Congress for the region's underdevelopment due to a lack of economic vision, attention, and infrastructure. As a result, the region has fallen into the hands of the divisive forces. This can be dealt with, according to Modi, through accelerated development” (Singh, 2016, p. 113). During an election campaign at Tuensang in Nagaland Modi said “Unless the northeast is developed, the dream of having a developed country will not be achieved and therefore the BJP government is paying special attention to the requirement of the region” (Money Control, 2018). In the name of development politics, BJP has taken special initiative to increase air, railway, road and water connectivity in the North East under their mission of Make in North East.

In terms of development discourse in North East India, BJP has successfully garnered more credit which they have successfully converted into electoral performance compared to Congress party. From the creation of “Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER)” to revive the North Eastern Council by giving more autonomy and power as regional sub-planning body, BJP has earned much credit which benefited them in their political consolidation. The MDoNER as a ministry in central government was introduced by Vajpayee led NDA government in 2001 “for the matters relating to the planning, execution and monitoring of development schemes and projects in the North Eastern Region” (MDoNER, 2018). In central government, MDoNER is the only separate exclusive ministry meant for the North East region as a geographical basis, “allocated with sufficient funds in order to achieve faster development of the region” (MDoNER, 2018).

Through their developmental agenda BJP has successfully replaced other national parties like Congress, CPI (M) from the North East region and consolidated its power as a dominant national player within a concise period. BJP has adopted multiple strategies for political consolidation in North East India. The stellar performance of BJP in the recent election in

Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland is a proof of this scheme of things. In the name of development politics, the Modi government's big push for road, railway infrastructure, and various steps to boost the regional economy helped them bring the masses closer to the BJP.

3.4 How youth from Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh see this political Change in North East India?

As part of this research, this study has conducted a fieldwork survey among youth voters in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh to understand the youth voter's views on recent political changes in North East India. By following a structured questionnaire, this study has conducted fieldwork survey in 6 different government and private universities in three BJP ruling states i.e. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur among post-graduate students and research scholars from Assam University (Silchar), Gauhati University (Guwahati), Dibrugarh University (Dibrugarh), Rajiv Gandhi University (Doimukh- Arunachal), Arunodaya University (Naharlagun) and Manipur University (Manipur). From 11 February to 27 March, 2019, interviews were conducted with 120 students where 65 are male and 55 are female respondents from the age group of 18 years to 35 years. Among these 120 respondents, 81 belong to rural area and 39 belong to urban voters. On the other hand, from a community perspective, 58 belong to Schedule Tribe (ST), 4 Schedule Caste (SC), 40 Other Backward Caste (OBC) and 18 belongs to others. The Religion profiling shows 56 belong to Hinduism, 29 Christian, 7 Muslims, 3 Buddhists, 17 others and 5 No-religion.

To talk about the youth voter's responses in this electoral change, this study has mainly focused on some major questions like how do the youth voters see the electoral change in North East India after 2014? How do they make difference between INC and BJP in North East Region? How do they see the BJP's rise in North Eastern states? How do they evaluate the overall development of North East region over the last five years?

To discuss about the political awareness among these youth voters this study has asked whether they consider themselves politically active and engaged. The study shows that most of the youth voters from six universities in three different states considered themselves politically active or engaged. From a State specific point of view, the youths from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh seem very politically active and participate in political discussions and activities. On

the other hand, youths from Manipur in majority numbers do not consider themselves politically active.

Table 3.6: *Do you consider yourself politically active?*

	Assam	Arunachal Pradesh	Manipur	Overall
Yes	55 %	53.33 %	16.67 %	45%
No	21.67 %	26.67 %	50 %	30 %
Can not say	23.33 %	20 %	33.33 %	25 %

Source: Based on author's fieldwork survey, 2019

Another question to understand the youth voters' political awareness is 'did you vote last time in elections?'. Further query was presented relating to their voting experience in three elections i.e. national election (parliament level), state election (Assembly level) and local election (panchayat/ municipal/ district council level). In terms of exercising their electoral rights youth voters from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh were found to be mostly active and more participatory in all three level of elections whereas youth voters from Manipur seems more participatory in state assembly elections than national and local elections.

Table 3.7: *Did you vote in the last elections?*

	Assam			Arunachal Pradesh			Manipur		
	National	State	Local	National	State	Local	National	State	Local
Yes	41.67 %	68.33 %	53.33%	60 %	70 %	70%	20%	76.67%	43.33%
No	53.33%	26.67%	40%	36.67%	26.67%	26.67%	76.67%	23.33%	50 %
Can not say	5 %	5 %	6.67%	3.33%	3.33%	3.33%	3.33 %	0	6.67%

Source: Based on author's fieldwork survey, 2019

To understand their party preference as a supporter of any party, it seems most of the youth in all three states prefer to consider them as neutral instead of taking any party preference. Among the 120 respondents 66.67 per cent respondents consider themselves as neutral whereas 21.66 per cent called themselves as BJP supporter and 9.17 per cent considered them as Congress supporter and only 2.50 per cent considered them as supporters of other different parties including regional parties.

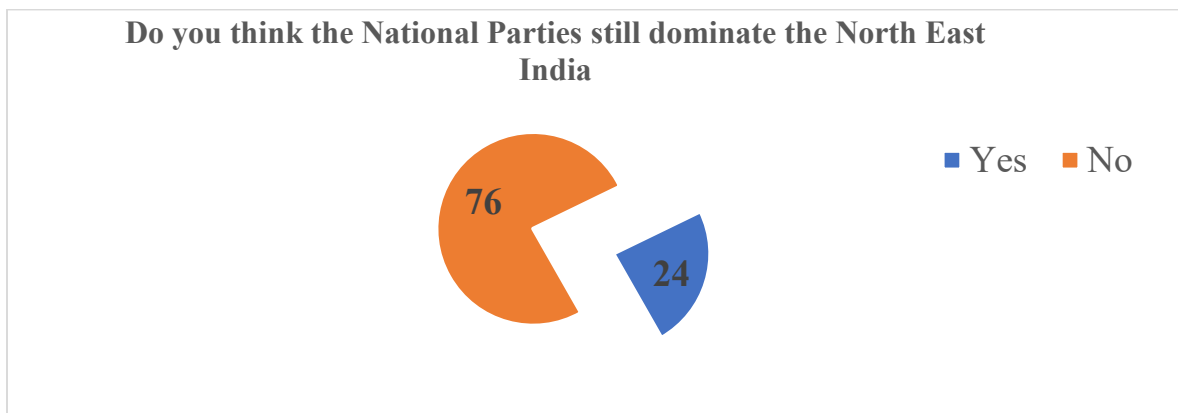
Table 3.8: *How do you consider yourself?*

BJP supporter	INC supporter	Other Parties supporter	Neutral
21.66 %	9.17 %	2.50 %	66.67 %

Source: Based on author’s fieldwork survey, 2019

Another important question to understand the political awareness among youth voters in North East India was- Do they think National Parties still dominate the electoral politics of North East India. In response most of them about 75.83 per cent youth opined that National parties still dominate the electoral politics of North East India. If we see the electoral trend in these North Eastern states, Indian National Congress become the only dominant party before 2014 general election. Since 2014 general election with the phenomenal victory of BJP as the dominant national party all over India, North East region also clearly seemed shifting its political orientation towards BJP dominant system. Within a very short period from 2014 to present 2019, BJP along with its alliance partners formed its BJP and NEDA government in all North Eastern states.

Figure 3.1: *Do you think the National Parties still dominate the North East politics?*

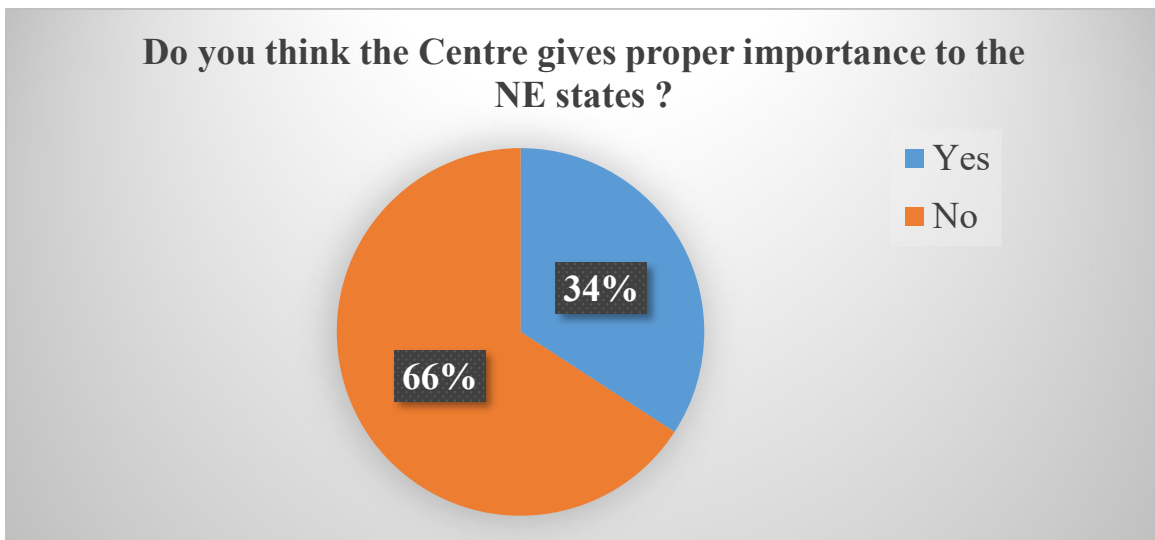


Source: Based on author’s fieldwork survey, 2019

Another important question of this study was how the youth voters from North East India think about the central government's attitude towards these all eight North Eastern states. Did centre give proper importance to the North Eastern states in comparison to other states. In response to this question, most of the youth voters 65.83 per cent responded that the government at centre did not give adequate importance to the North Eastern states due to its small size in terms of population and its distance from other parts of India and the different ethnic

composition compared to other parts of India. As an asymmetrical federal arrangement though, Indian state has given some specific privileges as part of constitutional provisions to these North Eastern states, but in terms of their representation in parliament, the North Eastern states always remains politically less-significant due to its tiny number of representatives in parliament i.e. 25 members in Lok Sabha and 14 members in Rajya Sabha. Compared to other states with large size and populations, the states from North East India hardly gain advantage in national level politics.

Figure 3.2: *Do you think the Centre gives proper importance to the NE states?*



Source: Based on author’s fieldwork survey, 2019

Most of the youth voters from these three states find employment, education, development, health care and immigration as major issue in North East India that government should give more focus on to solve these problem as mentioned in the table 3.9.

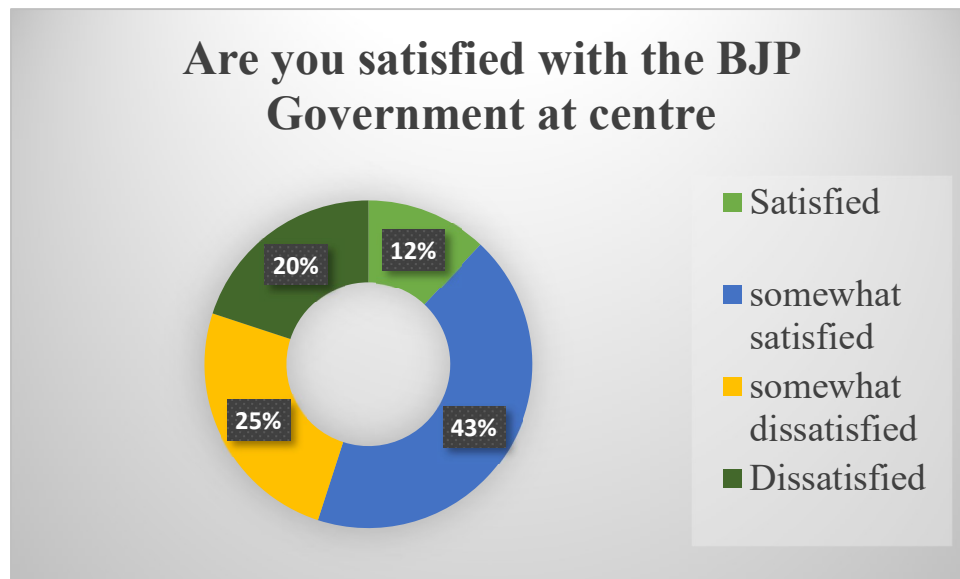
Table 3.9: *Which issue do you consider the most important in North East India that Government should give more focus?*

Issues	Respondents
Employment	65.83
Education	51.67
Development	47.5
Health Care	42.5
Immigration	37.5

Source: Based on author’s fieldwork survey, 2019

To get a sense of their views on the recent political changes in North East India, the respondents were asked if they were satisfied with BJP Government. In response, the dissatisfaction level was recorded very low, i.e., 20 per cent whereas 12 per cent were marked as satisfied with the BJP government at the centre and states and was interestingly 43 per cent marked as somewhat satisfied with the BJP government.

Figure 3.3: *Are you satisfied with the BJP Government at centre?*



Source: Based on author’s fieldwork survey, 2019

To discuss the rise of BJP in North East India as dominant national party, most youth voters believe that because of their development initiatives towards North East India in recent times, BJP became a dominant national party by replacing Congress party from this region. Simultaneously, the other factors like BJP’s alliance with regional parties and the anti-incumbency of the Congress also helped BJP come into power for the first time in most of the North Eastern states after 2014 general election.

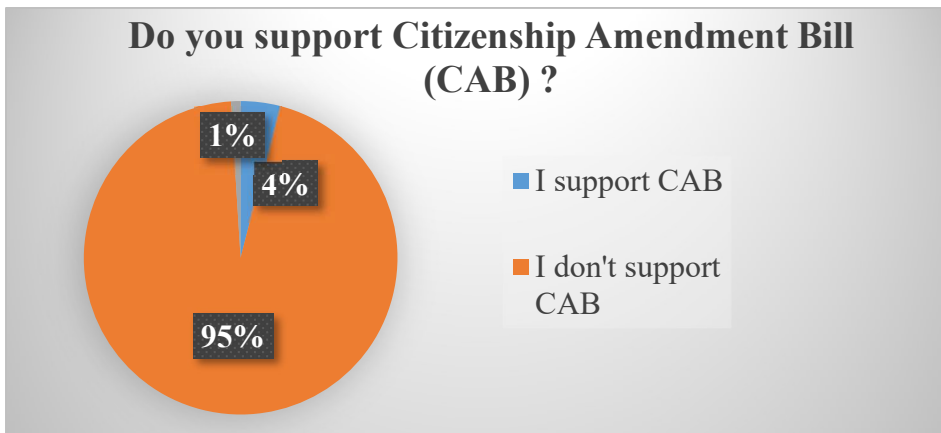
Table 3.10: *The reasons of BJP’s rise in NE India*

The Reasons of BJP’s rise in NE	Respondents
BJP’Ss Development initiatives	25 %
BJP’s alliance with regional parties	23 %
Anti-incumbency of past government	19%
People wanted an alternative	27 %

Source: Based on author’s fieldwork survey, 2019

Another important question was regarding the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2016 that “seeks to grant Indian Citizenship to persons belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities who have migrated to India after facing persecution on grounds of religion in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, if they fulfil conditions for grant of citizenship” (PIB, 2019). This bill is considered as serious threat to the entire demography of North Eastern region mainly for Assam. In response to this question whether they support this Act or not, majority of the respondents, 95 per cent, gave their opinion against the bill.

Figure 3.4: *Do you support Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB)?*



Source: Based on author's fieldwork survey, 2019

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has tried to examine the shifting trends of electoral politics in North East India by looking at the party system's changing pattern in North East India with BJP's rise as the dominant national party. Notwithstanding the asymmetrical federal provision of the Indian Constitution, that often works in favour of the North Eastern region (expressed through the fifth and sixth schedules and Article 371 to accommodate the interest of this region by creating sub-state level structure like District Council, Autonomous Council and giving special financial grants), the existing political asymmetry renders the North Eastern states ineffective in matters of representation and policy impact, due to the demos-enabling character of the federation. As a politically less-significant state with a small number of representatives in parliament, the eight states of this region do not have much bargaining power to influence the

national government and address their issues. Consequently, since independence, the entire region is being neglected or not getting much attention in terms of development, recognition and importance at the national level in the realm of party politics. By understanding this reality, within a short period, BJP with its developmental politics has become a dominant national party in this region. After coming to power at the centre under the Prime Ministership of Narendra Modi, BJP started giving special attention with prime focus on the all-round development of this region. By expanding their social base and localising the party identity with co-optation of other parties' agendas, BJP has succeeded in capturing power in many states and replacing the Congress party's hegemony from this region.

Chapter 4

Understanding the BJP and RSS Symbiosis in North East India

4.1 Introduction

Hindu Nationalism has become the predominant force in Indian politics with the BJP dominant system in recent times. Though the Hindu Nationalist force RSS and its political wing BJP is being credited for spreading Hindu Nationalism at a larger level but before their rise, “Hindu nationalism was constructed as an ideology between the 1870s and the 1920s” (Jaffrelot, 1999, p.11). The rise of Hindu nationalism from a small marginal force to a majoritarian force with core “Hindutva” ideology can be seen as a spectacular phenomenon. “Hindutva’s advancement from periphery to the centre of Indian politics explains its remarkable adaptability to the changing socio-political landscape of India” (Bhattacharjee, 2007, p.1). Though Hindu Nationalism is a new phenomenon, its ground was started in the nineteenth century with Hindu socio-religious reform organisations like “Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Hindu Mahasabha, and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh” play a significant role to expand this ideology. However, if we see the trajectory of this Hindu-nationalist ideology, there is a vast difference between the pre-independence and post-independent period. In this whole trajectory of Hindu Nationalism, two crucial actors play a significant role in making it a dominant force in Indian Politics, i.e. RSS and its political wing Bharatiya Janata Party. The BJP since its predecessor, Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS)’s time to the present has been sharing a symbiotic relationship with its parental organisation, RSS.

Both of them have become inseparable parts like the same coin with two sides, as they shared the same ideology and helped each other in materialising their goals. RSS claims itself to be a cultural organisation to protect the interest of Hindu people by unifying them to make a greater Hindu Rashtra. At the same time, the BJP has been influenced by the same ideology as that of RSS as its political wing. RSS can be seen as an instrumental factor in BJP’s electoral rise in Indian politics since its predecessor’s time to the recent 2019 general election. This chapter attempts to understand the symbiotic relationship between RSS and BJP to examine how RSS

becomes a contributing factor in the latter's electoral rise in India. For this purpose, this chapter is divided into some sections. The first section will try to discuss how the idea of Hindutva, Hindu Nationalism came into Indian politics as an alternative to secular nationalism in India, as well as its origin and growth before the entry of RSS. The following section will discuss how RSS become a vital force in Hindu Nationalist ideology from 1925 to independence time. The third section will discuss how RSS came into politics after independence with BJS to BJP through their political wing. The fourth section mainly discusses how RSS entered North East India and became the contributing factor for BJP's rise in North East India.

4.2 Hindu Nationalism in India: Origin and Growth

“Hindu nationalism constitutes a form of cultural nationalism, although religious values and traditions are key features” (Flaten, 2016, p.4). “The fuzzy boundaries between religion and culture also characterize the historical development of Hindu nationalist ideology” (Flaten, 2016: 4). “Hindu Nationalism appears for the first time resulting from the superimposition of a religion, a culture, a language, and a sacred territory- the perfect recipe for ethnic nationalism” (Jaffrelot, 2007, p.15). Dibyesh Anand (2011) observes,

Hindu nationalists imagine the Hindu community as consisting of all castes, subcastes, outcastes along with Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains, all religionists they call “indigenous” except the “foreign religionists” adhering to Islam and Christian (as exemplified in Joshi et al. 2003)—in short everyone except Muslims and Christians. (Anand, 2011, p.12-13)

“The first expression of Hindu mobilization emerged in the nineteenth century as an ideological reaction to European domination and gave birth to neo-Hinduism” (Jones, 1989; Copley 2000 cited in Jaffrelot, 2010, p. 40). The idea of Hindu Nationalism developed from the 1920s onwards in parallel with the mobilization of Muslims in the Khilafat movement. In India under British colonization, with the entry of Christian Missionaries in 1813, Britishers undertook various reforms, including certain Hindu customs abolished through certain laws. Later on, Christian Missionaries played a significant role in proselytizing and educational activities. As a result, a number of high caste Hindus, mostly Brahmins, saw it as a “threat to their religion and started undertaking various reform initiatives in society and religious

practices in order to adapt them to Western modernity while preserving the core of Hindu traditions” (Jaffrelot, 2009, p.131). The Arya Samaj movement was created in reaction to the British colonial state and Christian missionaries. The Arya Samaj as a socio-religious movement became a source of inspiration behind Hindu Nationalism. Before independence along with the Congress party, Hindu Nationalism also simultaneously dominated Indian political tradition. Although Indian leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo Ghose etc., followed the Hindu ideologies, neither emphasised creating any Hindu Organisation. However, Arya Samaj and its founder Dayanand Saraswati’s ideas and initiatives influenced the Punjab province, where Hindu Sabha become the significant actor to initiate the Hindu movement in India (Jaffrelot, 2009, p. 135). The Hindu Sabha and its counterpart in United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh) Punjab Hindu Sabha and the Hindu Mahasabha were formed in 1915 for working as

a collective defence of the socio-political interests of Hindus. It initially functioned as a pressure group within Congress, concerned to influence the party leadership to contest Muslim demands for increased access in the shape of quotas for the administration and the elective assemblies. (Jaffrelot, 1999, p. 19).

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a Maharashtrian Brahmin, the president of Hindu Mahasabha (1937-42), had written a text entitled “*Hindutva: Who is a Hindu*” published in 1923 that become an introductory text for Hindu Nationalists. This work was the first attempt to give a complete definition of Hindutva and Hindu Rashtra. For Savarkar “religion was only one aspect of Hindu identity, not even the most important” (Jaffrelot, 2010, p.45). Savarkar’s definition based on “Hindu identity out of Western theories of the nation” (Jaffrelot, 2010, p. 45). His major argument in “*Hindutva*” is that “the Aryans who settled in India at the dawn of history already formed a nation now embodied in the Hindus. Their Hindutva, according to Savarkar rests on three pillars: geographical unity, racial features and a common culture” (Jaffrelot, 2009, p.145). Thus, Savarkar’s definition of Hindutva mainly refers to three ‘H’, i.e. ‘Hindu, Hindi, and Hindustan’. Savarkar’s definition of “Hindu identity” is about “territorial (the land between Indus and the Indian Ocean), genealogical (fatherland) and religious (holy land)” (Chakrabarty and Jha, 2020, p.62). In this context, Chakrabarty and Jha argued, “The Hindu Rashtra is therefore more of a territorial than a religious nationalism because Hindu represented a cultural and civilizational synthesis which is more ‘a secular-rationalist than a

religio- fundamentalist construction” (Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020, p.62). As Jaffrelot mentioned, “The Hindutva of Savarkar was conceived primarily as an ethnic community possessing a territory and sharing the same racial and cultural characteristics, three attributes which stemmed from the mythical reconstruction of the Vedic Golden Age” (Jaffrelot, 1999, p.27).

The 1920s represent a landmark in the development of Hindu nationalism regarding both ideology and organizational structure. In 1923, Veer Savarkar published his influential work “Hindutva”, and two years later, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was founded. This period also saw the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha, which functioned as a political platform claiming to represent the interests of India’s Hindus. Savarkar’s Hindutva was mainly based on “who a Hindu is?”. Savarkar made it clear that “Hindutva was a much broader concept than Hinduism”. He stated, “Hindutva embraces all the departments of thought and activity of the whole Being of our Hindu race” (Savarkar, 1923/1989, pp. 3-4).

Moreover, Savarkar defined the essentials of Hindu India by referring to several factors: “We are one because we are a nation, a race and own a common Sanskriti (civilization)” (Savarkar, 1923/1989, p. 33). Muslims were not included in Savarkar’s definition since they did not share the same affection for Hindu civilization and Hindu culture. The second leader of the RSS, M. S. Golwalkar, put forth similar ideas. In his Bunch of Thoughts, Golwalkar identified the three internal threats to Hindu India: the Muslims, the Christians and the Communists.

4.3 RSS and Hindu Nationalism in Indian Politics

The RSS since its formation become the principal actor of the Hindu nationalist movement. It was deeply inspired by “contemporary European fascism”, and its key objectives were to “militarize and discipline India’s Hindus and arouse national consciousness” (Flaten, 2016, pp. 4-5). The main aim of the RSS was to “make India into a nation-state defined according to Hindu cultural and religious values, which in the RSS version reflected a distinct high-caste outlook. This ideology goes under the name Hindutva, which can be translated as Hinduness” (Flaten, 2019).

While V.D. Savarkar systematically defined “Hindu Nationalism with an ideology”, but he never outlines any plan of action to organize the Hindu community. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889-1940), a Maharashtrian first took the task of organising the Hindu Community through the foundation of the RSS. Savarkar’s idea helped “Hedgewar with an intellectual justification for the concept of a Hindu nation that embraced all the peoples of the subcontinent” (Anderson & Damle, 1987, p. 34). Hedgewar started the RSS with only five persons in 1925 at Nagpur (Kanungo, 2002, p. 48). The name ‘Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh’ (RSS) was adopted in a meeting held on April 17, 1926 (Barthwal, 2017). Dr Hedgewar was unanimously elected ‘Sangh Pramukh’ (Chief of Sangh) on December 19, 1926. Within a very short period, RSS became the largest Hindu nationalist movement to “spread and propagate the Hindutva ideology and infused new physical strength into the majority community” (Jaffrelot, 2007, p.16).

At first, Hedgewar adopted an innovative strategy to strengthen the organizational strength of RSS among Hindu people. Hedgewar started work at grassroots levels in order to reform Hindu society from below by creating local branches (Shakhas) in villages and towns as a basic unit of RSS. In Shakhas, every able young Hindu under an organizer (man in charge) called Pracharak (preachers) joins in practising martial arts and ideological training sessions. The Pracharak as an RSS cadre devoted his life for the organization to perform any organizational task to develop the network of the organization (Jaffrelot, 2007; Anderson & Damle, 1987; Kanungo, 2002). By 1933, the RSS started moving beyond Nagpur and Wardha to the Vidarbha region and the Hindi-speaking areas of Central Provinces (Kanungo, 2002, p. 48). According to scholars on Hindu Nationalism, the strength of RSS as an organization in terms of its membership and Shakhas has increased at rapid level since its formation. Between 1931 and 1933 the number of Shakhas increased from 60 to 125 and the membership grew to 12,000 (Palkar, 1964, p.255 cited in Anderson & Damle, 1987). Between 1938-1939, the RSS network expanded in Madras, Bengal, Gujarat etc. with 500 Shakhas and 60,000 members (Anderson & Damle, 1987, p.38). As Christophe Jaffrelot (2010) mentioned in 1948 there were about 600000 Swayamsevaks active in different parts of India. However, in 1948 when father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by one of its former members and the then Hindu Mahasabha member Nathuram Godse, then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru banned

the RSS and arrested most of the swayamsevaks but again in 1951, the RSS was back to its 1948 pattern. During 1950-1960 RSS network continued to grow steadily.

Furthermore, in 1975-76 during the national emergency RSS faced another ban from the Indira Gandhi Congress government. However, when the Janata Party government had come into power with its political wing Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the RSS strength increased from 10,000 Shakhas to 13,000 in 1979 (Jaffrelot, 2005). The expansion increased at rapid level in 1989 with 1.8 million swayamsevaks during the National Front government, where its political wing BJP was in coalition partner at the centre. During BJP led coalition government in 1998 according to RSS sources, the Shakhas increased to 27, 264 and 39, 175 Upshakhas. In 2004 according to the annual report before the “*Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha*” (All India Representative Committee) of RSS, there were 33,758 Shakhas and 48,329 Upshakhas actively involved in the organizational network. Until 2019, 8 March RSS Shakha has expanded up to 59, 266 Shakhas according to Annual Report submitted at Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha, RSS.¹

With the initiative of Hedgewar, soon RSS became the most powerful Hindu nationalist movement; however, his successor M.S. Golwalkar made a drastic change by sharpening both the ideological and organizational base of RSS (Kanungo, 2006). Hedgewar developed Shakhas as the core agency of RSS to make Hindu nationalist cadre and elite. Golwalkar as the next Sarsanghchhalak (head) in 1940 conceived the idea of Parivar and created several key progenies- Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) for students in 1948, Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) as a political wing in 1951, Saraswati Shishu Mandir for education in 1952, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) for labour in 1955 and Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in 1964 (Kanungo, 2006). In addition to these affiliates, “RSS founded a tribal movement, the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA- Centre for Tribal Welfare) in 1952 for countering the influence of Christian movements among the aboriginals of India, proselytism and priestly social work has resulted in numerous conversions” (Jaffrelot, 2007, p.18). The VKA of RSS started following the “missionary methods and achieved a number of reconversions” (Jaffrelot, 2007). Golwalkar’s successor Balasaheb Deoras after taking charge as the next Sarsanghchhalak of

¹From RSS website on Annual Report of RSS.

RSS become instrumental in shaping RSS with a greater political role. Deoras not only expanded but also consolidated the Parivar (Kanungo, 2006). Deora redesigned Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA) and Vidya Bharati in 1978, created Seva Bharati and Bharatiya Kisan Sangh in 1979. RSS has created an allied organization in every conceivable sphere (education, science, technology, medicine, industry, commerce, governance, development, health, law, media, intellectual property rights, human rights, environment, diasporas) and covers each possible section of tribals, Dalit, women, producers, consumers, workers, students, teachers, lawyers, doctors, physically challenged, retired soldiers and so on (Kanungo, 2006, p.54). After creating an affiliate, “the RSS appoints a few trusted and tried Pracharaks in the key posts of the new organizations. Almost every affiliate has the post of general secretary and an organizing secretary, usually occupied by the RSS Pracharak” (Kanungo, 2006, p.56). The RSS not only depute the Pracharaks in an affiliate but also draws the road map for the concerned organizations. The Pracharaks bind the entire network together organizationally and ideologically. “The linkage between RSS and its affiliate is much more organized and systemic; it is the RSS that decides whether a particular affiliate would play the lead role or simply remain anonymous, purely on strategic reason” (Kanungo, 2006, p.56). Simultaneously, along with RSS, Lakshmi Bal Kelkar started a women’s affiliate of RSS the “Rashtra Sevika Samiti” in October 1936 in the Central Province. Though these two organizations do not share any formal connection, they have maintained a very good cordial relation with each other (Anderson & Damle, 1987).

Since its formation, RSS became the leading actor to promote Hindu Nationalism, “but it did not impact public life in India because it remained out of politics” (Jaffrelot, 2007). However, Hedgewar associated himself with Congress, Hindu Mahasabha and took part in different programmes, but as the founder of the organization, he started the tradition of keeping the RSS away from any political activity and direct affiliation to any political organization. RSS even did not participate in the independence movement and deliberately avoided any political action that could be branded as anti-British activity. Even second Sarsanghchhalak of RSS M.S. Golwalkar also followed the same tradition. For him, “the RSS had pledged to achieve freedom through defending religion and culture and not by fighting the British” (Kabiraj & Malik, 2018, p.13). After India’s independence, RSS became a significant social and cultural organization and tried to give different services to the people in different parts of India.

4.4 RSS and BJP Symbiotic Relations

Although RSS called itself a cultural and non-political organization, a fact mentioned in its constitution itself but in practice, as Pralay Kanungo observed, “its actual operation goes much beyond the stated objective” (Kanungo, 2006, p.51). Since its formation, RSS had deliberately preferred to remain out of politics. RSS remained outside the politics, but its founder Hedgewar closely associated with political parties like Hindu Maha Sabha, and the Congress. The leader of Hindu Maha Sabha, B.S. Moonje was his political guru and V.D. Savarkar, the president of Hindu Maha Sabha had a significant influence on Hedgewar. Like Hedgewar, his next successor M.S. Golwalkar also maintained the same stand on RSS remaining outside political activities. They considered that the involvement of RSS in politics could lead to corrupt influences on the mind of the Swayamsevaks. Instead of conquering political power, they wanted to conquer the society in order to gain power as a ripe fruit (Kanungo, 2006).

However, after Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination in 1948 by one of RSS’s former follower Nathuram Godse, the RSS was banned, and nobody came out to argue its case in Parliament (Jaffrelot, 2005, p.7). The RSS leadership felt the need to have a political party of its own, which would defend its interest and champion the ideal of Hindu Rashtra (Kanungo, 2002). In that time, Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) formed as an alternative to the Congress party in 1951 when its founder Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, a minister under Nehru’s Congress government, resigned from the government in response to his strong disagreement on the issue of the refugee question. In 1950, on the issue of the refugee problem between India and Pakistan, India signed Liaquat –Nehru Pact². Dr S.P. Mookerjee strongly criticised this pact as the Congress party’s minority appeasement policy and resigned from the Congress government. He started a discussion with many Hindu Organizations like RSS, Ram Rajya Parishad, Hindu Maha Sabha for forming a new all-India Party as an alternative to Congress Party. He got tremendous support from RSS for establishing an alternative party against the Congress Party, which resulted in the formation of Bharatiya Jana Sangh on Oct. 20, 1951.

²Liaquat –Nehru Pact is about agreement on refugee problems between India and Pakistan negotiated between the two Prime Minister of India and Pakistan. On 8 April, 1950, Nehru and Liaquat Ali signed the agreement i.e. known as Delhi Pact through which each government agreed to uphold the rights of the minorities within their countries and they will facilitate the movements of migrants and to restore communal harmony between two Bengals.

Under the strong influence of Hindu organizations like RSS, BJS adopted the Hindutva ideology to emphasise Indian Culture and traditions. Party's support base also became very limited to only the Hindi belt i.e. North India. From the start, BJS had very limited political agenda³, mainly “the support for Hindi as the national language and banning of cow slaughter” (Graham, 1990, p. 30). From 1951 to 1967 BJS adopted an extreme radical Hindu nationalist agendas concentrated on only some limited section of people mainly in the Hindu-belt area. Thus in starting BJS could not able to make much wider support base with strong electoral presence because of its narrow ideology base.

On the other hand, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru with a secular image, the Congress party enjoyed a monopoly position by gaining a two-third majority in every election from 1952-1971. The BJS even did not cross the double digit of vote share in the general elections till 1971. **Table 4.1** shows the electoral performance of BJS from 1952- 1971. It shows its poor political performance during that time. Its support was base mainly dominant in some Hindi-heartland states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, etc. In the first general election in 1952 BJS won only three seats with 3.06 per cent votes and by 1967 it increased up to 9.31 per cent vote per cent with 35 seats.

Table 4.1 Seat Share and Vote share of BJS in Lok Sabha Elections: 1952-1971

Year	1951	1957	1962	1967	1971
Total contested seats	94	130	196	249	157
Won Seats	3	4	14	35	22
Vote Share (%)	3.06	5.97	6.44	9.31	7.37

Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India's statistical report on general elections from 1952-1971

From the very beginning, Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, the founder of BJS, tried to organize an “opposition bloc” to stand against the Congress Party. All-important leaders of BJS like Deen Dayal Upadhyay, L.K. Advani, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, etc. have joined different political groups to displace Congress from its dominance (Bhambri, 2001). Because of their

³Though BJS fully committed to the ideology of Hindu Nationalism according to B.D. Graham(1990) in his book “Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origin and Development of Bharatiya Jana Sangh” mentioned about BJS's attempt to adopt a liberal stand rather than conservative approach.BJS emphasized on economic and administrative decentralisation but they wanted to restricting the role of state in regulation of economic life. It also declared that BJS would abolish the jagirdar and zamindar system and distributing land to the farmer and promised to improve condition in the villages and to popularise cottage industries.

limited support base with Hindutva ideology, they could not compete with Congress Party alone. By inspiring Ram Manohar Lohia's anti-Congress ideology, BJP tried to make electoral understanding with other political parties. This strategy helped them expand their support base, but both RSS and BJS could not achieve such widespread recognition and support due to its Hindutva image. However, in that time, the JP movement was started by veteran Gandhian leader Jaya Prakash Narayan against Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's authoritarian rule to save democracy. The BJS with their cultural wings RSS and the VHP joined the movement very actively and they took the great initiative to mobilize the masses for supporting JP movement. By joining these movements, Jana Sangh leadership and its parent organization RSS became popular and found an opportunity to enter the mainstream of Indian Politics (Singh, 1994).

During the 1975-77 emergency, the BJS took greater initiative in channelising anti-Congress force into a common platform that merged with four other political parties', i.e. BKD, Congress (O), Congress (D), and Socialist Party to form Janata Party (JP). BJS decided to merge with newly formed Janata Party on 30 April 1977 which benefited BJS from using a wider social base and integrating itself into the mainstream of Indian Politics (Puri, 1989). While joining Janata Party, BJS did not include its own party values, programmes, and agendas in original forms. Instead, it silently accepted the principle of secularism, Gandhian socialism and the economic and political decentralization agenda of the Janata Party. They did not give up their core doctrine, but to gain political power and wider support base, the party deliberately entered into the compulsion of coalition politics (Jaffrelot, 1998; Bhambri, 2001; Ghosh, 1999; Malik & Singh, 1995).

The year of 1977 marked a significant shift in Indian politics. For the first time, Congress party at the centre lost its power to the newly created Janata Party. Janata Party with 295 seats formed a surplus coalition government at the centre. From the Bharatiya Jana Sangh party, L.K. Advani and Atal Bihari Vajpayee joined the Cabinet Ministry in Janata Party government. For the BJS, joining the Janata Party government proved significant to enter mainstream Indian politics. It helped the party expand their support base and electoral strength by sharing power with other secular parties. The BJS leadership was very pragmatic and open-minded towards coalition with opposition parties for displacing the Congress party. Using such a national platform through Janata Party, the BJS mainly started expanding its Hindutva ideology in

different states with its parental organisation RSS. In this process, different Ministers, Member of Parliament, Chief Minister of BJS in different states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh also played a crucial role along with their cultural wings to spread their ideology.⁴As a result, they faced massive criticism from other members of the Janata Party government like Socialist Party, Congress (O). Because of some reactionary and controversial activities of RSS raised the question of involvement of Janata party's BJS's minister with RSS. The other alliance partners in the government questioned the 'double membership' of BJS Minister and demands were raised for delinking the BJS members from RSS in order to remain as member of the Janata Party government. But Advani, Vajpayee and other BJS members refused to delink from RSS and resigned from the JP ministry. Thus in 1979 the Janata Party came to an end because of its internal party conflicts and fraction. Before the 1980's general election, the BJS member formed a new party named as Bharatiya Janata Party (in English Indian People's Party) on April 30, 1980. From BJS to BJP, its parent organisation RSS has shared a very close symbiotic relationship with the former.

The RSS become a significant factor for BJP in terms of manpower as well as other assistance. For example, two of its Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee (1996, 1998-2004) and Narendra Modi (2014-present) have come from RSS background. Other key figures in the BJP, for example, Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, late Gopinath Munde and Murli Manohar Joshi etc., and many others have come from RSS background. Though there is a complex relationship between the two, it is argued that "BJP has a ready-made apparatus of voluntary organisations that works as election machine for the party by supplying manpower and generates support for the regimes" (Palshikar 2017b, p.13). Prashant Jha (2017) analysed the relationship between the two as "the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh remains the source, the supplement and the shadow-contributing to the BJP's phenomenal electoral success, shaping it, but also getting shaped in the process" (Jha, 2017, p.131). In this context, Palshikar argues:

The RSS connection is not important for proving or accusing the BJP of its Hindutva.

The BJP, in any case, adheres to Hindutva. The connection is important to understand

⁴In this context we can mention their role in Janata Party government to introduced a bill aiming to ban on cow slaughter and their demand for withdrawing the history text-book written by secular historian and proposing for rewriting the history textbook by highlighting the Muslim ruler's invasion over Hindu rulers and they also advocated for passing a law against force conversion.

the flexibility that both of them enjoy and the possibilities of mobilizing public opinion in favour of the BJP. (Palshikar 2017b, p.12)

4.5 RSS in North East India: Towards the mission of *Akhand Bharat*

Although the work of the RSS and its Sangh Parivar has received huge scholarly attention in all other parts of India (Jaffrelot, 1998; Hansen, 1999; Anderson & Damle, 1987; Ghosh, 1999), at the same time, its presence in North East India did not get so much attention. There are only a few works on Sangh activities in North East India contributed by Pralay Kanungo (2011, 2012), Arkotong Longkumer (2010, 2017, 2019, 2020), Malini Bhattacharjee (2016), Sanjib Baruah (2020) which can be considered as significant in this context. The reason behind such situation can be attributed to the very fact that historically, geographically and culturally the North East India has been cut off from the rest of India. Most of the states of this region have been largely populated by the tribal population who followed their ancient animist religion. They have always attracted proselytizers, whether it was Vaishnavite, Hindu or Christian missionaries from the colonial period to the present time (Longkumer, 2019). The North East region had never been an ideal location for the expansion of Hindutva forces, yet the RSS and its affiliates made inroads in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh (Kanungo 2011; Bhattacharjee, 2016).

Although the rise of BJP in Assam and other states in the North East region is a relatively new phenomenon, the active presence of the Hindutva forces led by RSS and its different affiliate organisations since the pre-independent time facilitated the emergence of BJP in the region. To discuss the BJP's rise in North East India, some scholars argue that "it is only due to the quiet and determined hard work of the RSS cadre that BJP could make inroads in this region first time after independence" (Firstpost, 2017). In this context, Malini Bhattacharjee points out, "Bharatiya Janata Party's political experiment in making inroads into Assam over the past decade has been discussed at length, surprisingly little attention has been devoted towards understanding the contribution of the social and cultural wings of Sangh Parivar in deepening the roots of Hindutva in the state" (Bhattacharjee, 2016, p.80).

The RSS made its debut in North East India barely 10 months before independence. In 1946 three RSS Pracharaks, namely Dadarao Paramarth from Nagpur, Vasant Rao Oak and Sri

Krishna Pranjpe started their activities in Assam, which include most parts of what is today's North East India (Bhattacharjee, 2007; Sethi and Shubhrastha, 2017). On October 27, 1946, the RSS established its first Shakha in Guwahati, Shillong and Dibrugarh (Gupta, 2018). Dadarao Parmarth had shifted to Shillong as the Prant Pracharak, an RSS ideologue who heads the activities of the region concerned. Sri Krishna Pranjpe went to Dibrugarh and Vasant Rao Oak settled in Guwahati (Sethi & Shubhrastha, 2017).

However, after the RSS adherent Nathuram Godse assassinated Mahatma Gandhi on 30 January 1948, the organisation was banned across India. As a result, in December 1948, RSS started "a nationwide Satyagraha against the ban" (Bhattacharjee, 2007). From Assam 52 RSS activists including Keshav DeoBaawri, Girish Kalita, Sankalp Tiwari, Prafulla Kumar Borah and Dadarao Parmarth took an active role in the Satyagrah and was jailed. "In July 1949 after the ban was lifted, Dadarao Parmarth left Assam due to his illness, and in his place, Dattopant Thengdi arrived in Assam to oversee the organizational activities in Assam" (Bhattacharjee, 2007). In November 1949, RSS Sarsanghchalak M.S. Golwalkar sent Thakur Ram Singh of Punjab as the Prant Pracharak of Assam. At the same time, Eknath Ranadey was the Kshetriya Pracharak head of Bengal, Orissa and Assam.

In July 1949 after the ban was lifted, RSS actively started working in different places of Assam. The earthquake of Assam in 1950 became the significant landmark for RSS's entry among common masses in Assam as the popular acceptable force. During the 1950s after the massive earthquake and heavy floods in the Brahmaputra and its tributaries, there was a huge loss both in terms of human and materials. RSS took this opportunity to become actively involved in relief work in the region. During this time, RSS Sarsanghchalak M.S. Golwalkar visited the earthquake and flood-affected areas and "started an organization named *Assam Bhukamp Pidit Sahayata Samiti* (The Assam Earthquake Sufferers Relief Society), and RSS swayamsevaks distributed food, clothes and provided shelters to several victims of the earthquake" (Bhattacharjee,2007). Through this initiative, RSS got acceptance and popular support among common people. During 1950-1960 Assam had faced serious riots when Bengali speaking Hindu refugees fled from Muslim dominated East Pakistan to Assam. The RSS took this opportunity to extend their support to these Bengali Hindu refugees, which helped them to get significant support in Assam (Bhattacharjee, 2007).

As argued by Malini Bhattacharjee, “to spread the influence of RSS, the Pracharaks took help of several local Assamese intellectuals and notables” like Kamakhya Ram Barua, then judge of Gauhati High Court, who introduced RSS to many important people in Assam (Bhattacharjee, 2007). Other local nobles were Radhika Mohan Goswami of Nagaon and Giridhar Sharma, an eminent professor and principal of Arya College, helped strengthen the RSS activities in Assam (Bhattacharjee, 2007). Until 1975, every district in Assam had Sangh Shakhas. The association with these Assamese notables helped RSS significantly to become popular and acceptable among common people. Eventually in 2014, Basistha Bujarbarua, a local Assamese became the RSS Prant Pracharak of Assam.

During the National Emergency, RSS was the only organization in all over India that worked against Indira Gandhi’s authoritarian emergency rule. During the emergency, RSS as a strong force launched a nationwide Satyagraha to protest against it. From Assam and Manipur, many Assamese and Meitei Swayamsevaks took active part in the Satyagraha.⁵ The works of RSS expanded at rapid level and increased their support among Assamese, Manipuri and several other Hindu communities after the national emergency of 1977.⁶

In the initial period the influence of RSS in Assam and other North Eastern parts was seen only as a Krishna Bhakti movement (Sethi & Subhrastha, 2017; Pisharoty, 2019). In that time RSS was neither seen as potent ideological force nor any political involvement in state politics of Assam. However, the socio-political contours of time that opened up in Assam during the late 1970-80s gave them an opportunity to assert its ideological commitments (Awungashi, 2019). The Assam movement can be seen as a significant landmark in this case. “In 1979, the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) started the anti-foreigners movement to detect, delete and deport illegal migrants of Bangladesh from Assam” (Bhattacharjee, 2016, p.85) irrespective of any religion, whether Hindu or Muslim illegal migrants. The RSS fully supported this movement with their own vested interest. All other political parties except RSS backed Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) termed the Assam movement as “anti-social, anti-national with

⁵Author’s interview with M.M. Ashoken, RSS’s former Prant Pracharak of Manipur and present Working Committee Member from North East at Seva Bharti Office (Manipur Seva Samiti, Imphal) on February 24, 2019.

⁶ Author’s interview with M. M. Ashoken, RSS’s former Prant Pracharak of Manipur and present Working Committee Member from North East at Seva Bharti Office (Manipur Seva Samiti, Imphal) on February 24, 2019.

parochial and communal overtones” (Bhattacharjee, 2007). At the same time, during this movement, RSS grabbed the opportunity and mobilised their cadres to make public awareness among all Indian about “the true nature of the AASU’s anti-foreigner move and the danger of illegal infiltration from Bangladesh posed for national security” (Agarwala, 2006). In that time, BJS’s and former RSS Swayamsevak A.B. Vajpayee as an MP supported the Assam movement and visited Assam and got arrested for his protest.⁷ RSS organized Hindu sammelan in various parts of Assam in that time. The actual ground was made in 1984 when Eketmata Yatra was organized where Rathas coming from Bhairab Kunda and from Tripura met in Guwahati (Sarma, 2016). However, RSS tried to change the focus of the Assam movement from anti-outsider, Anti-foreigner to target Bengali Muslims. RSS polarized the movement into communal line differentiating the illegal migrants by supporting Hindus Bengalis as *Sharanarathi* (asylum seeker) and Muslim Bengali migrants as *anupraveshkari* (infiltrator). Along with AASU, the RSS’s student unit AVBP was also seen taking active part in the movement.

The Sangh’s support base and areas gradually expanded at rapid level in “Assam and other parts of North East India after the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992”(Bhattacharjee, 2007). In 1994, three local Pracharaks emerged in Assam to give RSS a boost in the region (Sarma, 2016). From 1946 to the present time, the RSS’s organizational network has expanded to “903 Shakas running in 730 places while there are 118 Milan and 47 Mandali” (Firstpost, 2017). Thus, the rise of RSS in North East India starting from Assam with one branch Assam kshetra to now four kshetra or divisions as Uttar Assam (covering Meghalaya and Nagaland), Dakshin Assam (covering Tripura and Mizoram), and Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur (Sarma, 2016).⁸

The entry of RSS in Arunachal Pradesh can be traced back to its initiative of “My Home is India” (*Bharat Mera Ghar*) programme in 1960 to spread nationalistic ideologies. Then senior RSS Pracharak Padmanabha Acharya started this programme for promoting national integration under which teachers and deprived students from the border areas have been taken to different parts of India including religious, cultural, educational places.⁹ This initiative

⁷Author’s interview with Samudra Gupta Kashyap and Available Vajpayee’s speech at parliament

⁸Author’s interview with RSS Prant Pracharak Sashikant Chauthaiwale

⁹Author’s interview with RSS Spokesperson of Assam Ranjib Sharma at Guwahati on February 2019.

helped RSS to get closer with Arunachali people. In the 90s the people of Arunachal Pradesh are getting familiar with the RSS.¹⁰

As Arunachal Pradesh is a tribal dominant state, the RSS mainly used socio-cultural and religious aspect to get their space among Arunachali people. The establishment of Arunachal Vikash Parishad, a brainchild of the indigenous faith movement *Doyen Golgi Bote* in 1993 also boosted the spirit of the people. Talom Rukbo the architect of the Donyi-Polo movement became the founding president of Arunachal Vikash Parishad (AVP) and also the involvement of many tribal intellectuals, elites and committed indigenous leaders have been successfully co-opted the Hindutva organization through AVP. The AVP acts as an umbrella organization that is committed to safeguard the indigenous faiths and culture of the people of Arunachal. It organizes and coordinates the activities of different indigenous organizations such as Nyishi Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society (NIFCS), *Donyi-Polo Yaelam Kebang* (DPYK), Central Nyedar Nanlo, Rangfra Faith Promotion Society (FFPS), *Meder Nello* (Apatani). Therefore, AVP act as an intermediary between Arunachali and Sangh Parivar. Arunachal Vikas Parishad (AVP), being a linked organization of the RSS, worked to “safeguard the indigenous religion, culture, and tradition of tribal population in Arunachal Pradesh” (Dangmei, 2019). The AVP worked among the indigenous groups to protect their indigenous religion, culture, and identity. They circulate ‘posters and pamphlets like “save your culture,” “loss of culture is loss of identity”, etc. (Dangmei, 2019, p.61). Certain other organisations of Sangh Parivar, which worked among “Donyi-Polo” or other indigenous faiths in the North East region with the larger agenda of integrating and assimilating the indigenous cultural and religious practices with Hinduism, include “Janajati Faith and Culture Forum and Janajati Dharma Sanskriti Manch” (Dangmei 2019). The Hindu forces consider these indigenous faiths of Arunachal Pradesh and other parts of the North East region as their Hindu faith through “assimilation or accommodate some of the Hindu elements into the tribal religion” (Dangmei 2019). Mohanty argues that RSS has very cordial relations with indigenous faith organizations. It encourages them to follow their religion because, for them, “Hindu is not a religion but a way of life”. As he says:

¹⁰ RSS Pracharak Sunil Mohanty in Arunachal Pradesh in an interview with First post journalist Simantik Dowera, 2017.

We while talking about their indigeneity, culture, tradition, languages, festivals, dress codes and food habit, we appreciate, recognize and encourage them through their own people. This is their own responsibility so we guided them and help them to promote as well as protect their own culture as a helping hand. We should inspire them to save and protect their own traditions. (S. Mohanty, personal communication, May 22, 2020)

RSS is currently running around 50 Shakhas, including Milan and Mandali¹¹ and has 3000 trained Pracharaks active in the state. It has expanded its activities through linked organisations like Arunachal Vikas Parishad (AVP), Arunachal Shiksha Vikas Samiti (ASVS) (usually, it is referred to as Vidya Bharti), Sewa Bharti, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Akhil Bhartiya Parishad, Shankar Bharti, Kisan Sangha, Sevika Samiti and Vivekanand Kendra (Sunil Mohanty, personal communication, 22 May 2020). RSS organized a meeting in December 2016 at Itanagar, which was addressed by Mohan Bhagwat, RSS Sarsanghchalak, and gathered around 10000 people. Scholars working in the area actively highlight the involvement of the RSS and linked organisation through their different social welfare works like establishing formal, informal schools, Bal Sanskar Kendra, hostels, residential schools, coaching centres in remote backward areas (Kanungo, 2012; Siddiqui, 2014)

Manipur is another state of North East India where the RSS has been able to establish significant presence. Although RSS has started their work in Manipur since 1950, but there was little awareness among common people about their presence in the state. RSS has started their day-to-day operational activities in Manipur from 1965 (Sarma, 2016). For a long time, there were no Shakhas and presence of RSS in the tribal hill districts of Manipur, but now RSS has a significant presence in hill area also.¹² In an interview with author, M.M. Ashoken, RSS Prant Pracharak of Manipur and originally from Kerala, mentioned that in recently organized *Tarun Sibir* (Youth Camp) for three days, RSS got participation from every district of Manipur. Out of total 37 development blocks, people from 34 blocks came to join RSS. Among them 72 Christians also joined the Youth Camp. The activities of RSS gained momentum in 1994 as

¹¹ Milan means weekly gatherings and Mandali means monthly gatherings of RSS Pracharak for discussion and doing exercise just like Shakhas.

¹² Author's interview with RSS Prant Pracharak and member of Central Working Committee of RSS from North East M.M. Ashoken at Seva Bharti Manipur, Imphal office on 2019, 27 February.

RSS successfully projected their national integration mission. As M.M. Ashoken said, “RSS has been working for promoting Hindu culture, traditions and identity of Manipur (Sarma, 2017).

The organization got a significant boost when the RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat inaugurated a conference of RSS cadre at Bhaigya Chandra Open Air Theatre in Imphal on December 7, 2014 where he mentioned, “The problem faced by Manipur are the problem of the nation.” Thus, RSS tried to make them acceptable among Manipuri through their message of national integration. At present, RSS has 115 local units, including Shakas, Milan, and Mandols, who actively operate in the state. As the Prant Pracharak Pramukh Dayanand Rajkumar admitted, “the penetration of RSS in the state is relatively low, particularly in the hill district, which are, largely Christian dominated” (Firstpost, 2017). As he added, “RSS in Manipur is not progressing very fast. It is an ongoing process. Slowly people from different strata of society are showing some interest in the organization. But the problem is some are coming purely for political gain” (Firstpost, 2017). In terms of supporter, “compared to the Meitei dominated valley district where Hindu dominates the demography, the RSS finds it tough to establish itself among the Christians” (Firstpost, 2017). In this context, Paokam Haokip, a Christian RSS Pracharak mentioned his experience, “People have a wrong perception about the RSS. The Sangh works for the upliftment of the downtrodden people, like the United Naga Council. Even though I am a Christian, I am a Hindu. We are proud RSS Christian (Awungashi, 2019). M.M. Ashoken, a senior former Prant Pracharak at Manipur, while explaining the organizational strength of RSS in Manipur mentioned

In Manipur, RSS has day to day Shakha. Earlier RSS has significant presence only in plain areas of Manipur however at present RSS have many members in Hill area also. In Tribal areas, RSS worked through its affiliate organization Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA) where they have approximately 25-30 workers and 5-6 full time Karyakarta works in hill areas. Along with Kalyan Ashram, Seva Bharati, Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh where about 50,000 members are involved in different activities. (M.M. Ashoken, personal communication, February 27, 2019)

4.6 Strategy of RSS in North East India: Integration or Larger Projection of Hinduisation?

4.6.1 RSS and Akhand Bharat: Integration through religious and socio-cultural appropriation

The North East region had never been an ideal location for the expansion of Hindutva forces due to the overwhelming majority of the Christian population in states like Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya. However, the RSS and its affiliates have made inroads into Assam and Arunachal Pradesh turning out to be a Hindutva stronghold in the region (Kanungo, 2011, p. 91). For RSS, the North East Region has significant importance to fulfil their “*Akhand Bharat*” (greater Undivided India) mission. For them North East India is important not only for its strategic geographic location but also for RSS’s cultural and national integration model in spirit (Longkumer, 2019). Both RSS and its political wing BJP consider North East India not as peripheral states but as the heart of India (Longkumer, 2019). As Arkotong Longkumer argued,

..... Use of *Akhand Bharat* in the context of the Northeast is novel in the way they visualize a region that has historically been marginal in the “Hindu” imagination. *Akhand Bharat* encompasses regions that are culturally linked or influenced by a Sanskritic culture that forms the Indian subcontinent and extends to Southeast Asia and central Asia. (Longkumer, 2019, p. 284)

The whole trajectory of Hindutva forces in North East India has shifted from “more explicit forms of nationalistic mobilization to more daily and imperceptible forms of cultural penetration (Berti, Jaoul, and Kanungo, 2011), primarily with non-Christian indigenous groups” (Longkumer, 2017). To make their presence more visible and acceptable in North East India, RSS has adopted many strategies from religious-socio-cultural appropriation to welfare, humanitarian activity to moderate their Hindutva agendas into a pragmatic form. However, RSS developed itself into a different form in North East India in comparison with other parts of India, but RSS never compromised with its core principle.¹³ In North East India, RSS, through the appropriation of religious faith and socio-cultural beliefs, setting up of educational institutions, cultural forum, welfare programmes, publication department etc. aimed to reclaim

¹³Author’s interview with Seva Bharti Purvanchal Organising Secretary Surender Talukdar at Seva Bharti Purvanchal Office, Guwahati on 9 December 2019

the region under its larger project of integrating the region through ‘Hindu origin’(Longkumer,2017; Bhattacharjee, 2016; Thomas, 2019).

The RSS had already established its Shakhas in different parts of North East India in the mid-1940s. However, by the 1960s its activities gained much momentum through various Hindu Organisations including Ramakrishna Mission, Vivekananda Kendra, Viswa Hindu Parishad, Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, Seva Bharati, Vidya Bharati, Ekal Vidyalaya and different organizations (Longkumer, 2017; Sharma, 2016; Thomas, 2019). Since 1960’s and 1970’s these organizations have been working closely with the various traditional religions in North East India. These Hindu Organisations under the banner of Sangh Parivar assisted in the standardisation and consolidation of various faiths, which included Heraka, Bathau, Seng Khari, Donyi-Polo, Rengfra and others (Thomas, 2019). In this process of close association between RSS and different indigenous faiths, as John Thomas argues,

Many of these faiths came to be appropriated and recast as tributaries and extensions of the larger river called ‘Hinduism’ with traditional gods becoming avatars of Hindu gods and the existing religious and cultural practices becoming attuned to the standards set by Hindutva. (Thomas, 2019, p.325)

AS L. Pachuau argues, “geographically and racially, India’s North East region lies between the traditions of the Indic Asia and the Mongoloid Asia” (as cited in Bhattacharjee, 2016, p. 81). Because of this “in-betweenness”, Hindutva forces tried to establish their integration model to fulfil their larger projection of Hindu identity in this region. They have selectively used the reference from Vedic, Puranic and epic texts, and local histories, religious symbols, myths, and idioms to promote, expand, and impart a Hindu identity in the North East region mainly in states like Assam (Bhattacharjee, 2016). For example, in Assam, as Malini Bhattacharjee (2016) has pointed out the RSS appropriated the existing diverse forms of Hindu tradition from the ancient periods to “claim the antiquity of Hinduism in the region” (p.81). “The mention of Pragjyotisha and Kamrup, the ancient and medieval names of Assam in several Sanskritic texts such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas, facilitates the ideologues of Hindutva to argue that Assam was essentially a Hindu Province and was well connected to the rest of “Hindustan” (Bhattacharjee, 2016, p. 81).

As Sanjib Baruah argued, “Ideologues of Hindu cultural nationalism have been deploying narratives of India’s geographical unity as a sacred landscape partly to push back against the narratives of autonomy and self-determination that have dominated the politics of the region in recent years” (Barua, 2020, pp.16-17). For this purpose, the Hindutva forces establish a link to present-day Arunachal Pradesh with the rest of the “Bharat” through mythology. They believe that Rukmini, the wife of Lord Krishna belonged to Kundil Nagar which is in present Arunachal Pradesh (Bhattacharjee, 2016). Similarly, “thus, Ulupi and Chitrangada- two women married to Arjuna-were supposedly Naga and Manipuri Princesses” (Baruah, 2020,p.17) and “Bhima’s wife Hidimba, a Dimasa woman from Assam” (Baruah, 2020, p.17). Likewise, the ancient temple including the Shakti Pith Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati and Malini Than in Arunachal Pradesh also become very significant for their projection of ‘Hindu origin’ to consolidate Hindu identity.¹⁴ “The RSS equates Kamakhya worship in Assam with the worship of ‘Shakti’ or ‘Durga’ in the Hindi heartland to show the commonality of Hindu tradition between the Northeast region and mainstream Indian Hindu society” (Bhattacharjee, 2016, p.81).

Besides Assam, in other North Eastern states also, the RSS mainly targeted tribal population along with their indigenous religious faith system against Christianity. Compared to other North Eastern states, RSS made an easy entry in Arunachal Pradesh by appropriating indigenous faith of different tribals mainly Donyi-Polo and Ranghra into their Hindutva project of integrating India (Kanungo, 2011; Dangmei, 2019). As S. Dangmei pointed out, “after independence, the government of India provided favourable conditions and encouraged Hinduism by permitting its missionaries to carry their activities which helped the Hindutva forces to establish its strong presence and influence of Hindu religion and culture among the tribal populations of Arunachal Pradesh” (Dangmei,2019, p. 60). With the RSS’s initiative, Arunachal Vikas Parishad (AVP) worked for safeguarding the indigenous religion, culture and tradition of the tribal population in Arunachal Pradesh. “The close link and association of Donyi-Polo or other indigenous faiths” in the North East region with Hinduism are made possible through different organization of Sangh Parivar include “Kalyan Ashram, Janajati Faith and Culture Forum and Janajati Dharma Sanskriti Manch” (Dangmei, 2019; Kanungo,

¹⁴Interview with Ranjeev Sharma, RSS Sampark Pramukh, Assam in Guwahati on February 2019.

2011). The Hindu forces consider these indigenous faiths of Arunachal Pradesh and other parts of North East region as their Hindu faith and within Hindu religion through “assimilation or accommodation of some of the Hindu elements into the tribal religion, they consider themselves as follower of indigenous religion since Hinduism is not a foreign religion” (Dangmei, 2019). On 16 February 2011 Yoga Guru Ramdev laid the foundation stone of the Hindu Seva Ashram at Lingalaya Seva Ashram in Arunachal Pradesh and mentioned himself as true Nyishi because he worships Sun and the Moon. Through this action, Baba Ramdev tried to advocate that “every follower of the indigenous faith (referring Donyi-Polo) is a Hindu who is worshipped directly or indirectly by the Hindus, irrespective of different nomenclatures” (Dangmei, 2019). Similarly, in Nagaland also, “RSS extended their help to the Heraka on the ground that Heraka is an indigenous religion” and RSS always consider the tribal people as Hindu so they extended their services to the tribal population by considering this commonality. Both RSS and Heraka share a commonality in respecting ancient Indian culture and tradition. They consider “Christianity as a foreign religion, and that their holy land is not in India”(Dangmei, 2019).

In this larger narrative of RSS’s integration model of *Akhand Bharat* through ‘Hindu Origin’ in an interview with RSS Spoke person of Assam (Sampark Pramukh) Ranjib Sharma said

If we take Arunachal as an example, they have *Donyi-polo* and *Rangfra* whereas in Assam, we have *Bathou* among Bodo people and *Monosha Puja* and *Sabha* in lower Assam, Durga puja in upper Assam. During Bihu festival, we also celebrate ‘Garu Bihu’ (Festival for Cow) to worship our domesticated cows as sacred animals. In all these things that we practice as a religious practice in different ways, there is no basic difference between Gangetic or mainland India and North East India. For RSS, the North East is the same as other parts of India in terms of culture and religious practices. Therefore, the RSS tries to connect our indigenous practice with mainland India through integration. For us if there is Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati it means Hindu people have been staying here since its establishment. If Manili Than is in Arunachal Pradesh the Hindu people have been staying there since the creation of Malini Than. We do not consider India as a political nation but a cultural nation. In this context, North East India is a part of that cultural nation. (R. Sharma, personal communication, March 1 2019)

As a mobilization technique for their expansion strategy, RSS has used or appropriated religious icons, local tribal leaders, cultural icons and symbols, local historical figures in North East India. As Malini Bhattacharjee argues,

By adopting local specificities and cultural and religious symbolism of different regions, the RSS has made inroads into not only the ‘Hindi belt’ but has also managed a breakthrough in several ‘inhospitable’ regions like Karnataka, Kerala, Assam, through the alliance route in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and other states. (Bhattacharjee, 2007, p.13)

In Assam, the RSS has appropriated Sankardeva, a popular religious-cultural icon who led a reformist Vaishnavite movement during 16th century in Assam. As a socio-religious reformer, Sankardeva spread his *Ek Saraniya Nam Dharma*, established *Sattras*, and *Namghar* across Assam which becomes socio-religious cultural centres among common people. Sankardeva began his religious movement against Brahmanical orthodoxy to simplify Hinduism emphasizing worship of Krishna as the main God (Bhattacharjee, 2016; Deka, 2006; Misra, 1999). However, Sangh Parivar used Sankardev to adjust their larger project of Hindu imagination. In this context as Christophe Jaffrelot argued how RSS and its political wing BJP has “adjusted to the local variant of Hindu culture” as part of their project of vernacularisation process by appropriating Sankardeva. The renowned author, Hiren Gohain, pointed out that Sankardev Sangh, a Vaishnavite devotee’s organization with 30 lakh members, shared the platform with RSS as part of the Hindutva project (Gohain, 2003). The RSS even took shelter to grow in Assam under the satra tradition established by Sankardeva. For example, in 2000 RSS played an instrumental role in recognizing the *Satriya* dance as a classical dance form by the Sangeet Natak Akademi (Sethi and Shubhrastha, 2017). Malini Bhattacharjee observes, “Sankardev is thus projected as a torchbearer of Hinduism who successfully arrested Christian proselytization amongst tribal people” (Bhattacharjee 2016, p.82).

With this mobilising strategy in Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, RSS has appropriated “Naga leader freedom fighter Rani Gaidinliu, Manipuri prince Tikendrajit Singh, in Meghalaya U Tirot Singh, a Khasi chief who fought the British in the 18th century” (Chakravarty, 2017). In Nagaland and Manipur, the RSS and BJP appropriated Naga spiritual leader, freedom fighter

Rani Gaidinliu (1915-1993) from the Zeliangrong tribe. As a freedom fighter, Rani Gaidinliu fought against British rule and Christian missionaries to protect the indigenous culture, i.e., Heraka from Christianity (Chakravarty, 2017; Bijukumar, 2016; Longkumer, 2010). As a believer of Heraka faith, Rani Gaidinliu and Zeliang Heraka Association (ZHA) who was always against the Naga National Council opposed the ‘westernization’ of the Naga culture and protect the indigenous religion, culture and language (Bijukumar, 2016). As a result, Rani Gaidinliu and ZHA also had ties with Hindu forces in the region. Rani Gaidinliu attended the second World Hindu Conference in Allahabad in 1979 where she was appointed as the President of Matri Sammelan. Rani Gaidinliu was also a patron of Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi Vikas Parishad since 1974, the founder of Zeliangrong Council, advisor to Viswa Hindu Parishad (Newme, n.d.). On August 24, 2015 “Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the celebration of Birth Centenary of legendary freedom fighter Rani Gaidinliu” at Vigyan Bhawan (Mazumdar, 2015). On that occasion, “after releasing coins of Rs 5 and Rs 100 denominations with her images on them to commemorate her birth centenary, Prime Minister Narendra Modi criticised the historians for ‘ignoring’ the contributions of people from Northeast to India’s freedom movement” (Mazumdar, 2015).

Figure 4.1: Prime Minister Modi in inauguration of Birth ceremony of Rani Gaidinliu, 2015



Source: Ministry of Culture, Government of India official page-Facebook.
<https://www.facebook.com/indiaculture.goi/photos/a.682508968499810/922910687792969/?type=3&theater>

Referring to Rani Gaidinliu as “Rani-maa”, the Prime Minister said “it is our misfortune that people such as Rani Gaidinliu have either not been remembered adequately, or have been deliberately forgotten” (PIB, Government of India, 2015). Thus, RSS and BJP have appropriated Rani Gaidinliu and Heraka with Hinduism against Christianity. The Akhil Bharatiya Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (ABVKA) supported the activities of ZHA and they claim “Heraka” as part of the larger Hindu family. For the Sangh Parivar, since many of the practices of Heraka have been derived from Hinduism and asserted that as a Vanavasi (forest dwellers), they can be assimilated into the Hindu fold (Dangmei, 2019). As V. Bijukumar argued, “in appropriating Heraka with Hinduism the Hindutva forces are countering the dominant Christians by constructing a counter narrative premised on Hindutva” (Bijukumar, 2016, pp.53-54).

In Tripura, before the 2018 Assembly election, RSS came up with the depiction of “Bharat Mata in the traditional attire of four major tribal communities of Tripura with Mongoloid face. Bharat Mata with four communities, i.e., Tripuris, the Reangs, the Chakmas, and the Debbarmas”, connect North East region as their integration project with the rest of India (The Tribune, 2017).

Figure 4.2: *Bharat Mata from North East India and Other parts of India*



Source: Firstpost and Wikipedia

They have used this depiction of Bharat Mata as “mark of symbolic integrity and oneness to connect it culturally with the rest of the country” (The Tribune, 2017). In an interview with The Tribune, former RSS Prant Pracharak in North East India, Sunil Deodhar who was in charge of BJP in Tripura during 2018 Assembly election said,

The Mongoloid communities of the northeast too worship Durga but we do not see the goddess in their traditional attire. We have therefore decided to depict Bharat Mata in the traditional attire of all the 300 tribal communities in the region. (Tribune, 2017)

4.6.2. RSS and Education and Social Welfare Strategy in North East India

In this context along with religious and cultural appropriation, the most crucial strategy of RSS in North East India is using education and social welfare as a tool to influence the common masses to Hindutva fold. Scholars observed that after independence, RSS successfully established itself as a major social organization trying to give different social services during natural disaster like flood, earthquake even providing shelter to refugees and in normal time also RSS offered their social services, social welfare programme among targeted marginalized groups such as women, Dalit, tribal and Hindu lower castes (Jaffrelot, 2005; Bhattacharjee, 2016). Different organizations of Sangh Parivar like Seva Bharati, Vidya Bharati, Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, Vivekananda Kendra etc. worked in different social welfare projects. Through these activities, RSS also “follow the line of the Christian missionaries, who had been promoting Christianity through welfare activities, particularly by running hospitals and schools (Kanungo, 2002, pp. 152-153). As scholars observe, through these activities of social welfare programme and projects, RSS tried not only to check the growth of Christianity but also to promote Hinduisation and encourage reconversion (Kanungo, 2003; Jaffrelot, 2005; Bhattacharjee, 2016).

In 1926, RSS first started their social welfare work in Nagpur region during the birth festival of Lord Ram. During 1947, after independence in the political disaster, RSS set up Hindu *Sahayata Samiti* to help “millions of refugees who were fleeing West Pakistan” (Jaffrelot, 2008, p.244). However, the social welfare strategy has been implemented more systematically

since 1979. With the initiative of the then Sarsanghchalak Balasaheb Deoras, RSS set up a new affiliate “Seva Bharti”. The organization is guided by Akhil Bharatiya Saha Seva Pramukh of the RSS. The organization mainly looks after the issues and problems faced by the socially and economically underprivileged people of Indian society including tribal and indigenous communities and in urban areas the slum dwellers and resettlement colonies. Seva Bharti runs various “welfare and social programmes such as free medical assistance, free education and vocational training, and other allied organizations Hindu Seva Pratisthan, Bharatiya Kusth Nivarak Sangh Swami Vivekananda Medical Mission, National Medicos Organization etc”¹⁵.

Table 4.2: *List of Seva Bharti Projects in All over India*

Name of the Projects	Number of projects
Education	86,689
Health	26,827
Social	30,587
Self-Reliance	26,588
Total	1,70,700

Source: Seva Bharti

In North East India, Seva Bharti Purvanchal was established in 1998 with the aim to provide guidance and assistance to the youth, women and poor, underprivileged section of the society, including different indigenous tribal communities, tea tribes in Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and other parts of North East India. Seva Bharti Purvanchal conducted different social welfare constructive activities for all round development of society in rural development, health, education, self-employment and Sanskar (Character Building Programme) and relief rehabilitation during disasters, covering all the states of the North East region.¹⁶ Some of the key projects according to Seva Bharti Purvanchal¹⁷ are Arogya Mitra to focuses on increasing awareness among the youth of the society towards building a service culture with a nationalistic mindset. The “*Dhanvantari Seva Yatra*” as a form of mega health campaigning programme in the entire North East region where Seva Bharti and the National Medicos Organization have been working since 2005. The *Ekal Vidyalay* (One Teacher School) was established who mainly works among tribal communities located in inaccessible

¹⁵ Annual Report, 2018-19, Seva Bharti, Purbanchal.

¹⁶ Interview with Sewa Pramukh Surender Talukdar Seva Bharti Purvanchal, Guwahati on 9 December, 2019, and website www.sevabharti-purbanchal.org

¹⁷ Interview with Sewa Pramukh Surender Talukdar and Seva Bharti Purvanchal website

remote areas of Assam and Meghalaya and other parts. The “*Yognilayam*”, Mobile Pathology Lab etc. are some of the projects in North East India.

Seva Bharti Purvanchal extended its charitable services in the far-flung areas of the North East region through its different affiliated service organizations such as Ratnapeeth Seva Samiti, Bongaigaon, Seva Bharti Guwahati, Seva Bharti Kamakhya Nagar Charitable & Dharmic Trust, Seva Bharti, Meghalaya and Seva Bharti, Nagaland.¹⁸

Among these different social welfare programmes, *Dhanavantari Seva Yatra* is a mega-free health campaigning programme in entire North Eastern states, jointly organized by Seva Bharti, Purvanchal and National Medicos Organization (NMO) since 2005. In this programme, doctors and students from various medical colleges across the country and abroad take part voluntarily. According to the Annual Report of Seva Bharti, Purvanchal, in the financial year 2018-19, the 16th DSY was organized in February 2019 with 207 Doctors and medical students and a total of 31,533 patients benefitted with 162 Free Medical camps in the North Eastern region.

Table 4.3 16th *Dhanavantari Seva Yatra (DSY) details State wise in North East Region*

State	No of Camps	No of Beneficiaries (in person)
Assam	114	22678
Arunachal Pradesh	6	751
Manipur	8	1247
Meghalaya	10	1200
Mizoram	5	1834
Nagaland	4	758
Tripura	15	3065
Total	162	31533

Source: Annual Report, 2018-19, Seva Bharti, Purbanchal.

¹⁸Annual Report, 2018-2019, Seva Bharti, Purbanchal, Guwahati

Figure 4.3: *Dhanavantari Seva Yatra at Rowmari, Biswanath in 16th DSY*



Another successful project to be taken by RSS in North East India is *Samuhik Vivah* (Mass Marriage). Seva Bharti, Purvanchal through this Mass Marriage programme in Assam mainly supports the financially and socially backward population of the society to get married by observing all rituals followed by their respective society that otherwise have been unable due to pecuniary difficulties. Through this programme, SBP in association with ‘Sevaayan’ and ‘Dharma Jagaran Mancha’ helped the individuals to maintain the social customs followed by their society and cultural values observed by their respective communities. Under this mission those couples who remain unmarried due to social and financial difficulties, are immensely benefited. In some area, due to unsocial marriages, couples are not recognized by their society and they are not allowed to take part in any social and religious functions of the community. Those couple is unable to arrange social marriage due to their financial problem. The mass

marriage programme organized by SBP is helping the society to overcome the socio-cultural issues besides financial difficulties. SBP conducted this mass marriage institution almost free of cost to needy couple. According to the Annual Report of Seva Bharti Purvanchal, 2018-19 a total of 1305 couples were engaged through *samuhik vivah* programme in four different places of Assam i.e., Biswanath, Tinsukia, Sonitpur and Morigaon District. This Mass marriage programme not only help RSS to spread their Hindutva influence as well as popular support among different tribal and tea-tribes Adivasi backward communities but also minimize the influence of Christianity among these people. RSS Pracharak claimed that this type of initiative helped them control the growth of Christianity among tribal, tea-tribes and other backward communities.¹⁹

Another successful welfare programme conducted by Seva Bharti is Ekal Vidyalaya (One Teacher School). Under this project, Seva Bharti established free study centres at the remotest area of the North East among rural community students as One Teacher School to empower the children through education. In Assam, they mainly targeted tribal and tea garden areas. Seva Bharti in association with Sewa Canada have been establishing schools in areas with poor educational facility to promote, support and grow awareness towards education among students and parents.

In North East India, another successful project to spread its influence is Vidya Bharti Akhil Bharatiya Shikha Sansthan created in 1977.²⁰ Vidya Bharti as an RSS affiliated organization which mainly establishes various schools, educational institutions with the aim “To develop a National System of Education which would help to build a generation of young men and women that is committed to Hindutva and infused with patriotic fervor.”²¹ The Vidya Bharti network mainly “focuses on moral, extracurricular and physical education for ‘mind, body and spirit’” (Bhattacharjee, 2007,p. 53). In the year of its creation, Vidya Bharti has 500 schools and 20,000 teachers and by the end of 1990, it has increased 4,000 schools and 35,000 teachers.²² By 1998 Vidya Bharti became the largest Non-Governmental Organization in the

¹⁹Interview with RSS Pracharak Ranjib Kumar Sharma, RSS Spoke person.

²⁰Organiser, Nov 12, 1978

²¹Philosophy, aims and objectives on the Vidya Bharti website, <http://vidyabharti.net/EN/AimAndObjective> and <http://vidyabharti.net/EN/Philosophy>

²²Organiser, Oct 21, 1990

educational sector which runs 13,000 institutions with 74,000 teachers and 17 lakh students (Bhattacharjee, 2007). In the 2012-13 academic year a total 3 million students were enrolled in various schools run by Vidya Bharti. In these schools not only Hindu students but also large number of Muslims and Christian students take admissions. In all over India Vidya Bharti run these schools with different popular local names as “Saraswati Shishu Mandir, Bharatiya Vidya Niketan, Gita Vidyalay and Saraswati Bal Vidyalay” (Kanungo, 2012).

In Assam, *Shishu Shiksha Samiti* (Child Education Committee)²³ was established in 1979. The *Shishu Shiksha Samiti* started its first school at Ambikagiri Nagar, Guwahati in 1979 in the name of *Sankardev Shishu Kunja*. In order to attract the Assamese students, utmost caution was taken in naming the school along with the introduction of the Assamese language as the medium of instruction in Assamese dominated areas. Similarly, in Bengali dominated regions in Barak valley, they started this type of school with Bengali language, while in Bodo dominated areas Bodo language became the medium of instruction (Bhattacharjee, 2007). At the initial stage, *Shishu Shiksha Samiti*, Assam administered the functions of its schools for the entire region. However, with the increasing numbers of schools and expansion of activities, different separate state samitis were established (Bhattacharjee, 2007). In the North East region, Vidya Bharti started this type of school with different local names as *Sankardev Shishu Niketan* in Assam, *Garurachal Vidyapith* in Meghalaya, and *Vivekananda Vidyalay* in Arunachal Pradesh. In these schools most of the teachers are swayamsevaks, well trained in the ideology of Hindutva. Along with the daily routine of classes Saraswati Bandana, Gayatri mantra, traditional devotional songs are taught occasionally. “Teachers at these schools often insert nationalist narratives into the social science and history books prescribed by national authorities, as these texts are held by some RSS circles to be devoid of respect for the country’s distinct civilization” (Anderson & Damle, 2018b, p.34).

Another popular RSS affiliated organization which works for the development of Hinduisation is the Akhil Bharatiya Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA). Ramakant Keshav Deshpande, a senior RSS Pracharak and an official of the Orissa State Department of Tribal Welfare at

²³ Shishu Shiksha Samiti (Child Education Committee), Assam is a non government organisation which runs one of the largest private network of schools in Assam. It is a state level affiliate committee of Vidya Bharati in the State of Assam.

Jashpur, Chhattisgarh in 1952, established VKA as a social welfare organization. The organization can be seen as an effort to counteract Christian missionary activities that aims “to strengthen the faith, culture, tradition and rituals of tribals” by empowering them through different welfare projects. VKA was established for eliminating “the chasm between the mainstream Indian community and their tribal brethren through social assimilation”.²⁴The VKA runs different social welfare projects among tribal communities such as education, health care, protection of Janajati’s rights, village development, establishing schools, coaching centres, free hospitals, vocational training, Sanskar Kendra etc.²⁵

According to 2011 census, “tribal population of India is 10.43 crores with 8.6 per cent of total population where 89.97 per cent live in rural area and 10.03 per cent live in urban area” (Census of India, 2011). There are about 705 total Schedule Tribes live in 30 states/ Union Territories spread over 732 districts in India. At present, the VKA have been active in total 674 districts where they mainly targeted 447 Janajati districts with total 20, 266 projects in different social welfare programmes.²⁶

Table 4.4: Different Projects by Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram till Sep, 2019

Name of the Projects	Number of projects
Hostels	239
Ekal Vidyalay	1904
Bal Sanskar Kendra	666
Vidya Mandir	54
Free Coaching Centre	587
Hospitals	6
Medical Camps	541

Source: Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram’s Official website [<https://vanvasi.org/>]

In North East India the VKA has made significant impact among common people mainly tribal population through its different welfare programmes. The VKA has become popular in most of the North Eastern states through different locals’ names as Janajati Vikas Samiti in

²⁴Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA), Official website <https://vanvasi.org>

²⁵Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA) Official website <https://vanvasi.org>

²⁶ Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA) Official website <https://vanvasi.org>

Nagaland, Arunachal Vikas Parishad in Arunachal Pradesh, Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram in other states. In Assam Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram was set up in 1978. At the initial period they established free hostels, medical dispensaries in places like Udalguri, Diphu, North Lakhimpur and Dhemaji. Now VKA runs almost 508 projects in the North East India including 24 hostels, 6 dispensaries, 116 Sanskar Kendra, 21 schools covering 417 places. In Arunachal Pradesh, Arunachal Vikas Parishad (AVP) affiliated to ABVKA was established in 1993 with the founder president Golgi Bote Talom Rukbo. The AVP works spread over 18 district level committees and runs 569 projects in 1040 villages of Arunachal Pradesh. AVP runs one hostel, three schools, 20 Bal Vikas Kendra, two medical centre, 310 Shradha Jagaran Kendra in Arunachal Pradesh.

Table 4.5: *Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram's different projects in North East India*

VKA and State	Hostels		Education Centres		Medical Centres	
	Nos	Beneficiaries	Nos	Beneficiaries	Nos	Beneficiaries
AVP, Arunachal Pradesh	1	-	51	2713	142	29074
VKA, Assam	6	163	76	45	124	16265
VKA, Dakshin Assam	5	131	24	920	1	-
JVS, Nagaland	4	103	34	1422	1	425
Kalyan Ashram Meghalaya	0	0	124	5385	-	-
Sikkim Kalyan Ashram	1	16	201	2988	40	1763
Kalyan Ashram Tripura	8	245	46	-	-	-

Source: *Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram's Official website* [<https://vanvasi.org/>]

During 1990s, the Sangh Parivar started working among tribal areas where Christian missionaries had already established various educational institutes and medical facilities and conversion were taking place. The VKA started work among different tribal communities and tea-tribes in North East India against the Christian missionaries as the saviour of the tribal communities and their culture from the advent of the Christian as 'foreigner'. "This resulted in various clashes over tribal customs which the converts to Christian had ceased to observe" (Dangmei, 2019). "While Christian argued that tribals were not Hindus, the Sangh Parivar who renamed the tribal as 'Vanavasi' (Forest dwellers) rather than Adivasi (original inhabitants),

argued that they were part of Hindu family as they shared many of the cultural and religious aspects of Hindu religion” (Dangmei, 2019). They have adopted the programme of ‘home coming’ (*Ghar Wapsi*) and ‘mass marriage’ (*Samuhik Bibah*) to counteract Christian Missionary activities in tribal and tea-tribe areas in North East India.

Thus, Malini Bhattacharjee while examining the expansion strategy of RSS in North East India argued,

Hindutva activists have therefore, from the very beginning, adopted novel strategies for navigating through the complex particularities of this region in order to establish itself in the cultural and political imagination of the people. Moving away from its standard techniques of mobilising support through the invocation of Hindu stereotypes like ‘Ram’ or ‘Ayodhya’, it instead focuses on adapting local cults and symbols such as those associated with Kamakhya and Sankardev Sattrā traditions. Coupled with this, it also consolidates support by providing welfare services in the realm of education, health and cultural development, through a range of affiliate bodies. (Bhattacharjee 2016, pp. 86–87)

4.7 How does RSS help BJP in North East India: The Political Machine?

After 2014’s phenomenal victory, the Bharatiya Janata Party has won a landslide victory in the 2019 general election. Unlike other parts of India, North East India also for the first time has experienced BJP’s phenomenal rise in most of the North Eastern states. In these two recent Lok Sabha elections, BJP become a formidable force in North East India. While discussing BJP’s rise as major political force in North East India, although the rise of BJP in this region is a relatively new phenomenon, the Hindutva forces led by this political journey of BJP RSS facilitated the ground. Scholars argue that “it is only due to the RSS cadres’ quiet and determined hard work that BJP could make inroad in North East region for the first time after independence” (Firstpost, 2017). In this context, Malini Bhattacharjee points out that although the “BJP’s political experiment in making inroads into Assam over the past decades has been given so much attention, but at the same time it is important to understand the contribution of the social and cultural wings of its parivar over the past 60 years in Assam in deepening the roots of Hindutva in Assam” (Bhattacharjee, 2016, p.80). It is believed that the nationalist narrative of the RSS has helped the BJP to make political gains in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam,

Manipur and other North Eastern states where at present the party run the state government. In the context of Assam, regardless of its (Hindutva forces) existence for over 73 years, it is only now that the BJP become successful to form its first state government in Assam. For the first time in 2016 Assembly election, BJP won 60 seats with 29.51 per cent vote share and formed a coalition government with two major regional parties Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Bodo People's Front (BPF). While explaining the contribution of RSS in this electoral victory, the RSS Prant Pracharak of Assam Shankar Das who is now Boudhik Pramukh of RSS in North East India claimed:

We are helping the BJP either directly or indirectly. Although the BJP runs the government today at the Centre, the credit has actually indirectly gone to the RSS. In Assam, BJP had no organizational base before. Even though we have not claimed credit, it is because of the RSS that the BJP won in the state. (Firstpost, 2017)

While assessing the role of RSS in the rise of BJP in North East India, the NEDA Convener Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma articulated that both RSS and BJP as an ideological parivar share a common ideology where all RSS people working for Sangh consider themselves as ideological associates of the Party. The RSS worker is not going to help Congress. As an organization while working in different states in North East India, the RSS has created a climax of pro-nationalistic ideology out of which the BJP gets automatic advantages. The RSS has created the eco-system in a particular state and their strength automatically benefited BJP in electoral politics. Similarly, some political analyst also thinks that with the BJP in power, the activities, base of RSS also expanded in India. Bidyut Chakrabarty pointed out, "RSS has a strong network in the North East and with the BJP being in power at the centre and in some of the states, it is natural that the RSS would try to be more visible, and expand its already present organizational network" (Varma, 2018).

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in the North East region since 1946 playing a significant role in promoting Hindutva through its different organizational activities. It includes humanitarian activities such as providing relief during the disaster and providing targeted services to marginalized groups such as women, tribal and Hindu lower castes and

also help the Hindu refugee to find employment (Bhattacharjee, 2016, p.83). As this work has already mentioned in order to spread its influence among common masses, the RSS established many affiliated bodies to facilitate different social welfare works include establishing schools, hospitals, hostels and medical dispensaries etc. in this region.

After Assam victory, in Manipur also for the first time BJP succeeded to win 21 seats with 36.28 per cent vote share and formed its first state government in Manipur with its alliance partner NEDA. In Manipur, although BJP has achieved such electoral victory; but behind this spectacular success, years of silent works by Sangh Parivar become an instrumental factor. “Organisations like Sewashram, Ekal Vidyalay, Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram, Sewa Bharti, Kisan sangh, Vidya Bharti, Friends of Tribal Society or Van Bandhu Parishad, Bharatiya Jan Seva Sansthan, Bharat Kalyan Pratisthan, Bal Sanskar Kendra etc. have been running different welfare programmes including formal and informal education units across Manipur, and they have worked among people from different religions by focusing on patriotism and nationalism of the Manipuri people” (Kashyap, 2017). While explaining the contribution of RSS in this electoral victory in Manipur, senior RSS Pracharak Jagadamba Mall mentioned

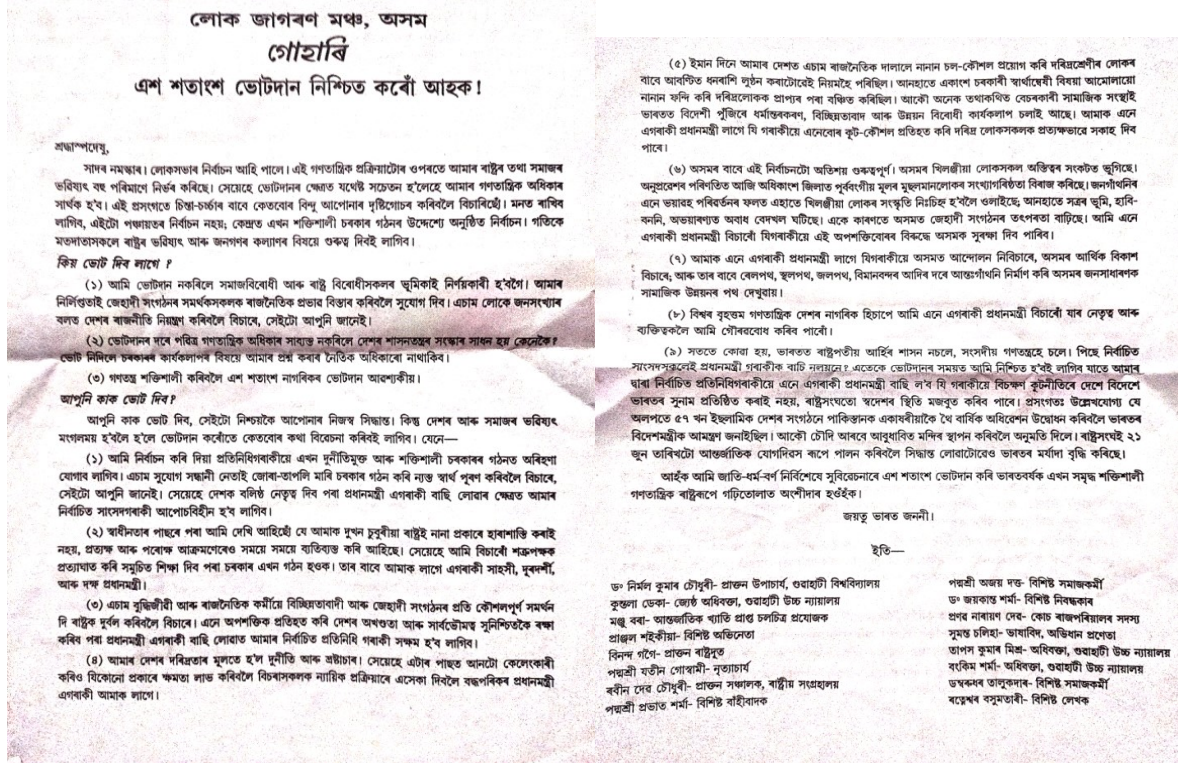
It is a fact that the BJP worked hard. But one must also remember that various Sangh wings have been working very hard for years, both in the Imphal Valley as well as the surrounding hill districts. Tribal people, irrespective of their religious faith, particularly trust and respect our welfare programmes. This trust was definitely converted to votes. (The Indian Express, 2017)

In the context of Arunachal Pradesh also through the umbrella platform of Arunachal Vikas Parishad (AVP), RSS and its affiliate organizations remained instrumental in shaping indigeneity as a major axis political mobilization in the state. Building upon the footprint of RSS, the BJP in the state has appropriated it as a major source of consolidating its social base.

Though there is a complex relation between the BJP and its parent organization, by observing the recent state elections in different states including North East India, it is seen that BJP has “ready-made apparatus of voluntary organisations” which works as election machine for the party by “supplying man power and generates support for the regimes” (Palshikar, 2017b, p.13). In North East India the RSS has worked as an election machine for BJP. In this context,

RSS's affiliated organization Lok Jagaran Manch which is known differently in different states can be seen as significant example.

Figure 4.4: Lok Jagaran Manch, Assam's pamphlet during 2019 General Election



In Assam Lok Jagaran Manch and in Manipur Common Citizen Forum works for BJP's support. Under this Lok Jagaran Manch and Common Citizen Forum, they invited the most popular respected local notables, academicians, intellectuals, artists, social workers, and organised public meetings to appeal to people for a constructive political change pro-nationalist mind. They even conduct door-to-door campaigns during elections and appeal to common people for a hundred per cent participating in voting. The figure shows the pamphlet of Lok Jagaran Manch, Assam during 2019 Lok Sabha election where by using the name of these above local notables and popular people, the RSS indirectly tried to influence common people to cast their vote for BJP in the name of pro-nationalist mindset. However, during this time RSS and its different affiliate organisations have been actively working among different sections of people through their different activities like setting educational institutions, cultural forum, welfare programmes etc. Through such works they not only got popular recognition

among different marginal, backward section of people but also expand their organisational network in different parts of Assam and other North Eastern states. That shows that though rise of BJP in these states is a relatively new phenomenon, the Hindutva forces was very much active in their own organisational works in all over Assam and other parts of North East India. However, both RSS and BJP work separately in their own field but nobody can deny the significant contribution as well as influence over the latter as its parental organisation. As Prashant Jha argued, “The Sangh machinery and the Sangh ecosystem alone cannot win the party election. But without it, the BJP is often crippled” (Jha,2017, p.146).

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter attempts to understand the symbiotic relationship between RSS and BJP to examine how RSS becomes a contributing factor in the latter’s electoral rise in North east India. This chapter argues, although the rise of BJP in Assam and other states in the North East region is a relatively new phenomenon, the active presence of the Hindutva forces led by RSS and its different affiliate organisations since the pre-independent time facilitated the emergence of BJP in the region. RSS as a parent organisation has played a significant role in BJP’s rise in North East India. Before the 2014 general election, in most North Eastern states, the BJP has neither any significant support base nor organizational base. However, the RSS has worked for establishing footprint of its political wing in North Eastern states. As a parent organisation, RSS’s work is not only limited to promoting Hindutva but also as an election machine or machine politics for BJP during election time, RSS works as a “ready-made apparatus of voluntary organisations” by “supplying man power and generates support for the regimes” (Palshikar, 2017b, p.13).

Chapter 5

BJP in Assam: Entry into the gateway of North East India

5.1 Introduction

The electoral politics of Assam has been dominated by the core issues of indigeneity, ethnic identity, tribal politics of autonomy, land, and the issue of illegal migration; however, with the new entry of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a major political force by replacing Congress party, Assam has witnessed a co-option of ethno-regionalism and ethnicity with explicit Hindu nationalist aspirations. The phenomenal electoral victory of the 2016 and 2021 Assam assembly election not only helped BJP to shed its image of North-India Hindi Heartland party to an All-India party but also through this new entry in North East India, BJP has been able to establish a “BJP Dominant system” in Indian politics (Mehta,2016). Though BJP is a new political force in Assam in establishing dominance as a national party, its dominance is very distinct from other parties, which needs to be discussed in this chapter. While discussing the rise of BJP in Assam, it raises an important question, i.e., How does the party like BJP representing Hindu Nationalism become a dominant political force in Assam where religion was not a dominant force of political mobilisation, rather it was ethnicity and identity politics. This chapter will try to understand the rise of the BJP as the dominant political party in Assam and its political strategy for coming to power in Assam as the ruling party. By following these objectives, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will try to give an overview of the electoral politics of Assam by analysing Assembly elections and Lok Sabha elections in Assam. The second section will discuss the rise of the BJP as a significant national player in Assam. The third section will discuss the electoral politics of Assam after BJP is coming to power in Assam.

5.2 The Electoral Politics of Assam

As argued by Sandhya Goswami, “Electoral politics in Assam in the last two decades has witnessed multiplication in the number of political parties and politicisation of multiple ethnicities” (Goswami, 2003, p.221). However, since independence for a long time, the electoral politics of Assam has been dominated by only one national party, i.e., the Indian National Congress (INC), as the ruling party. The state can be considered as Congress State like other North Eastern states where INC had been in power as the single largest party for long time. “The party system has changed from single-party dominance to a multiparty system that shows high degree of party fragmentation” (Goswami, 2021, p.1). As Goswami (2021) observes, “the state has moved from an era of catch-all formations to that of cleavage-based politics in extreme form and has witnessed multiplication in the number of political parties and politicization of multiple ethnicities” (2021, p.2).

Till the rise of Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) in 1985, Congress party dominated the electoral history of Assam (Tripathi & Sharma, 2021). For the first time in the 1978 Assembly election, INC lost its single-party dominance and restricted to 26 seats with 23.62 per cent vote share (Table 5.1). The Assembly election of 1978 ended Congress's dominance in the state for the first time. This election was help after Janata Party came to power at centre for the first time after 1977 general election. As a result, this election could be seen as an effect of change of party in power at the centre bring corresponding change in party in power at state level. Janata Party won 53 seats and 27.53 per cent vote share, whereas, Congress party won only eight seats with 8.8 per cent vote share. Janata Party formed the first non-congress coalition government in Assam under the leadership of Golap Borborah. Janata Party got support from Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and some independent MLAs. The CPM and other left parties also gave their outside support to the Janata party government (Goswami, 2012). However, before 1980 general election, the Janata party at state also fell within two years.

During the Assam movement period from 1979-1985 Assam was in turmoil. President rule was imposed in Assam. In the 1983 Assembly election though INC came to power, but it lacked popular legitimacy. The 1985 Assembly election can be considered a significant one after Assam Movement. Tripathi and Sharma observes, “post Assam agitation, the nature of party system changed as the pattern of political competitiveness and social base of parties underwent

transformation” (Tripathi & Sharma, 2021, p.12). The electoral politics of Assam has experienced a reconfiguration of the party system with ethnic polarisation and ethnic accommodation. Sandhya Goswami argued, “The Assam Movement of 1979-1985 articulated the regional aspirations of the Assamese people, which energized the process of formation of a regional party, namely the AGP, as an alternative to the Congress party in the state in 1985” (Goswami, 2021, p.2). For the first time in Assam, a new regional party Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), formed by former AASU leaders, won a decisive victory in the state election and formed the state government under the Chief Ministership of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.

The 1985 Assembly election ended the one-party dominance of Congress to a bi-polar competitive party system and later to a fragmented multi-party system in the state. Although different regional parties in different periods of time momentarily emerged as a significant political force in Assam, most of them could not establish any significant political presence for a long time. The only regional party of Assam Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) since its formation played a significant role in electoral politics of Assam. AGP was formed as an alternative of Congress (I) two months after the signing of the Assam Accord. It may be noted that Asom Gana Parishad was not the first regional party in Assam. There were other political parties on regional basis in Assam i.e., *Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad*, *Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal*, and Plain Tribals Council. On 15 August 1985, AGP was formed as the result of a unified force of different organisations who were active during the Assam Movement. The AGP is formed by *Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad*, *Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal*, and *Asom Gana Sangram Parishad*, and the ex-members of All Assam Students Union (AASU). The AGP could enjoy two alternate term in 1985 and 1996. During that period, not only in state politics but also in national politics AGP as a “regional party with national outlook” marked a significant impact. The party became part of National Front coalition government in 1989 and United Front government in 1996 as ruling partner. However, AGP failed to consolidate its dominating position in later period. In 1991 both assembly and parliamentary elections, Congress party again came back with its single party majority in the state.

Table 5.1: Electoral performance of major political parties in Assam Assembly Elections, 1951-2021

Party		Seats & Vote	Year-wise Electoral Performance of Political Parties in Assembly Elections in Assam														
			1951	1957	1962	1967	1972	1978	1983	1985	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
National Parties	BJS/ BJP	Seats	0	---	---	0	0	---	---	0	10	4	8	10	5	60	60
		Vote	0.29	---	---	1.84	0.27	---	---	1.07	6.55	10.41	9.35	11.98	11.47	29.51	33.21
	INC	Seats	76	71	79	73	95	26	91	25	66	34	71	53	78	26	29
		Vote	43.48	52.35	48.25	43.6	53.2	23.62	52.53	23.23	29.35	30.56	39.75	31.08	39.39	30.96	29.67
	CPI	Seats	1	4	0	7	3	5	1	0	4	3	0	1	0	0	0
		Vote	2.84	8.1	6.39	5.15	5.64	4.09	2.58	1.21	2.47	1.95	1.1	1.02	0.52	0.22	0.14
	CPM	Seats	---	---	---	---	---	11	2	2	2	2	0	2	0	0	1
		Vote	---	---	---	---	---	5.62	5.14	4.48	3.85	1.94	1.78	1.43	1.13	0.55	0.84
JNP	Seats	--	---	---	---	---	53	---	0	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
	Vote	---	---	---	---	---	27.53	---	1.44	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
State Parties	AGP	Seats	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	19	59	20	24	10	14	9	
		Vote	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	17.93	29.75	20.02	20.39	16.29	8.14	7.91	
	AIUDF	Seats	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	18	13	16	
		Vote	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	12.57	13.05	9.29	
	BPF	Seats	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	12	12	4	
		Vote	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	6.13	3.94	3.39	
	PTC	Seats	---	---	---	---	---	4	3	3	---	---	---	---	---	---	
		Vote	---	---	---	---	---	2.6	4.66	3.62	---	---	---	---	---	---	
	ASDC	Seats	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	5	2	1	---	---	---	
		Vote	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	1.98	1.11	0.89	---	---	---	
UPPL	Seats	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	6	
	Vote	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	3.39	
Independent Candidates	Seats	14	5	8	26	10	15	10	92	15	11	19	22	2	1	1	
	Vote	28.34	26.81	23.81	32.33	29.75	25.67	29.02	61.5	21.41	17.42	19.51	16.6	9.17	11.04	5.93	

Source: Election Commission of India's statistical report on Assam Legislative Assembly Elections (1951-2021).

Along with AGP, the other two regional parties Bodo People's Front (BPF) and All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) also have played a significant impact in the electoral politics of Assam. Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF) was formed in 2005. Since its formation, BPF as the ruling party controlled the Bodoland Territorial Council till 2020 BTC election. In 2011 and 2016 Assembly elections also, the party performed very well in BTAD area (Table 5.1). After 2011 Assembly election, the party as the alliance party formed coalition government with Congress party. However ahead of 2016 Assam Legislative election, BPF changed its alliance partner and joined BJP led National Democratic Alliance. As the coalition partner, BPF got important ministerial positions in BJP led coalition government at the state. Then again in 2021, the party left BJP led NEDA and joined United Progressive Alliance (UPA) ahead of 2021 Assam election. As the pre-poll alliance partner BPF had contested 12 seats in BTAD area, however the party won only four seats with 3.39 per cent vote share. Another state party AIUDF was formed in 2005 mainly by the leaders from the immigrant Muslim community (Nath, 2019). Since its formation the party showed its continuous success as the significant player in electoral politics of Assam in the last Assembly as well as Lok Sabha elections. "All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), a Muslim political party, has been considered a key player in Assam politics" (Nath, 2019, p.33). In Assam, independent candidates also have played an important role in assembly elections where we have seen (table 5.1) since the 1951 election, independent candidates won large number of seats with significant vote shares. In 1985, independent candidates won 92 seats with 61.5 per cent vote share and formed AGP government under Prafulla Kumar Mahanta's Chief Ministership.

Similarly, in the Lok Sabha elections also for a long time, Indian National Congress became a formidable national player by capturing most of the seats with significant vote shares. Since the 1951 general election, INC became the single largest party in Assam to win almost 71 per cent of Lok Sabha elections' total seats until 1985. However, for the first time after Assam Movement Congress party lost its one-party dominance in both Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections in 1985. INC had to limit itself to just four seats and 23.43 per cent vote share in the 1985 general election, whereas independent candidates won 8 seats with 56.93 per cent vote share. In the 1996 general election, the Congress party faced tough competition with the strongest regional party Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), where both parties won 5 seats each.

Table 5.2: Lok Sabha Elections and Major Political Parties in Assam

Year	Seats and Vote Share of major Political Parties in Lok Sabha Elections in Assam						
	BJP	INC	PSP	AGP	BPF	AIUDF	IND
1951	0 (3.64)	11 (45.74)	---	---	---	---	---
1957	---	9 (51.68)	2 (19.96)	---	---	---	1 (18.11)
1962	---	9 (45.16)	2 (19.16)	---	---	---	---
1967	0 (5.48)	10 (45.84)	2 (12.80)	---	---	---	---
1972	0 (2.46)	13 (56.98)	---	---	---	---	---
1977	---	10 (50.56)	---	---	---	---	1 (7.64)
1985	0 (0.37)	4 (23.43)	---	---	---	---	8 (56.93)
1991	2 (9.60)	8 (28.49)	---	1 (17.62)	---	---	---
1996	1 (15.92)	5 (31.64)	---	5 (11.71)	---	---	1 (11.71)
1998	1 (24.47)	10 (38.97)	---	---	---	---	1 (9.51)
1999	2 (29.48)	10 (38.42)	---	---	---	---	1 (9.36)
2004	2 (22.94)	9 (35.07)	---	2 (19.95)	---	---	1 (13.41)
2009	4 (16.21)	7 (34.89)	---	1 (14.6)	1 (16.1)	1 (16.1)	---
2014	7 (36.86)	3 (29.90)	---	0 (3.87)	0 (2.21)	3 (14.98)	1 (9.62)
2019	9 (36.41)	3 (35.79)	---	0 (8.31)	0 (2.5)	1 (7.87)	1 (4.3)

Source: Election Commission of India's statistical report on general elections (1951-2019).

In the 1998 and 1999 general elections, when BJP was in power at centre as the single largest party with its NDA political coalition, in Assam Congress party as the single largest party dominated both assembly and Lok Sabha elections. Congress party upheld its dominance in Assam before 2014 general election. Assam Gana Parishad as the dominant regional party in Assam won its first single seat in 1991 general election. In 1998 general election, the party won its highest number of seats five seats with 11.71 per cent vote share. In 2004 general election AGP won two seats with 19.95 per cent vote share and one seat with 14.6 per cent vote share in the 2009 general election. After this, in 2014 and 2019 general election, although, the party was in alliance with the ruling BJP led NDA political coalition, but the party could not win any seats, and even the party's vote share also declined. Bodoland People's Front, another regional party has won only one seat in 2009 election from Kokrajhar constituency. However, AIUDF, another regional party formed in 2005 won its first seat in the 2009 election the party won three seats with 14.98 per cent vote share. In 2019 general election the party won only one seat with 7.87 per cent vote share. Like other states in North East India, in Assam also, independent candidates have played a significant role in electoral politics of both general

and state assembly elections. In 1985 general election independent candidates won 8 seats with 56.93 per cent vote share as the highest ever seats and vote share in states like Assam.

Table 5.3: *The State Governments in Assam (1951-2021)*

Assembly Elections	Largest Party	Seats of the Largest Party	Chief Minister	Term	Governing Party
1951	INC	76	Bishnu Ram Medhi	9/08/1950-27/12/1957	INC
1957	INC	71	Bimala Prasad Chaliha	28/12/1957-6/11/1970	INC
1967	INC	73			
1972	INC	95	Sarat Chandra Singha	31/01/1972-12/03/1978	INC
1978	JNP	53	Golap Borborah	12/03/1978-04/09/1979	JNP, PTCA
			Jogendra Nath Hazarika	9/09/1979-11/12/1979	JNP,
			Anwara Taimur	06/12/1980-30/06/1981	INC
			Keshab Chandra Gogoi	13/01/1982-19/03/1982	INC
1983	INC	91	Hiteswar Saikia	27/02/1983-23/12/1985	INC
1985	INC	25	Prafulla Kumar Mahanta	24/12/1985-28/11/1990	AGP
1991	INC	66	Hiteswar Saikia	30/06/1991-22/04/1996	INC
			Bhumidhar Barman	22/04/1996-14/05/1996	INC
1996	AGP	59	Prafulla Kumar Mahanta	15/05/1996-17/05/2001	AGP
2001	INC	71	Tarun Gogoi	17/05/2001-24/05/2016	INC
2006	INC	53			INC, BPF
2011	INC	78			INC, BPF
2016	BJP	60	Sarbananda Sonowal	24/05/2016-10/05/2021	BJP, AGP, BPF
2021	BJP	60	Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma	10/05/2021-Till	BJP, AGP, UPPL

Source: Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_chief_ministers_of_Assam]

In the government formation process also, INC becomes the dominant national party in the state. In Assam from 1951 to 1978 Congress party had continuously formed its government as the single largest party with an absolute majority. Term wise, out of the total of 17 state governments, INC has formed total 12 state governments. However, for the first time, like other parts of India, Assam also came under the influence of anti-Congressism under Janata Party. Under Janata party wave, Assam also replaced earlier Congress government with a Janata Party-led coalition government under Golap Borborah. Janata Party also formed its government in Assam two times, from 12 March 1978 to 11 December. Assam Gana Parishad was the first regional party of Assam who formed their government for two times under the leadership of then student leader youngest politician Prafulla Kumar Mahanta after 1985 and 1996 Assembly election. After AGP government, again Congress party came back to power in 2001 Assembly election as the single largest Party and remained in power till the 2016 Assembly election. Former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi become the longest-serving chief minister from the Congress party in Assam. He had enjoyed his tenure continuously for 15 years, from 2001 to 2016. After Congress and Janata party, BJP became the third national party in Assam to form its first state government in 2016 Assembly election along with two regional parties AGP and BPF. In 2021 assembly election also, the saffron party again come back to power as the single largest party and formed its second government under the leadership of Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma.

5.3 BJP as Formidable Player in Assam

For BJP among all the states in North East India, Assam is considered the gateway to enter into this region's electoral politics. BJP, as a Hindu nationalist party, found it very difficult to establish its dominance by replacing the long-ruling Congress party from Assam. Assam is a complex society with multi-diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities, including different tribal communities, Assamese, Bengalis, and other communities like Nepali, Punjabi, Bihari, Marwari, and migrant Bangladeshi, etc. Among these populations, the Assamese Hindus are dominant in Brahmaputra Valley, and Bengalis are dominant in Barack Valley. Electorally though BJP was not very strong force in Assam from 1985 onwards initially in Brahmaputra Valley, it could make its support base into the Bengali dominated Barak Valley

by winning seats in both Lok Sabha as well as Assembly elections from 1991 elections (Srikanth, 1999).

Table 5.4: BJP in Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha Elections in Assam

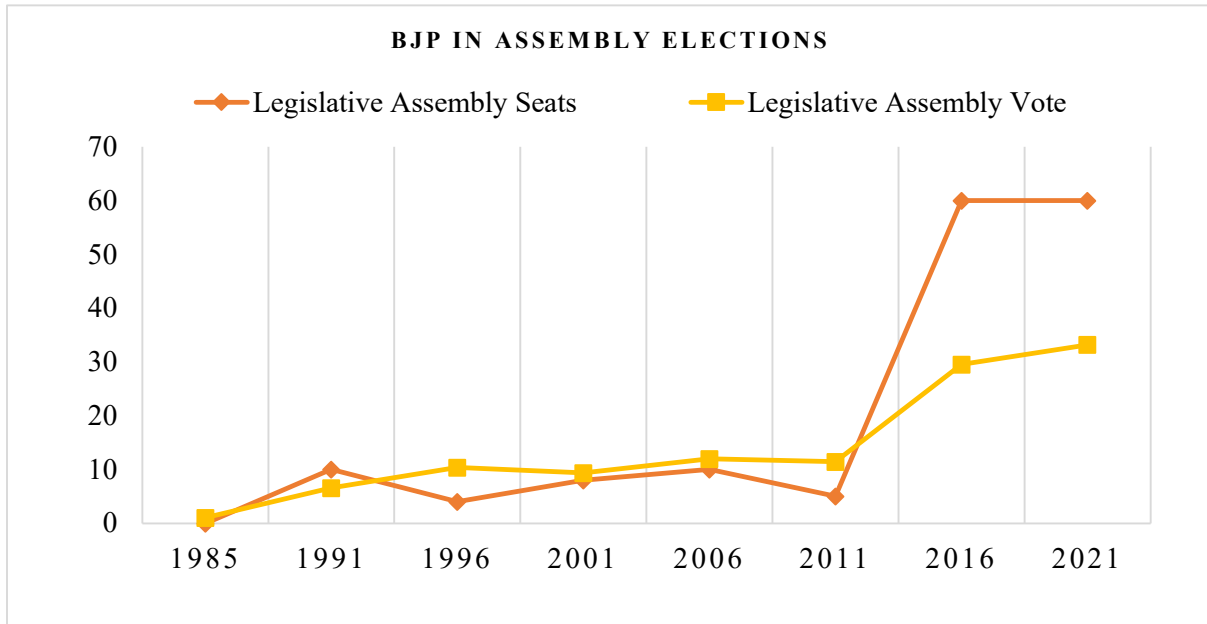
Year	Legislative Assembly		Year	Lok Sabha	
	Seats	Vote		Seats	Vote
1985	0	1.07	1985	0	0.37
1991	10	6.55	1991	2	9.6
1996	4	10.41	1996	1	15.92
2001	8	9.35	1998	1	24.47
			1999	2	29.48
2006	10	11.98	2004	2	22.94
2011	5	11.47	2009	4	16.21
2016	60	29.51	2014	7	36.86
2021	60	33.21	2019	9	36.41

Source: Election Commission of India

Table 5.4 analyses the electoral rise of BJP in Assam since its formation in both Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. BJP, as a national party, started its political journey in Assam with a limited support base and marginal political presence despite the strong organisational support base of its parental organisation RSS in the state before independence. Although BJP had started with zero seats and about one per cent vote share in both Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, BJP has gradually improved its seats and vote share in the next elections in a spectacular way. In the 1991 elections, for the first time, BJP won 10 seats with 6.55 per cent vote share in Assembly election and two seats with 9.6 per cent vote share in Lok Sabha election in Assam. After this maiden start in both elections, BJP has continuously maintained its significant political presence as a national party by increasing winning seats and voting share at a rapid level.

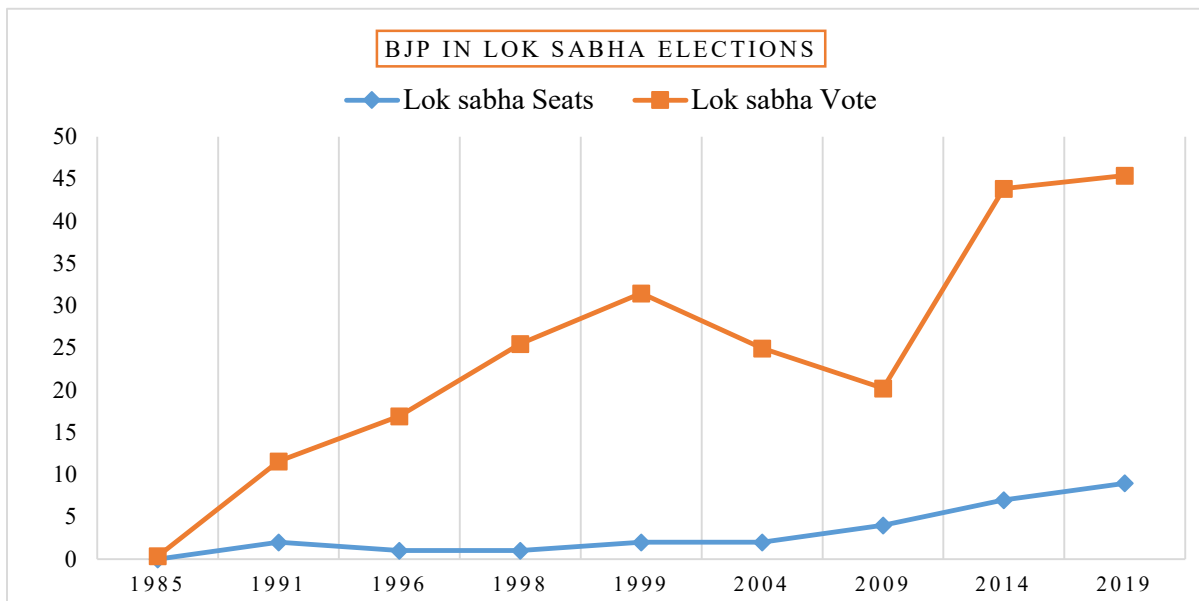
The below figures show how BJP has increased its seats and vote share in general and assembly elections in Assam since 1991. BJP as a major political force in Assam can be visible only after the 2014 General election and mainly in the 2016 Assembly election, where first time Assam has witnessed a tectonic shift in the electoral politics of Assam with the rise of BJP as the strongest party (Mahanta, 2014; Goswami & Tripathi, 2015; Tripathi, Das & Goswami, 2018).

Figure 5.1 *BJP's electoral performance in Assembly Elections in Assam*



Source: Based on Election Commission of India's statistical report on Assembly Elections (1985-2016) of Assam.

Figure 5.2: *BJP's electoral performance in Lok Sabha Elections in Assam*



Source: Based on Election Commission of India's statistical report on general elections (1985-2019).

BJP became a dominant political force in North East India in the last two general elections, mainly in states like Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Manipur. Scholars have discussed BJP's rise in Assam, as localisation of BJP, social polarisation, and appropriation of ethnic space, victory for identity politics (Misra,2016), or inorganic growth or saffronisation of North East India (Bijukumar,2019). However, BJP's emergence as major political forces become a significant factor not only for marking a new phase of polarised politics in Assam (Mahanta, 2014) but also how BJP has shifted the trajectory of electoral politics of Assam to a different dimension is important to understand. While discussing BJP's rise as a formidable player in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur, this work will understand three main political dynamics. Firstly, alliance or coalition strategy and Co-opting leaders from other parties or calling it appropriating ruling elites. Secondly, BJP's socio-cultural appropriation through its parental organisation RSS for establishing its ideological and cultural footprint in these states and third, BJP's development politics in these states. This study has discussed two other variables, i.e., BJP's socio-cultural appropriation in terms of ideology through its parental organisation RSS in these states in chapter three and BJP's developmental politics North Eastern region in chapter seven. In chapters five and six, this study will focus on BJP's electoral strategy in these three specific states regarding its coalition politics or alliance with other parties and co-opting leaders from other parties appropriating political elites for its electoral gain.

5.3.1 BJP and Alliance Strategy in Assam

BJP, as a Hindi heartland party with Hindu Nationalist ideology, understood very well that only with the religious card with a marginal support base and weak organisational base they couldn't replace the Congress dominance from this region. To enter the political landscape of Assam as the dominant political force, BJP's prime concern was to oust the dominance of Congress. Congress party was the dominant player in Assam for a long time in both general and assembly elections. As the ruling party, Congress has adopted many grand electoral strategies that increased its popularity among common voters. For example, various populist policies, politics of institutional accommodation through creating many autonomous councils for different "ethnic communities as well as electoral representation, which cut across diverse ethnic and linguistic groups" (Tripathi, Das & Goswami, 2018, p.3). BJP understands it very

well that by promoting the Hindu Nationalist agenda for the sake of political consolidation, BJP will not be able to establish its strong party dominance in such a multi-diverse pluralist demographic state in Assam. Instead of adopting a “Top-Down” approach, BJP has tactfully adopted a “Bottom-Up” approach so that it able to shape its image as an insider party with a pragmatic approach. BJP is seen deviating from its narrative in the rest of the country, i.e., from ‘Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan’ party to one with co-opted regional parties and their agendas to reshape its image as a locally electable political entity in Assam. BJP, as the strong alternative of Congress Party, is visible only after the 2014 general elections, where for the first time, BJP won a significant number of seats in the Lok Sabha elections. However, to consolidate its strong position as a dominant national party in Assembly elections, BJP understood very well that BJP couldn’t materialise its “Congress-Mukt” mission without any regional parties' support. For this purpose, BJP forged a new social coalition and electoral alliance with political parties like Asom Gana Parisad (AGP) and Bodoland People’s Front (BPF) along with Ganashakti Party and different tribal groups like Rabha, Tiwa, Karbi groups which become beneficial for BJP both in General as well as Assembly elections. As Tripathi et al. (2018) points out, after 2015’s humiliating electoral defeat in Bihar and Delhi Assembly elections, BJP has shifted its electoral strategy of going alone to forming a coalition with regional parties. In Assam, BJP has “crafted a new social coalition and electoral alliance along the ethnic axis in Assam based principally upon the precedence of regional subtext” (Tripathi, Das & Goswami, 2018). In terms of BJP’s strategy in electoral politics of Assam, Tripathi, Das, and Goswami argued,

...working a social coalition with regional players turned out to be a major concern for the BJP because it could enhance its legitimacy and acceptability in a region characterised by deep diversity along regional, religious, linguistic and ethnic lines but could also serve to contain the anti-Congress vote split. (Tripathi, Das & Goswami, 2018: 3)

Although traditionally BJP has a significant support base in Barak Valley and Lower Assam since 1991 General and Assembly elections, alliance with regional parties like AGP helped them expand their support base in other parts of Assam. “The regional transcendence of the BJP witnessed in 2014 can be dubbed as a precursor to the BJP’s rise in the state as it upset the

electoral balance previously tilted towards the Congress across regions in Assam” (Goswami & Tripathi, 2015). BJP’s phenomenal rise in Assam is significantly remarkable only after the 2014 General Election (see Table 5.5) and mainly the 2016 Assembly Election. BJP’s remarkable expansion in Assamese speaking Upper Assam and Lower Assam and Barak Valley was visible during these recent elections.

Table 5.5: *Region-wise BJP’s political performance in Lok Sabha elections in Assam (1991-2019)*

Region	Years							
	2019	2014	2009	2004	1999	1998	1996	1991
Upper Assam (6)	4	5	1	1	1	0	0	0
Lower Assam (5)	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	0
Barak Valley (3)	3	0	1	0	0	1	1	2
Total Seats (14)	9	7	4	2	2	1	1	2

Source: Author’s calculation based on Election Commission of India’s statistical report on the general election from 1991-2019.

Note: For the region-wise electoral performance of BJP in the Lok Sabha election in Assam from 1991-2019 is based on the classification of 14 Lok Sabha constituencies into Upper Assam, Lower Assam, and Barak Valley. The Upper Assam includes six constituencies Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tezpur, Nowgong, and Kaliabor constituency. The Lower Assam region includes five Lok Sabha constituencies Mangaldoi, Gauhati, Barpeta, Kokrajhar, and Dhubri. The Barak Valley region includes three Lok Sabha constituencies Autonomous Districts, Silchar, and Karimganj.

In the 2014 General election, Assam was among the states with the tectonic change in Indian Politics, where BJP has won seven out of 14 seats with the highest ever vote share of 36.5 %. The table 5.4 shows the significant increase of vote share and seat numbers of BJP in Lok Sabha Elections since 1985 where BJP has a steady growth of vote share from 9.6 % in 1991 election with two seats to highest ever 36.86 % vote share with seven seats in 2014 General Election. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, BJP became the single largest party in Assam with 9 seats and 36.41 per cent vote share. In Assam region-wise, BJP has made a significant electoral presence in Barak Valley since 1991. The two main constituencies in the Valley, i.e., Karimganj and Silchar, BJP has a significant presence since the 1991 election. Although in the 2014 election, BJP did not win any of these seats. However, in the 2019 general election, BJP won all three seats with 51.52 per cent vote share in Barak Valley (Sharma & Tripathi, 2019). In lower Assam, Gauhati and Mangaldoi are the two main constituencies where BJP dominates for long time. Veteran BJP MP Bijoya Chakrabarty represented the Gauhati constituency for

long time. In Upper Assam, only Nowgong constituency BJP has a significant support base since 1999 represented by veteran BJP MP Rajen Gohain. This unprecedented growth of BJP in the General election become possible at the cost of regional parties like AGP and also the anti-incumbency factor of past government. Nani Gopal Mahanta analysed the emergence of BJP in the 2014 General election as phenomenal, which “marked a new phase of polarised politics in Assam” (Mahanta, 2014). As a remarkable feature about this election for him, “first time ethnic, regional and identity-based issues have been side-lined and questions of governance and religion played a more important role in mobilising voters” (Mahanta, 2014, p.19).

The 2016 Assembly election of Assam becomes significant to understand the rise of BJP in Assam for various reasons. First, it ousts the dominance of Congress from Assam as being a Hindu Nationalist Party with insignificant electoral presence as an alternate of Congress party and as another national party for the first time formed its government with the alliance of AGP and BPF in North East India. Second, BJP’s entry into Assam as governing party shed its image of North Indian party to an All-Indian Party. Simultaneously, by observing this electoral expansion of BJP from other Indian states to North Eastern States, Pratap Bhanu Mehta (2016) defines it as “BJP Dominant System” in Indian Politics. The 2016 Assembly election of Assam first time marked the significant growth and consolidation of BJP as the dominant political force in Assam by winning 60 seats out of total contested 90 seats with 29.51 per cent vote share. In contrast, BJP hardly won an average of seven seats with below 12 per cent vote share during the previous election.

The significant factor which contributed to this phenomenal rise of BJP in Assam is the former’s ability to form a new social coalition as well as the strategy of electoral alliance with ethnic parties like Bodo People’s Front (BPF) and old ally Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) along with Ganashakti Party and other tribal groups like Rabha, Tiwa, Mishing, etc. This electoral alliance with the social coalition helped BJP make inroads to the tribal areas and projected them as an insider party. By referring this BJP’s surge in Assam Udayon Misra mainly pointed out the BJP’s successful grand strategy of “garnering the support of regional forces like Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), the Bodoland People’s Front (BPF) and the Rabha, Tiwa and other plains tribal organisations” (Misra, 2016, p.20). This alliance gave the BJP a much-needed

secular flavour, and alliance with party like AGP, BPF gave BJP the legitimacy and acceptability in Assam as an insider party (Misra, 2016; Tripathi, Das & Goswami, 2018). As Misra argues,

Apart from its understanding with the AGP, the BJP leadership made another master move in bringing within the fold of the BJP alliance the Tiwa and Rabha organisations. This gave the party a tribal friendly face and helped its fortunes not only in Tiwa and Rabha areas but also in the hill constituencies of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao. Here it virtually replaced the Congress that had held power for decades. (Misra, 2016, p.21)

The verdict of the 2016 Assam Assembly election resulted in the formation of BJP led NDA government at Assam with AGP and BPF as the governing party. Out of total 126 seats, they secured total 86 seats where BJP won 60 seats with 29.51 % vote share, AGP won 14 seats with 8.14 % vote share, and BPF won 12 with 3.94 vote share. In this election, the significant strategy for BJP was to forge social coalition with different ethnic groups in both regions, which immensely help them consolidate the support of both plain and hill tribal community voters spread all over the state (Misra,2016; Tripathi, Das & Goswami, 2018). BJP’s understanding with Bodo and Rabha in lower Assam and Tiwa, Kachari, and Mishing in Upper Assam became beneficial in this case. This resulted in BJP led NDA coalition won 75 per cent seats in Upper Assam, 64 per cent seats in Lower Assam, and 60 per cent seats in Barak Valley.

Table 5.6: *Political Performance of BJP in Assam Assembly Elections Region Wise (1985-2016)*

Region	Years						
	2016	2011	2006	2001	1996	1991	1985
Upper Assam (56)	33	2	5	3	0	0	0
Lower Assam (50)	15	3	0	1	0	1	0
Barak Valley (20)	12	0	5	4	4	9	0
Total Seats (126)	60	5	10	8	4	10	0

Source: Author’s own calculation based on Election Commission of India’s statistical report on state assembly elections of Assam from 1985-2016 available at [<https://eci.gov.in/statistical-report/statistical-reports/>]

To analyse the Assembly election result region-wise, this study has made a comparative study based on the total 14 Lok Sabha constituency-wise division of 126 State Assembly seats. The Brahmaputra Valley contributes a total of 106, including Upper Assam with 56 Assembly seats and Lower Assam with 50 seats. In the same way, the Barak Valley, including the Autonomous

District, contributes total 20 seats. For the first time in this 2016 assembly election, BJP has significantly established its strong dominance as an alternate Congress party by winning many seats. BJP has won total 33 seats out of 56 seats in upper Assam, whereas in previous elections, BJP hardly won 2-5 seats. In lower Assam, BJP becomes an active player by capturing 15 seats out of 50 seats. Traditionally this lower Assam region is dominated by different parties like Bodoland People's Front (BPF) in Kokrajhar and Mangoldoi districts and All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), Congress in Dhuburi, Barpeta, Goalpara, etc. For BJP, it's very difficult to establish its strong electoral presence by defeating other political parties in this region. Only the Barak Valley can be considered as BJP's stronghold support base. Out of 20 seats, including Autonomous District, BJP can win a significant number of seats relatively compared to other regions. In the three Bengali-dominated districts, i.e., Cachar, Hailakandi, and Karimganj in Barak Valley, BJP won 8 seats out of 15 seats where BJP has strong dominance for a long time in constituencies such as Silchar, Dholai, Katigora, Patharkandi and Ratabari, respectively. For the first time in Autonomous District also BJP won four out of total of five seats. In Upper Assam constituencies such as Behali, Rangapara, Luming, Dibrugarh, Duliajan, and Lower Assam, constituencies like Golokganj Sorbhog BJP able to uphold its dominance in Assembly elections. BJP successfully captured all Lok Sabha constituency seats like Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Tezpur in the 2016 Assam election. In Guwahati, out of 10 assembly seats, BJP won eight seats, where Congress won only two seats.

In the same way from Dibrugarh, BJP won eight out of total of nine seats, where the other one by its alliance partner AGP. In Tezpur also, BJP won eight out of nine Assembly seats. From the Silchar Lok Sabha constituency, also BJP won six out of total seven seats. Significantly, BJP also made inroads into the Muslim-dominated areas as it won 15 out of total 49 such Muslim-dominated constituencies in Assam. BJP and its alliance partner's performance in Schedule Tribes (ST) reserved constituencies also very impressive, where out of 16 such reserved ST seats BJP won 14 seats. BJP's alliance partner BPF won six seats, whereas BJP itself won total eight seats. BJP's consolidation in tea tribe-dominated areas is also very impressive. Strategically at the centre BJP government's decision to giving support for the granting Schedule Tribe (ST) status to six communities, including tea-tribe, Tai-Ahom, Koch-Rajbongshi, Moran, Mattak and Chutia communities help BJP to get support from these communities during 2016 Assam election (The Assam Tribune, 2015a).

BJP’s dominance in Assam is very distinct from other parties. BJP for its electoral benefit is quite vocal about local issues, local politics. After the 2014 Lok Sabha election as part of its strategy, BJP also involved in local politics to easily capture the local dominance from Congress party (Tripathi, Das & Goswami, 2018: 8). BJP first contested in the Autonomous Council and the Sixth Schedule Councils, which helped them expand their social base towards tribal communities through alliance and understanding with tribal leaders. BJP in “Urban Local Bodies election won 39 out of 74 Municipal Boards and Committees in Assam” (The Assam Tribune, 2015b). “In both BTAD and North Cachar Hills Autonomous Councils BJP contested against Congress party” (The Assam Tribune, 2015c).

BJP has established its dominance in Lok Sabha and Assembly elections and BJP became the largest party in the 2018 Assam Panchayat election held in December 2018. As the largest party BJP has won around 50 per cent of total seats in all posts. BJP achieved a comprehensive victory in 2018 Panchayat election by winning 9025 seats in Gaon Panchayat Member (GPM) seats out of 21,990 seats and out of 2199 Gaon Panchayat President (GPP) seats, BJP won 991 posts. According to State Election Commission of Assam, BJP has won 1020 Anchalik Panchayat Member (APM) seats and out of 420 Zila Parishad Member (ZPM), BJP won 212 seats.

Table 5.7: *BJP and other Parties performance in Assam Panchayat Election, 2018*

Party-Post	GPM (21,990)	GPP (2199)	APM (2199)	ZPM (420)
BJP	9025	991	1020	212
INC	7239	760	772	147
AGP	1676	137	117	19
AIUDF	1023	130	138	26

Source: Assam State Election Commission’s Press Release, 2018

Note: GPM-Gaon Panchayat Member, GPM- Gaon Panchayat Member, APM- Anchalik Panchayat Member, ZPM- Zila Parishad Member. BJP- Bharatiya Janata Party, INC- Indian National Congress, AGP- Asom Gana Parishad, AIUDF- All India Democratic United Federation.

From the 2014 General election to this 2018 Panchayat election in Assam, BJP is seen as the dominant national player by replacing Congress party not only national and state but also in grass root level election. This panchayat election, out of 26 Zila Parishad, BJP has control over 13 Zila Parishad as a single largest party where Zila Parishad such as Biswanath, Charideo,

Kamrup (M), Kamrup, Majuli, Tinisukia BJP won all Zila Parisad member seats. Interestingly in the previous 2013 Assam Panchayat Elections, Congress had won over 80 per cent seats of total seats whereas BJP as the fourth position won 1529 GPM, 106 GPP, 130 APM and 15 ZPM seats (India today, 2018).

5.3.2 BJP and Elite Appropriation in Assam

One major significant strategy of BJP for coming to power in North East is incorporating political elites from other political parties. Like other North Eastern states, this strategy works quite well for BJP in Assam also. Before the 2014 general election, BJP did not have much popular support base and electoral strength as dominant national party in Assam. BJP for its electoral benefit became remarkably adaptable and accommodative towards bringing the political leaders from other political parties and rewarded them with new positions and responsibilities so that they feel empowered and work for the party. This strategy helped a lot to strengthen its position as strong alternative of Congress party in Assam. The BJP successfully incorporate new elites from a cross-section of the region's communities. One significant success of BJP in Assam in this context is to co-opt leaders like former powerful Congress minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma before 2016 Assam Assembly Election. "Sarma's skills at negotiation and man management and his ability to hold the attention of the audience through rousing speeches, have all been a striking feature of his political journey" (Konwer, 2019, p.40). For BJP, Himanta Biswa Sarma became a conducive factor for BJP's electoral expansion in Assam and other North Eastern states. On 23rd August 2015 at the residence of BJP's national president Amit Shah, Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma joined the BJP. Even after joining BJP, "Himanta Biswa Sarma has continued to maintain healthy relations with his Congress counterparts in other states and has made new friends in the last three years which has cemented his stature in the BJP" (Konwer, 2019, p.40). Within two months of his joining the saffron party, "nine congress MLAs including Bolin Chetia, Pradan Barua, Pallab Lochan Das, Rajen Borthakur, Pijus Hazarika, Kripanath Mallah, Abu Taher Bepari, Binanda Saikia and Jayanta Malla Barua joined BJP at a function attended by BJP's national general secretary Ram Madhav and BJP's state president Sidharth Bhattacharjee" (The Hindu, 2015).

Table 5.8: *BJP and Elite appropriation from different political parties in Assam*

S.N.	Name of the Politician	Current Position	Affiliations	
			Organisation	Party
1	Sarbananda Sonowal	Central Cabinet Minister	AASU	AGP-BJP
2	Himanta Biswa Sarma	Chief Minister	AASU	INC-BJP
3	Chandra Mohan Patowary	Cabinet Minister	AJYCP	AGP-BJP
4	Atul Borah (Senior)	MLA	AASU	AGP-BJP
5	Naba Kumar Doley	Minister		AGP-BJP
6	Pranab Kalita	Ex-Speaker	AASU	Independent-BJP
7	Binanda Saikia	MLA	AASU	INC-BJP
8	Pallabh Lochan Das	MP	AATSA	INC-BJP
9	Padma Hazarika	MLA	AASU	AGP-BJP
10	Pijus Hazarika	Cabinet Minister	NSUI	INC-BJP
11	Hitendra Nath Goswami	MLA	AASU	AGP-BJP
12	Jogen Mohan	State Minister	AASU-RSS	BJP
13	Tapan Kumar Gogoi	MP	AASU	BJP
14	Kushal Duari	MLA	AASU-ULFA	INC-BJP
15	Chakradhar Gogoi	MLA	AASU	BJP
16	Rituparna Barua	MLA	AASU	BJP
17	Bimal Borah	MLA	AASU	BJP
18	Binod Hazarika	MLA	AASU	BJP
19	Bhaskar Sharma	MLA	ULFA	BJP
20	Bolin Chetia	MLA	----	INC-BJP
21	Kripanath Mallah	MLA	---	INC-BJP
22	Jagdish Bhuyan	Ex-MLA	AASU	AGP-BJP
23	Rupjyoti Kurmi	MLA	---	INC-BJP
24	Rajen Borthakur	Ex-MLA	---	INC-BJP
25	Ajanta Neog	Cabinet Minister	---	INC-BJP

Source: Compilation from different newspaper sources and interviews with Samudra Gupta Kashyap (2019)

Dr Sarma was appointed as the BJP's convenor of Election Management Committee in the state assembly election. Very soon Himanta Biswa Sarma as expert negotiator, a formidable organiser become BJP's go-man factor in Assam and other North Eastern states. However, before his political entry to BJP, Assam's former chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, the former leader of AASU and MLA of the regional party AGP joined BJP and became the state president of BJP. After 2014's general election, the appointment of Sonowal as the Union

Minister of State for Sports and in 2015 as the Party president of the state gave further boost to the saffron party in Assam. During 2016 assembly election, Sonowal belonged to the plain tribal community of Kachari as the Chief Ministerial candidate of BJP became a masterstroke strategy for the party. Along with Sarbananda Sonowal and Himanta Biswa Sarma, this study has found a large number of politicians from different political parties and organisations joined BJP and also rewarded with important position at the party or current government.

In this context, other AGP leaders such as Hitendra Nath Goswami, AGP's former president Chandra Mohan Patowary, Padma Hazarika, senior AGP leader Atul Bora, Naba Doley, Jagdish Bhuyan etc. and many politicians from INC include Ajanta Neog, Gautam Roy, Rupjyoti Kurmi, BPF Leader Banendra Kumar Mushahary etc joined BJP (Konwer, 2019). Ahead of 2021 assembly election, Ajanta Neog, a senior Congress politician, was expelled from the party for holding a closed-door meeting with Assam's CM and Himanta Biswa Sarma. As a Congress politician, Ajanta Neog was in council of Minister under Tarun Gogoi's congress government. On 29 December, 2020 Neog joined BJP along with Congress MLA Rajeed Goala and former BPF leader Banendra Kumar Mushahary. In her statement during the joining ceremony, Neog said, "I joined BJP because BJP has plans for the future ahead." While criticising Congress she said, "A party which has not planned its way forward cannot have a future in politics" (EastMojo, 2020).

5.4 BJP in 2021 Assam Assembly Election: BJP Dominant system in Assam?

After 2016's phenomenal victory BJP again retained the state power for second time in 2021 assembly election. BJP became the single largest party with 60 seats and 33.21 percent vote share and its alliance partners AGP won 9 seats whereas its new alliance partner from Bodoland Territorial Region, UPPL led by the ex-president of the All-Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) Pramod Bodo won six seats (Sultana, 2021). The NEDA alliance won total 75 seats with 44.51 percent vote share as a whole and formed a coalition government in Assam headed by NEDA's convener and BJP's main strategist in North East, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma. The BJP achieved this electoral victory through multiple strategies. In spite of a strong anti-CAA protest against the ruling party in the state by different organisation, pressure groups and a grand pre-poll alliance formed by Congress, AIUDF, BPF and the Left parties, BJP became victorious as

the largest party with highest vote share. “In fact, the Congress’s tie-up with the ‘Muslim Party’ AIUDF seems to have helped the National Democratic Alliance’s (NDA) cause, helping them keep Hindu voters firmly on their side and wean away a small but sizeable chunk of Assamese Muslim voters” (Palshikar et al., 2021). Palshikar, Tripathi and Sharma argued, “Religious polarisation, particularly Hindu consolidation, is one factor that helps in making sense of the election verdict” (Palshikar et al., 2021). “Based on CSDS’s post-poll survey, it is found that the Hindu voters did not show much support towards the ‘Mahajot’ led by Congress mainly because former’s alliance with the AIUDF” (Palshikar et al., 2021). BJP also successfully diverted the anti-CAA sentiments by popularising the “theory of civilisational threat emanating from the East Bengal-origin Muslims. It targeted the East Bengal-origin Muslims, particularly the AIUDF, the main political outfit of the community” (Dutta, 2021 b).

Table 5.9: Assam Election Result, 2021

Political Parties	BJP	INC	CPI (M)	AIUDF	AGP	BOPF	UPPL	Ind
Seats Contested	93	95	2	20	29	12	11	381
Seats Won	60	29	1	16	9	4	6	1
Vote Share	33.21%	29.67%	0.84%	9.29%	7.91%	3.39%	3.39%	5.93%

Source: Election Commission of India’s Data on Assam legislative assembly election, 2021

Akhil Ranjan Dutta argued, “The BJP consolidated its base by foregrounding developmentalism, accompanied by hyper populism”(Dutta, 2021 b) Before assembly election, Assam government initiated many cash transfer programmes such as pension for widows, free cooking gas cylinders for house hold, free scooters for female students, free uniform for school students, free ration to poor people through National Food Security schemes, Oronudoi for every household under below poverty line, Arundhati Gold Scheme for weddings of poor brides etc (Saikia, 2021). BJP has launched different new and innovative schemes like SVAYAM Scheme under which government is providing 50, 000 rupees to every educated youth to start their own business, start up. “Not a single segment of society remained untouched by the populist beneficiary schemes, including girls and women belonging to the minority Muslim community” (Dutta, 2021 b). Thus, BJP in Assam successfully conveyed the message among masses that BJP is for all-inclusive development irrespective of any religion.

5.5 BJP after the 2016 election: from Governance to Hindutva

After the 2016 Assembly election with phenomenal victory, BJP formed its coalition government in Assam along with two alliance partners, i.e., AGP and BPF. On 23 May 2016, Sarbananda Sonowal as Chief Minister and 10 Cabinet Ministers, including two ministers from each alliance partner, took oath to form the first BJP government in North East India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Cabinet Ministers Rajnath Singh, Arun Jaitley, Nitin Gadkari attended the swearing-in ceremony along with veteran BJP leaders L.K. Advani, Muruli Monohar Joshi and the party president Amit Shah. The chief ministers from BJP and NDA ruling states and interestingly about 100 spiritual leaders, including the Satradhikar (the head of Vaishnavite monasteries) also attended the ceremony (India today, 2016; The Telegraph, 2016).

In the first sitting of Assam's 14th Assembly, three BJP MLA, including Assamese actress Angoorlata Deka represented the Batradrava constituency (that is the birthplace of the great saint of Assam Srimanta Sankardeva) and Ashok Sarma from Nalbari Constituency and Bimal Borah from Tingkhong constituency took oath in the Sanskrit language. Angoorlata Deka, in response to this new trend as focused on the importance of that ancient language which she termed as "*Dev Bhasa*" (Language of God), and by doing this, she also wanted to draw the attention of the youth generation of the importance of learning this ancient yet rich scientific language (The Indian Express, 2016).

After coming to power, the BJP led coalition government in Assam came to the limelight due to its activities that directly reflect its policy and agenda towards promoting Hindutva. The Assam government, on 28 February 2017 adopted a cabinet decision to "introduce Sanskrit as a compulsory subject till class VIII" which evoke sharp criticism from different student organisations and opposition political parties (The Indian Express, 2017). However, later on, Assam government could not materialise the decision, as then the education minister of Assam, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma himself admitted that Assam does not have requisite infrastructure to make Sanskrit compulsory (Economic Times, 2017). Several organisations like "All Assam Student Union (AASU), Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) criticised this

move as a well-orchestrated conspiracy being micro managed and monitored from Nagpur” (Economic Times, 2017). They mainly referred the influence of RSS over Assam government.

On 25 April, 2017 Assam government has introduced a new scheme with the central government’s assistance for establishing model degree college in educationally backward districts in the name of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, an RSS -BJP ideologue. As part of this plan, Assam government has already established a five new model college named “Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Adarsha Mahavidyalaya”. Different organisations include AASU, AJYCP, etc., sharply criticised this move of government as disrespecting the local intellectuals and icons by naming an outsider, i.e., BJP’s ideologue has no any connection with Assam. Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) leader “Akhil Gogoi accused the state government of “imposing Hindutva agenda” on the people of the state” (Pisharoty, 2017). The alliance partner AGP also opposed this naming of model college. Because of this amid protest BJP government after establishing the five-model college in that name, decided not to name other model colleges after Deen Dayal Upadhyaya.

Another important political development of the BJP led NDA government in Assam is the publication of the complete draft of NRC and its role in the citizenship amendment bill, 2016. The process of NRC by following Supreme Court of India’s order was started in May 2015 and ended on 31 August 2015. A total of 3, 29, 91,385 members applied through 68, 31, 330 applications. On 30 July, 2018, the complete draft of NRC found 2, 89, 83, 688 people eligible for inclusion in the complete draft whereas 40.07 lakh people were left out. After the publication of the second and final NRC draft led to a massive debate over the citizenship issue and issue of illegal immigrants. In response to this development, BJP at centre becomes more assertive to introduce the citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 which creates a strong protest, opposition all over Assam, and other North East parts led by different organisations. The Constitution Amendment Bill, 2016 will change the definition of illegal migrants. The Bill, introduced in the Lok Sabha on July 15, 2016, “seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955 to provide citizenship to illegal migrants, from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, who are of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian extraction” (The Hindu, 2018). According to this Bill, those illegal migrants belong to those above religions except Muslim are eligible to get citizenship in India. The Bill also expands the cut-off date for granting citizenship to 31

December, 2014 from 24 March, 1971 as mentioned in 1985 Assam Accord. This bill also reduces the minimum staying years in India from 11 years to 6 years to obtain citizenship by naturalisation process. The situation become worse before the introduction of the bill in Lok Sabha by BJP government when Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a public meeting for 2019 Lok Sabha poll in Silchar in Bengali dominated Barak Valley announced his government's decision to pass the bill in parliament for giving Indian citizenship to the persecuted minorities (Economics Time, 2019)

After this announcement, the Central government decided to set up a high-level panel to discuss Clause 6 of the Assam Accord under which “Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people” (Government of Assam, n.d.). BJP government also proposed to extend Article 371 which will make provisions for reservation of parliamentary and Assembly seats for the indigenous people of Assam and also through implementing the clause 6 of Assam Accord to “protect and preserve the political, cultural and other rights as well as ethnic identities of the indigenous people of Assam” (Government of Assam, n.d.). As Home Minister Rajnath Singh in his tweet mentioned, “MHA has notified on 5 January, 2019 a High-Level Committee consisting of eminent and knowledgeable persons from Assamese society with a very wide mandate to suggest such safeguards for protection of the Assamese identity, including reservation in the State Assembly and in jobs: HM” (HMOIndia, 2019).

After the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) submitted the Bill before the parliament, AGP on 8 January before the introducing the bill to Lok Sabha decided to withdraw their support from BJP led Assam government. The three AGP Ministers in Assam government party president Atul Bora, Keshab Mahanta and Phani Bhushan Choudhury resigned from the ministry over the citizenship bill's controversy. The Lok Sabha on 9 January, 2019 passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016 despite the strong opposition in Assam. As a protest to this move, the All-Assam Student Union (AASU) announced an 11 hours shutdown against the Bill. The North East Student Organisation along with different student organisations from other North Eastern states also joined the programme and also political parties Congress and All India United Democratic Front supported the call (The Hindu, 2019).

Rajnath Singh regarding this citizenship bill controversy at Lok Sabha informed that “ the Bill is not just for Assam but also valid for all the states and Union territories. The responsibility will not be Assam’s alone and whatever steps are needed to be taken, the centre will take” (Live mint, 2019) BJP NEDA convener, then Finance minister of Assam Himanta Biswa Sarma by supporting the move of Central government regarding Citizenship Amendment Bill mentioned “the NRC debate is a fight between India’s and Jinnah’s legacy” (India today, 2019). He points out “This is a fight between Jinnah's legacy and India's legacy. Let the Assam Accord be violated, but let us not go to Jinnah. You have to determine between the Assam Accord and Jinnah way. Which way will you go?" (India today, 2019).

During this controversy of Citizenship bill, BJP government at centre also came up with another significant decision for granting ST (Schedule Tribe) “status to six communities of Assam Tai-Ahom, Chutia, Koch-Rajbangshi, Moran, Matak, Tea-tribe” (The Hindu,2019). These six communities are now enjoying Other Backward Classes (OBC) or More Other Backward Classes (MOBC) status in Assam (Sarmah & Hazarika, 2020). As Home Minister regarding this decision, tweeted, “A separate Bill will be brought to grant ST status to Bodo Kacharis in Hill districts of Assam and Karbis in the rest of Assam. Sixth Schedule of the Constitution is also proposed to be amended to strengthen the Autonomous District Councils: HM in Lok Sabha” (HMOIndia, 2019). Later on, Government of Assam constituted “a five-member Group of Ministers to recommend measures for protection of rights of existing tribes as well as the benefits to be extended to the proposed communities, the six new communities would be clubbed under a new ST category” (Doley, 2019). As a mark of protest the existing Scheduled Tribe communities of Assam under the Coordination Committee of Tribal Organizations of Assam (CCTOA) called a 12-hour state bandh on 11 January, 2019 to opposed the bill (Outlook, 2019).

BJP again came to power at the Centre with single party absolute majority in 2019 general election. After coming to power, in spite of so much protest in North East India and other parts of the country, BJP government has passed the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 on 11 December, 2019. With the enactment of this CAA Act “members of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities who have come from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan till December 31, 2014 facing religious persecution there will not be treated as

illegal immigrants but given Indian citizenship” (The Hindu, 2020). For the first time in India, religion becomes a criterion of granting citizenship based on law. Opinion polls conducted by the CSDS on 2019 elections show that despite the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) emerging as the major axis of opposition mobilization against the BJP in the region yet local factors and ethnic fault lines too remained prominent in Meghalaya, Nagaland and Manipur in shaping the voting behaviour (Jamir et al. 2019). Considering the nature of politics in the region, despite having strong protest against Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, BJP became the single largest party with 60 seats in Assam. BJP's returned to power for the second time in Assam can be called as “a resounding consolidation of pro-Hindutva forces in a state long known for its politics of *jatiyotabad*—ethnonationalism” (Donthi, 2021). Days after BJP came to power in the state, the party announced its plans to “introduce a cow protection law in Assam and approach the Supreme Court for the reverification of the state’s contested National Register of Citizenship” (Saikia, 2021).

Figure 5.3. *The Assam Cattle Preservation Bill 2021.*

CATTLE PRESERVATION
An initiative to regulate cattle slaughter, consumption and trade in Assam

Assam Cattle Preservation Bill, 2021

PROHIBITED

- Slaughter of **cow, calf and heifer** in Assam
- **Transport of cattle** from or through Assam
- Sale of beef or beef products in areas predominantly inhabited by **Hindus, Jains, Sikhs** and other non-beef-eating communities
- Sale of beef or beef products within **5-km radius** of any temple, satra or other Hindu religious institutions

Penalty
Imprisonment up to **8 yrs** or fine up to **₹ 5 lakh**

The cattle, not being a cow, calf & heifer and not below 14 years of age, or which have become permanently incapacitated due to accidental injury or deformity, can be slaughtered subject to clearance certificate issued by an authorised veterinary officer

@himantabiswa | @himantabiswasarma

Source: Himanta Biswa Sarma (2021) [Tweet]¹

After coming to power BJP government on 13 August, 2021 passed The Assam Cattle Preservation Bill 2021. “The bill would replace the existing Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 1950, which allowed the slaughter of the cattle above the age of 14 after approval from local veterinary officers” (The Hindu, 2021). According to this Bill, “No one will be allowed to sell beef or beef products in any form except at places permitted by the government. Beef would not be allowed to be sold in areas that have a predominant population of Hindu, Sikhs, Jains, and other non-beef-eating communities or within a radius of five km of any temple, satra (Vaishnavite monastery), or other religious institutions belonging to Hindus, or any other institution or area as may be prescribed by the competent authority” (Parashar, 2021). The opposition parties strongly opposed this bill. The All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) criticised this Bill as “This is not a Bill to protect cows, or even respect cows. This has been brought to hurt the sentiments of the Muslims and polarise communities further. We oppose it and will try and bring in amendment resolutions” (Agarwala, 2021).

BJP government at state also showed its interest to change the population control policy in the state, under which the government will gradually implement a two-child policy for availing the benefits of state government’s welfare schemes. However, the government will exclude the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Adivasi communities (Tea-tribes) from this two-child policy. In 2019, the last BJP government had already made a decision that “those with more than two children would not be eligible for government jobs from January 2021” (Saha,2021). Assam government has already a “two-child norm, along with requirements of minimum educational qualifications and functional sanitary toilets, for contesting in gaon panchayat (village council) polls as per an amendment in 2018 to the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994” (Outlook, 2021). Although, the government’s proposed decision and the rhetoric surrounding it have been viewed as mainly targeting the Muslim population of the Bangladeshi origin in

¹ In his tweet, Assam’s Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma expressed his opinion on passing this Bill- “Extremely happy and proud to fulfill our poll promise with the passing of historic Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 2021.

I'm sure this will deal a heavy blow to the illegal cattle trade & transit through Assam, ensuring due care of cattle as practised in our tradition for ages. (accessed through <https://twitter.com/himantabiswa/status/1426218667893616643?lang=en>)

the state to protect the indigenous communities of Assam against the illegal migrants (Choudhury, 2021). Government also tried to justify its position by saying, that the two-child policy is the only way to eradicate poverty and illiteracy among state's Muslim minority. And Different organisations of the Muslim community welcomed this proposal of adopting good family planning norms including such a policy (Choudhury, 2021).

To fulfil its electoral promise of protecting the land and rights of indigenous people of Assam through the slogan of "*Jati-Mati-Bheti*", the BJP government in Assam had launched eviction drive against Bengali-speaking Muslim encroachers on government land in many parts of Assam created a huge controversy. Kaushik Deka argues, "Assam's problem of land encroachment has become a political issue since it is often intertwined with the matter of illegal immigration from Bangladesh" (2021, pp. 44-45). According to the state government of Assam, "6,652 sq. km (double the size of Goa) of government land and 22 per cent or 3,878.8 sq. km (almost three times the size of Delhi) of Assam's total forest land of 17, 393 sq. km is under encroachment" (Deka, 2021, p.44). As Bhattacharya points out, "Eviction drives in Assam have been carried out intermittently over the past several years but fast-tracked after the new government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was sworn-in in May" (Bhattacharya, 2021). The first BJP government at state under former Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal also "conducted several evictions drives at the Kaziranga National Park, Manas National Park, Mayong in Morigaon district, Batradrava than, and Sipajhar" (Deka, 2021, p.48). After 2021 Assembly election, since Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma took charge as Chief Minister of Assam, "more than 300 families- all Banga-speaking Muslims-have been evicted from areas like Lanka in Hojai district, Jamugurihat in Sonitpur district and Patharkandi in Karimganj district" (Deka, 2021, p.48). Among these evictions, most of the evictions were taken place in such districts where Muslims of Bengali speaking are in majority. District wise, Darrang has seen the most evictions where the ground of Assam movement was started when 45,000 illegal names were detected in electoral roll of the Mangaldoi Lok Sabha constituency. After coming to power in the state, in the name of fulfilling its electoral promises, in many cases, BJP has imposed its majoritarian agendas in Assam.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed BJP's consolidation and rise in Assam from initially being a marginal player to a dominant player in the state. To understand the BJP's rise as a dominant national party in Assam, this chapter examines its electoral strategy, techniques that BJP has adopted in this specific state and to what extent they have had their impact on other North East India's states in terms of BJP's electoral alliance, appropriation of regional agendas, taking of dual ideological stand for its electoral gain. This chapter argues, although the electoral politics of Assam has been dominated by the core issues of indigeneity, ethnic identity, tribal politics of autonomy, land, and the issue of illegal migration; however, with the new entry of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a major political force by replacing Congress party, Assam has witnessed a co-option of ethno-regionalism and ethnicity with explicit Hindu nationalist aspirations. For coming to power, instead of adopting a "Top-Down" approach, BJP has tactfully adopted a "Bottom-Up" approach so that it able to shape its image as an insider party with a pragmatic approach. During its initial phase in Assam, BJP is seen deviating from its narrative in the rest of the country, i.e., from 'Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan' party to one with co-opted regional parties and their agendas to reshape its image as a locally electable political entity in Assam. To materialise its "Congress-Mukt" mission in the state, BJP has forged a new social coalition and electoral alliance with political parties like Asom Gana Parisad (AGP) and Bodoland People's Front (BPF) and United People's Party of Assam (UPPL) along with Ganashakti Party and different tribal groups like Rabha, Tiwa, Karbi groups which become beneficial for BJP both in General as well as Assembly elections. During the initial period, although BJP is seen taking a pragmatic approach to act like a locally electable political entity, however, after capturing power in most of the North Eastern states, BJP is seen imposing its majoritarian agenda.

Chapter 6

BJP in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur: Temporal Rise?

6.1 Introduction

After Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh become the two significant states to understand the rise of BJP as the dominant player in this region. This work has analysed the rise of BJP as a dominant national player in the North Eastern region by introspecting multiple factors where some of these are common factors. Some are state-specific, which need to be examined in this chapter. While discussing BJP's rise as a formidable player in Assam as well as in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, this work will try to understand this through three main political dynamics, i.e., alliance or coalition strategy along with co-opting leaders from other parties or called it as appropriating ruling elites, BJP's socio-cultural appropriation through its parental organisation, RSS, for establishing its ideological as well as cultural footprint in these states and BJP's development politics in these states. In this chapter the study has mainly focused on BJP's electoral strategies and politics for coming to power in Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh. Moreover, an endeavour has been made to emphasize some of BJP governments' major decisions and activities after coming to power in these states.

6.2 BJP in Arunachal Pradesh

As a predominantly tribal-dominated state with diverse ethnic groups, Arunachal Pradesh becomes an important case study to discuss the recent rise of BJP as a ruling party in the state. For long time, the state has remained a 'Congress State'. Since its first election in 1978, competitive party politics was absent due to other political parties' nominal presence (Bath 2018). BJP along with its parent organisation RSS has always been on a mission to establish its cultural footprint and political expansion in Arunachal Pradesh due to its geo-strategic location and nationalist force to fulfil its mission of national integration for an '*Akhand Bharat*.' Though BJP came to power in Arunachal Pradesh through other means like defection and merger from other parties, it was only in the 2019 election that the party could form its

first elected government in the frontier state. BJP's late entry as a ruling party with an absolute majority in Arunachal Pradesh despite having a strong presence of RSS, the parent organisation of BJP for a long time is a major investigation in this study. While discussing the rise of BJP in Arunachal Pradesh, this study explores some questions like- In terms of BJP's unprecedented rise in Arunachal Pradesh, is this BJP's organic rise in Arunachal Pradesh in a real sense or is it because of dependency syndrome? BJP's strategies of appropriation, localisation, or regionalisation of the Party with a pragmatic approach and co-opting leaders from other parties can be considered significant factors in its rise in Arunachal Pradesh. Simultaneously, BJP's politics of development in the North East region is also essential to understand in this context.

6.2.1 Why is Arunachal Different from Other Indian State?

Among all other Indian states, Arunachal Pradesh is one of the most heterogeneous, multi-lingual, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic states. It is predominantly a tribal state with 68.8 per cent of tribal population (Census of India, 2011). Though all "other states of the North East were recognised on ethnic lines, Arunachal Pradesh is different for its geostrategic location and being a flashpoint of border tensions with China" (Mukherjee 2017, p.13). "Bounded on the north by China, on the east by Myanmar, on the south by Assam and Nagaland and on the west by Bhutan, the State of Arunachal Pradesh has about 1630 kms long international border; 160 km with Bhutan, 1030 kms with China and 440 km with Myanmar" (Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 2010, p.3).

"The political history of Arunachal Pradesh is the history of political isolation for long" (Bath, 2009, p.36). As a young state of India, Arunachal Pradesh has passed through different stages from the Frontier Tract to Frontier Agency, became a Union Territory, and finally elevated to the status of a complete statehood (Bath 2009). The state came into contact with modern administration after the British annexed Assam in 1826. Its origin can be traced back to the introduction of the Inner Line Regulation¹ in 1875 by the British. In 1914, Arunachal got

¹ The inner line regulations, commonly referred to as the Inner Line Permit system (ILP) came into effect through the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations (BEFR), 1873. Under this regulation- "The [State Government] may, by notification in the [Official Gazette], prohibit all [citizens of India or any class of such citizens], or any persons residing in or passing through such districts from going beyond such line without a pass under the hand and seal of the chief executive officer of such district, or of such other officer as he may authorize to grant such pass; and the [State Government] may, from time to time, cancel or vary such prohibition." This regulation applied to the

formal recognition as the North East Frontier Tract through separating some tribal areas from “the then Darrang and Lakhimpur District of the province of Assam by the Foreign and Political Department of the Government of British India” (Bath 2018, p.56). Before independence, the British administered this North East Frontier Tract as “Excluded Area” under the “Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded) Act 1936”.² It consisted of three artificially administered units: “the Balipara Frontier Tract, the Sadiya Tract, and the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract” (Talukdar 1986, 31). After independence, “Arunachal Pradesh was included as Part –B of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. As a tribal area, the Governor of Assam was appointed to administer it as an agent of the President of India” (Chaube 1973, p.188).

The first significant administrative change in this area was affected in 1954 by creating the “North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA)”, under which all the areas of Arunachal Pradesh came under one administrative authority to give them a collective political identity (Talukdar 1986, p.133; 1998). The second significant political change in the present Arunachal Pradesh was the transformation of NEFA to a Union Territory's status as part of the state reorganization process in North East India through the “North East Area (Reorganisation) Act, 1971”. The most significant political development of Arunachal Pradesh in this political evolution was the upgradation of Union territory to a full-fledged state on 20 February 1987. After independence, Arunachal Pradesh passed through a series of territorial and administrative re-organisation processes, which was completed with the formation of a full-fledged state.

To understand the electoral politics, unlike other Indian states, Arunachal did not get the early experience of participation in the electoral process until the introduction of the Panchayat Raj system in NEFA in 1969. The Chinese aggression of 1962 marked a significant impact in this context where the Indian government realised the political and strategic importance of NEFA. The Indian Government felt for a higher level of association of the people for fostering longer and wider political consciousness. Indian government felt the need to bring Arunachal Pradesh into the mainstream of national politics (Talukdar 1986, p.135). For that purpose, “the

districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong (Naogaon), Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Garo Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Naga Hills, and Cachar. It was further extended to the Eastern Dooars in Goalpara district, the Mokokchung subdivision in the Naga Hills, the Sadiya Frontier Tract, the Balipara Frontier Tract, and the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract along the then NEFA.

² Under the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded) Act 1936

Government of India appointed the Daying Ering Committee³ to study the possibility of introducing the modern local self-government in NEFA” (Bath 2009, 45). On the Committee's recommendation, Arunachal Pradesh had experienced a landmark political development by introducing the Panchayat Raj system in 1969. As A C Talukdar points out,

It introduced modern political process and institution in the area, established a uniform pattern or political institution in all the area of the state, introduced elements of indirect elections and gave an all Arunachal perspective to politics in the state. It greatly influenced the traditional political institution of tribal people. In short, it set in motion a series of political forces in the state. (Talukdar 1988, p.188)

Another significant political development to accelerate the democratic process through popular participation happened in 1971 by the enactment of the North East Area (Re-organisation) Act, 1971, which transformed NEFA “into a centrally administered Union Territory with a legislative assembly named Pradesh Council with 30 seats and one seat each for both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha”. The most significant political development took place in 1986 through the Arunachal Act, 1986, which recognised Arunachal Pradesh as the full-fledged state with a unicameral state legislative assembly with 60 seats and two seats for Lok Sabha and one seat for Rajya Sabha.

Though the Panchayat Raj System in 1969 enabled “the people of Arunachal Pradesh to exercise their franchise right, it was not until 1977”, when the rest of the country was voting in the sixth national election, the people of Arunachal Pradesh chose their representatives for both state and the national election in 1977 and 1978. Until 1977, the President of India nominated the members of Parliament from Arunachal Pradesh. Even the people of Arunachal Pradesh were not represented in the legislative assembly of the state of Assam. Due to this fact, it was argued “administrative policies of Arunachal Pradesh has long been determined by the anthropological view that elections are alien to the tribal culture” (Bath 2018, p.63). In this regard, the Bordoloi sub-committee (which was appointed by the Government of India “to

³ Daying Ering Committee was a 4 member committee formed in April 1964 under the Chairmanship of Dr. Daying Ering. It was an investigative body looking into governmental decentralization. Ering Committee Report mainly formed the the basis of establishing Panchayati Raj institutions in Arunachal Pradesh

recommend special measures for the administration of tribals) did not recommend franchise for the people of NEFA as the Committee found that the level of consciousness among the people of Arunachal Pradesh was very low” (Chaube 1973, p.193).

The electoral politics of Arunachal Pradesh has undergone significant changes, which are the concomitant outcome of restructuring of social and political structures and economic development of the state (Bath 2018, p.64). Based on the existing scholarly works on electoral politics of Arunachal Pradesh, the following can be deciphered as significant nature and features of electoral politics of Arunachal Pradesh-

“Arunachal Pradesh is perhaps the only state in India which had a peculiar blend of multiple representatives’ institutions- some traditional and hereditary, some elected” (Mukherjee, 2017, p.15). “Arunachal Pradesh is a tribal majority State with around 26 major tribes each having their own established principles of governing their own communities” (Mukherjee, 2017, p.15). Under the Parliamentary system along with democratic institutions of governance like Governor as the head of the state with unicameral legislature, the Council of minister headed by Chief Minister in Arunachal Pradesh, there are also “traditional institutions of governance based on the customary rules governing the socio-political lives of the tribal clans and groups” (Mukherjee 2017, p.15). Every tribe has its village council or village organisation as a democratic, oligarchic or theocratic form. Among the major communities, “the Monpa had their *Mang Zomsa*, *Kebang* of Apatani, the *Abbala* of the Idu Mishmis, *Mockthung* of the Tangas, the *Muckchup* of the Khamtis are some example of village organisations. The village council system of Singphos, Noctes, Wanchos, Khamti, Tangas called as Chieftains” (Talukdar 1986, p.132). As Mukherjee argues, “these traditional institutions have survived along with modern democratic institutions. There has not been any conflict between the function of the Assemblies and their tribal institutions” (Mukherjee, 2017, p.16). While the tribal chieftains dominate traditional customary institutions, the national parties dominate the state's legislative assembly. In the initial years, the electoral politics of Arunachal Pradesh, Nani Bath observed that the tribal voters in Arunachal Pradesh behaved politically in response to the dictate of society or group. Because of political compulsion and the changes in the restructuring of social and political structures and economic development, clan or group solidarity has been seen to

be diluted. However, primordial group considerations, to some extent, still influence voters' choice of candidates and parties, particularly at local level politics (Bath 2018, p.64).

Arunachal Pradesh has a very tiny number of representatives at parliament due to its small population. As a result, the state does not have much bargaining power than other politically significant states regarding the number of representatives. For a long time, as a "Special Category State," Arunachal Pradesh is heavily dependent on the centre for major financial grants and subsidiaries. Therefore, like any North Eastern state, Arunachal Pradesh is historically inclined towards the central government's Party. In such context, most of the state's political leaders do not have any specific ideological inclination and party affiliation. A leader in Arunachal Pradesh may join any party, not because of his commitment, support to the Party and its ideology, but to contest an election from any party which offers him/her the ticket. The ideology of the leaders changes with time, and it directly relates to government formation in Delhi. "Pragmatism, rather than ideology, dictates their political behaviour" (Bath 2009, p.50).

The electoral politics of Arunachal Pradesh is dominated by the National Party only. However, Arunachal Pradesh has seen the emergence of two main regional parties, the People's Party of Arunachal Pradesh in 1977 and the Arunachal Congress in 1996. But these regional parties in Arunachal Pradesh do not have much significant influence and a popular support base like national parties. In this context, A C Talukdar argued that the main reason for weakening regional forces in Arunachal Pradesh is the politics of defection encouraged by national parties, weak financial position, and a general tendency among voters to support the ruling party at the centre for financial support (Talukdar,1993, p.298).

In Arunachal Pradesh, like political leaders, the voters are also not ideologically committed to any party. Instead of voting for any specific party in the election, voters here mostly prefer candidates as their leaders. In Arunachal Pradesh, ethnic identities matter more in the voting pattern of Arunachal Pradesh (Bath 2004). As a result, many a time, in both general and state elections, an independent candidate wins a significant number of seats. In this case, we can take the state elections of 1990, 1995 and 1995 are glaring evidence of this phenomenon.

6.2.2 Electoral Politics of Arunachal Pradesh

The entry of the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1972 with the formation of its state unit laid the foundation of party politics and party system in Arunachal Pradesh (Bath 2016, p.32). For a long time, before its state formation, Congress was the only political party that remained in power as the dominant Party in both state and general elections. The existential reality of any party except Congress is that the parties remain for a brief period. There have never been a competitive party politics in the state due to the Congress party's strong presence in both state and general elections. The state can be considered as a “Congress state” where one party dominance or “Congress system” (Kothari 1964) has become the dominant feature of party politics in Arunachal Pradesh for a long time. Other national parties like BJP and regional parties did not have a strong foundation or support base for a long time.

Arunachal Pradesh for a long time remained as the ‘Congress state,’ but the state has been the victim of politics of defection, re-defection many times. The first defection politics started in the state just before the first legislative assembly election in 1978. When the Janata Party, after the 1977 general election formed the first non-congress coalition government at the centre in Arunachal Pradesh, the state unit of Congress joined the Janata Party and fought the 1978 election as Janata Party candidates.

In the first state assembly elections, the newly formed first regional party of Arunachal Pradesh, the People’s Party of Arunachal (PPA), also contested the election. In the first legislative assembly election for 30 seats, the Janata Party won 17 seats. It formed the first state government under the re-elected former Congress Chief Minister P K Thongun in 1978. The PPA won eight seats in this first election and five independent candidates won the election. Because of defection and re-defection politics, the Congress party could not win any seat in the first legislative election in Arunachal Pradesh. However, in the second legislative assembly election, both INC (I) and PPA won 13 seats equally. INC (I) formed its first elected state government in Arunachal Pradesh with the support of four independent candidates. From the second assembly election to the 2014 assembly election (Table 6.1) Congress Party remained as the single largest party with an absolute majority to form its government.

Table 6.1: *Electoral performance of Political Parties in Arunachal Pradesh's Assembly Elections*

Party		Seats & Vote	Years of Legislative Assembly Elections in Arunachal Pradesh									
			1978	1980	1984	1990	1995	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019
National Parties	BJP	Seats	1		0	0	9	3	11	41		
		Vote	7.69		3.37	10.83	19	5.21	30.97	50.88		
	INC	Seats	0	13	21	37	43	53	34	42	42	4
		Vote	0.45	42.58	43.07	44.25	50.5	51.78	44.41	50.38	49.5	16.86
	JNP	Seats	17	0	1	2						
		Vote	42.08	0.38	2.28	2.53						
	JD	Seats	11		3							
		Vote	33.34		17.24							
	NCP	Seats					4	2	5	0		
		Vote					8.74	4.28	19.33	3.84		
State Parties	PPA	Seats	8	13	4				4	5	1	
		Vote	30.24	40.98	15.54				7.27	8.96	1.71	
	AC	Seats					1	2				
		Vote					16.68	3.88				
	JD (U)	Seats							0		7	
		Vote							0.62		9.89	
	AITC	Seats							5			
		Vote							15.04			
	NPP	Seats									5	
		Vote									14.55	
Independent Candidates	Seats	5	4	4	11	12	2	13	1	2	2	
	Vote	27.23	11.54	33.33	20.14	26.35	11.87	28.43	2.15	4.92	3.03	

Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India's statistical report of the general election to state legislative assembly, Arunachal Pradesh from 1978-2019 available at <https://eci.gov.in/statistical-report/statistical-reports/> & <https://results.eci.gov.in/>

Although the Congress party remained the formidable force in Arunachal Pradesh before the grant of statehood, the Party also became the worst victim of defection and re-defection many times. At the same time, the position of other political parties, including both national and regional parties, in the election of Legislative Assemblies in Arunachal Pradesh is very minimal. Janata Party as the first ruling Party in Arunachal Pradesh that came to power in 1978 with 17 seats as the single largest party could not get enough popular support in the last elections that it contested till 1995.

The first regional Party of Arunachal Pradesh, People’s Party of Arunachal formed the government in 1979 for 47 days, could not secure a significant position in assembly elections except in the second election. The party won 13 seats along with the Congress Party. The only other national Party, BJP, made a significant political presence only after the 2009 elections. The other political parties like Janata Dal (JD), National Congress Party (NCP), Arunachal Congress (AC), All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), Janata Dal (United), and newly joined National People’s Party (NPP) failed to register any significant impact in electoral politics of Arunachal Pradesh. In comparison with these parties in Arunachal Pradesh, the independent candidates from the first election to the recent 2019 election were able to impact Arunachal Pradesh's electoral politics significantly. In this context the examples of 1978, 1990, 1995, and 2004 assembly elections can be taken into account where an independent candidate won a significant number of seats.

Table 6.2: *Seats won and vote share by Political Parties in Lok Sabha Elections in Arunachal Pradesh*

Year	BJP	INC	AC	PPA	IND
1977	---	1 (41.25)	---	---	1 (58.75)
1980	---	2 (44.13)	---	0 (40.22)	0 (4.78)
1984	---	2 (43.32)	---	0 (34.63)	0 (17.84)
1989	---	2 (49.99)	---	0 (35.21)	0 (14.79)
1991	0 (6.11)	2 (68.92)	---	---	0 (0.29)
1996	0 (17.41)	0 (28.83)	---	---	2 (53.75)
1998	0 (21.75)	0 (23.9)	2 (52.47)	---	----
1999	0 (16.3)	2 (56.92)	0 (16.62)	---	---
2004	2 (53.85)	0 (9.96)	0 (19.88)	---	0(12.14)
2009	0 (37.17)	2 (51.11)	0 (9.3)	0(1.2)	---
2014	1 (46.62)	1 (41.66)	---	0(7.96)	---
2019	2 (58.22)	0 (20.69)	---	0 (4.25)	0 (2.06)

Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India’s statistical report of the general election to Lok Sabha (Arunachal Pradesh) from 1977-2019 available at <https://eci.gov.in/statistical-report/statistical-reports/&https://results.eci.gov.in/>

Similarly, for long time, INC became a formidable force in the Lok Sabha elections by capturing all two seats in most general elections. Only in 1996, 1998, 2004, and recent 2019 elections, INC could not win even a single seat in Arunachal Pradesh. In the 1996 general election for the first time, the state has seen the reverse trend of electing INC candidates since 1980. Two independent candidates Tomo Riba and Wangcha Rajkumar, the two sitting MLA

from Arunachal West and Arunachal East Parliamentary constituency, defeated the official Congress (I) candidate P K Thungon and Laeta Umbrey. In the 1996 Lok Sabha election, both the independent candidates got support from Gegong Apang, who had unfriendly relations with the Congress High Command over the issue of Chakma and Hajong refugees.

In the 1998 election, after the formation of the second regional Party, Arunachal Congress (AC) won both the seats. In the history of Arunachal Pradesh's electoral politics, a regional party won all the two seats in the Lok Sabha elections for the first time. From Arunachal West constituency Omak Apang, a young leader and son of Gegong Apang, defeated INC candidate Jarbom Gamlin with 55.78 per cent vote share, and another Arunachal Congress candidate Wangcha Rajkumar beat BJP candidate Sotai Kri with 50.59 per cent vote share. In the same way, in the 2004 general election, BJP won all two seats in the Lok Sabha elections. The most significant phenomenal victory of BJP was witnessed in the recent 2019 general election, where BJP continues its 2004 general election's trend by winning both the Parliamentary seats in Arunachal Pradesh.

6.3 BJP in Arunachal Pradesh: From Marginal Player to a Formidable Force

The BJP has started its political journey in Arunachal Pradesh by participating in the 1984 Assembly Election. However, until the 2019 Assembly election, BJP remained a marginal player with few seats. The party's strength has increased from 7.69 per cent vote share to 50.88 per cent vote share in the 2019 Assembly election (Table 6.3). As a Congress state BJP could not establish any significant footprint in the political landscape of this state for a long time. However, its parent organization RSS has been working on field in Arunachal Pradesh in an active way from even before the emergence of BJP in the state. Like RSS, both politically and ideologically, Arunachal Pradesh was crucial for BJP's national integration model. Simultaneously, as a frontier Himalayan state sharing borders with China, BJP is strongly motivated to increase its footprint in Arunachal Pradesh due to its territorial tension with the latter. Several insurgent groups and some leaders, notably ULFA's Paresh Barua are allegedly having safe shelter in China (Deka 2018). The geo-strategic location of Arunachal Pradesh and for territorial expansion by materialising 'Congress-Mukt North East Mission' BJP considered the Himalayan state with utmost priority.

Table 6.3 *BJP in Legislative Assembly elections and Lok Sabha Elections in Arunachal Pradesh*

Year	Legislative Assembly		Year	Lok Sabha	
	Seats Won	Vote Share		Seats Won	Vote Share
1984	1	7.69	1991	0	6.11
1990	---	---	1996	0	17.41
1995	0	3.37	1998	0	21.75
1999	0	10.83	1999	0	16.3
2004	9	19	2004	2	55.85
2009	3	5.21	2009	0	37.17
2014	11	30.97	2014	1	46.62
2019	41	50.88	2019	2	58.22

Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India's statistical report of the general election to Lok Sabha & State Assembly Elections (Arunachal Pradesh) available at <https://eci.gov.in/statistical-report/statistical-reports/&https://results.eci.gov.in/>

Traditionally BJP has prolonged and steady growth in both Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. In 1984, Arunachal Pradesh was the first North Eastern state where the BJP could leave its deep political footprint by winning one seat in the Assembly election. BJP contested for total six seats in this first Assembly election in Arunachal Pradesh. Only from Along North constituency BJP candidate Lijum Romya defeated the Congress candidate Talong Taggu by securing 32.21 per cent vote share. As a politician, Lijum Romya contested the election for the first time from the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) in the 1980 Assembly election and lost to a Congress candidate in the Along North constituency. Later, Lijum Romya joined BJP and became the first state president of the BJP when the state unit of BJP was formed in Arunachal Pradesh on 12 August 1983 (Bath 2016, p.91). From the first election to the 1999 Assembly election, BJP could not win a single seat; however, BJP has gradually increased its vote share in the Assembly elections. In the 2004 Assembly election, the BJP contested total 39 seats where BJP won nine seats with 19 per cent vote share.

Figure 6.1: *BJP's Rise in Assembly Elections in Arunachal Pradesh*

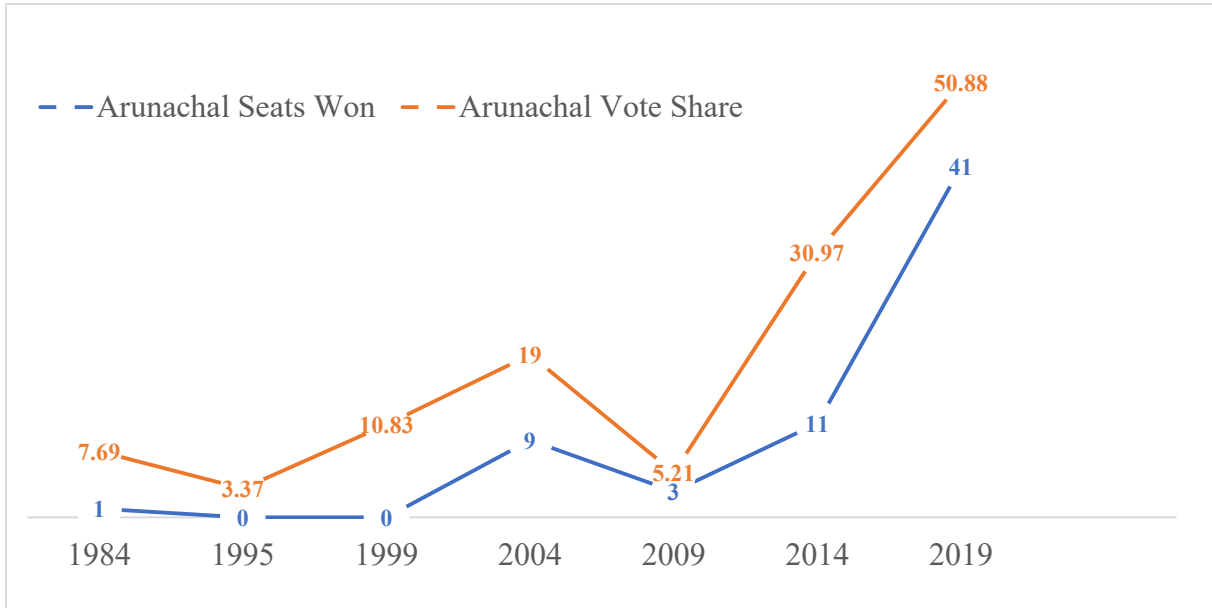
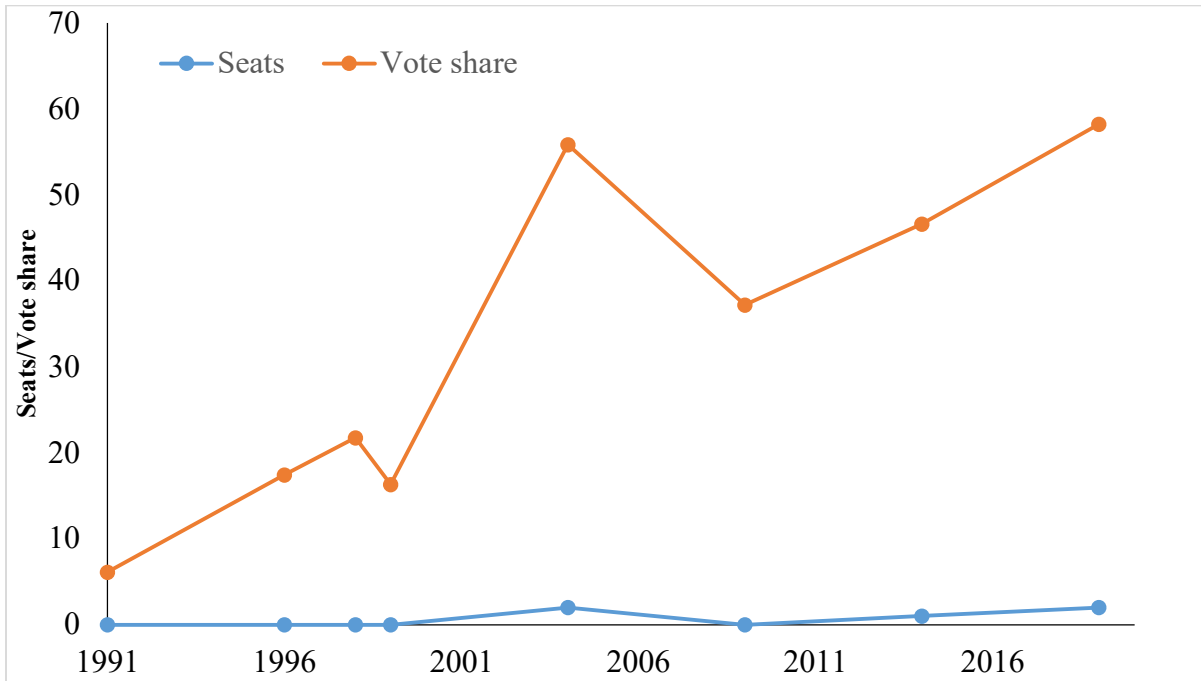


Figure 6.1: *BJP's Rise in Lok Sabha Elections in Arunachal Pradesh*



In the 2009 election, BJP could not maintain its previous trend and was limited to only three seats with 5.21 per cent vote share. From the 2014 Assembly election, BJP came back with a

significant electoral presence in the state. In the 2014 state election, unlike other parts of India, although the “Modi Wave” could not influence at large, for the first time BJP registered significant victories with 11 seats and the highest ever vote share of 30.97 per cent in Arunachal Pradesh. BJP has made a phenomenal rise in recent 2019 state elections as a formidable force in Arunachal Pradesh with 41 seats and 50.88 per cent vote share.

In the Lok Sabha elections, though the BJP made its maiden entry in the 10th Lok Sabha election 1991, till the 2004 Lok Sabha election, BJP could not win even a single seat. However, the Party has significantly improved its vote share from 6.11 per cent vote share to 16.3 per cent. In the 2004 general election, Arunachal Pradesh became the second North Eastern state after Assam, where BJP with 55.85 per cent vote share won both the parliamentary seats. Tapir Gao from Arunachal East and Kiren Rijiju from Arunachal West constituency won both the parliamentary seats. However, in the 2009 Lok Sabha election, the Congress candidates with 51.11 per cent vote share defeated both the BJP candidates. In the 2014 General election, the BJP candidate from Arunachal West constituency Kiren Rijiju returned with 46.62 per cent vote share and was rewarded with Union Minister of State for Home Affairs. The 2019 General election became a significant landmark for the BJP in Arunachal Pradesh. BJP candidate Kiren Rijiju and Tapir Gao won both the seats to Lok Sabha and BJP secured 58.22 per cent vote share.

Arunachal Pradesh has experienced strong one-party dominance of the Congress system for a long time in terms of the government formation process. The BJP as another national party has never had the experience of forming its own elected government until the recent 2019 election. However, the Party has formed its state government two times in 2003 and 2016 only through defection, merger from other political parties like the Indian National Congress and People’s Party of Arunachal Pradesh. After the first assembly election, Janata Party formed the first state government in Arunachal Pradesh under the leadership of former Congress Chief Minister P K Thungson. With the Janata Party government's breakdown at the centre in 1979, Arunachal Pradesh also faced re-defection politics where 17 MLAs withdrew their support from the Janata Government at the state.

Table 6.4: *The State Governments in Arunachal Pradesh from 1978-present*

Assembly Elections	Largest Party	Seats	Chief Ministers	Term	Contesting Party	Governing Party
1978	JNP	17	Prem Khandu Thungon	1978-6/09/1979	JNP	JNP
			Late Tomo Riba	18/09/1979-3/11/1979	PPA	UPPA
1980	INC	13	Gegong Apang	18/1/1980-18/01/1999	INC	INC
1984	INC	21			INC	INC
1990	INC	37			INC	INC
1995	INC	43			INC	AC
1999	INC	53	Mukut Mithi	19/01/1999 - 2/08/2003	INC	INC
			Gegong Apang	3/08/2003-9/04/2007	AC	UDF
2004	INC	34	Dorjee Khandu	10/04/2007-31/04/2011	INC	INC
2009	INC	42	Jarbam Gamlin	5/05/2011-1/11/2011	INC	INC
			Nabam Tuki	1/11/2011-26/01/2016	INC	INC
2014	INC	42	Kalikho Pul	19/02/2016-13/07/2016	INC	PPA
			Nabam Tuki	13/07/2016-17/07/2016	INC	INC
			Pema Khandu	17/07/2016-16/09/2016	INC	INC
				16/09/2016-31/12/2016	INC	PPA
				31/12/2016-29/05/2019	INC	BJP
2019	BJP	41		29/05/2019 -till	BJP	BJP

Source: Directorate of Information & Public Relations Government of Arunachal Pradesh http://www.arunachalipr.gov.in/?page_id=329 and <https://www.mapsofindia.com/arunachal-pradesh/chief-ministers.html>

As a result, the Janata Party resigned on 6 September, and with the support of defected MLA's, the People's Party of Arunachal under the leadership of Tomo Riba formed a new government on 18 September 1979 with a new name United People's Party of Arunachal Pradesh (UPPA) (Bath 2016, 33). However, this UPPA government remained in power for 47 days due to re-defection to the newly formed Congress (I). In such a situation, the assembly was dissolved in

November 1979, and President's rule was imposed. With the second legislative assembly election result, both the INC (I) and the PPA equally won 13 seats. The Congress party formed its first elected government under Gegong Apang with the support of 4 independent candidates. In Arunachal Pradesh, Gegong Apang becomes the longest-serving Chief Minister from 1980 to 1999. The Congress (I) Chief Minister Apang remained in power for more than 15 years till the formation of his own Party Arunachal Congress in 1996. Over the citizenship issue of Chakmas and Hajong, Apang had a disagreement with the Congress party. Apang resigned from the Congress and formed a new party Arunachal Congress and remained in power as Arunachal Congress government in the state for two years. Arunachal Congress became part of the BJP led NDA government at the centre. As the regional party for the first time, Arunachal Congress won both the parliamentary seats in the 1998 general election. However, Arunachal Congress was voted out of power in the 1999 Assembly election. Again, the Congress party headed by Mukut Mithi came to power with 53 seats as the single largest Party who remained in power till 2003.

In July 2003, during the Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, Gegong Apang, who was a dissident Congress leader, toppled the Mukut Mithi-led Congress government and emerged as the Chief Minister under the newly floated United Democratic Front (UDF). UDF later merged with the BJP, making it the first time that the BJP was a part of the ruling dispensation in the state, as Tony Jamoh points out in an interview, without having a single elected MLA from the Party. Apang had also justified his position of joining the BJP to bring the region into the "national mainstream" (Bath 2016, p.38). However, in 2004, when the BJP lost to the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government at the Centre, Mr Gegong Apang returned to the Congress party and stood for a Congress ticket. Apang justified his decision as "It is a homecoming for all of us. It is the Congress party alone, which has always had a presence at the grassroots level in Arunachal Pradesh" (Talukdar, 2004). Thus, in 2003 the BJP that had merged with the UDF came to power in the Arunachal Pradesh not by winning the popular mandate, which the INC won, but by merging with Gegong Apang, who was on a hiatus from the INC for a few months.

On the same line, the BJP came back to power in 2016 in Arunachal Pradesh under Pema Khandu, the son of former Chief Minister Darji Khandu. Pema Khandu, as an MLA from

Congress party in the 2014 state election, defected first to the PPA and then to the BJP. He was sworn in as the 9th Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh on 17th July 2016, replacing Nabam Tuki as a consensus candidate after months of political turmoil. Mr Khandu had the support of 45 party MLAs along with two Independent MLAs. Since his coming to power as the “Chief Minister in July 2016, he and his government changed their party affiliation on two occasions. After the political battle against the Party, on Sept. 16, 2016, 43 MLAs from the Congress party and Mr Pema Khandu defected from the INC to the People’s Party of Arunachal Pradesh (PPA), an ally of the BJP” (Kashyap 2016). The second defection began on 21st Dec. 2016, when Khandu was suspended along with six other MLAs from “the PPA by the party president and Takam Pario was named as the next likely CM of the state” (Firstpost 2016). “In December 2016, Khandu proved his majority in the house with 33 of the PPA’s 43 legislators joining the BJP, making him the second CM of BJP in Arunachal Pradesh after Gegong Apang in 2003” (The Indian Express 2017a).

Both the times they came to power not by winning the popular mandate but due to their mergers and defections by members of the ruling party. There appeared to have a link between the party ruling in the centre and defections to that Party. In an interview with Ashan Riddi, Secretary-General of the People’s Party of Arunachal (PPA) on 25 July 2018, he stated: ‘BJP did not rise in Arunachal Pradesh, rather it is due to change of Government in the Centre, representatives defected and shifted to BJP. BJP did not get people's verdict in the election to the State Assembly.’ One common factor visible when the BJP came to power in the state is that the same Party was ruling in the Centre. Ranju Dodum, a journalist with the Dawnlit Post comments that ‘the biggest factor’ behind the defections ‘is that in the Centre the BJP is in power hence the shift. It was the Congress that had actually won the state election back in 2014. It was only later that the shift to the BJP happened. The reason being that the state is "fund-crunched", and having the same Party in power helps in procuring funds. Here, I think, funds is really euphemism for money to be pocketed.’ Dodum notes that the MLAs wanted to join the BJP for fund/money to be pocketed, but the process of defection was slowed down because they feared a ‘possible backlash from the public. Arunachal politicians have a bad reputation for being *'aya ram, gaya ram'* so they wanted to make it appear as though they were unhappy with the Congress leadership but also did not want to outrightly go with what is perceived as a Hindu-favouring party in the BJP. The process of joining the BJP was being

orchestrated for a long time. All of them did not join because another MLA, Takam Pario, wanted to be the CM.’

Tony Jamoh, mentions that Arunachal Pradesh has a near total dependence on the Centre for funds as there is meagre revenue generation due to poor infrastructure, transportation, accessibility. Such dependence has led to everyone wanting to be in power leading to rampant defection by leaders. Political ideology is not taken seriously except by a few loyal cadres. That defection leading to change in the ruling Party has an adverse impact on the pace of development of the state was mentioned in an interview by Mr Tapen Siga, a BJP member who never changed his Party, who had won a Lok Sabha seat in 2004, but lost in 2009. However, Tony Jamoh points out that since the BJP is in power both at the Centre and state, defection chances are low. However, he notes that tensions may appear during ticket distribution.

The lack of adherence to party ideology of those partaking in defections is evident given the pace and rate of party shifts. Elaborating on the high rate of defections, Riddi commented that, ‘Politicians are not oriented towards ideologies or issues. Democracy in the State is yet to mature.’ Ashan Riddi even noted that there “may be” more defections in the months to come. On 17 July 2018, seven of the nine PPA MLAs joined the NPP, which indicates that more defections are probably on the cards.

With regard to the alliance and regional parties, Dodum notes ‘Alliances have not played many roles in Arunachal as most times parties win by a clear majority. As for the PPA, it's become what is popularly called here as a 'parking lot' where the MLAs decide to halt before moving on. History shows it's true.’ This was borne out by the recent defections in 2016 when the Congress MLAs first joined the PPA and then joined the BJP.

6.4 BJP in 2019 Elections: Politics and Strategy

The impressive performance of BJP in both the 2019 Lok Sabha and Assembly Election can be seen as a turning point in Arunachal Pradesh's state politics. It ousted the one-party dominance of the Congress party and transformed it into a saffron surge. For the first time, a party with Hindu Nationalist ideology came to power in this frontier Himalayan state. BJP, as the single largest party won 41 seats including three unopposed seats with the highest ever 50.86 per cent vote share in state politics. On the other hand, the long-standing Congress party

has to limit itself to just four seats with 16.85 per cent vote share and achieved/attained the fourth position according to its electoral performance. At the same time, Janata Dal (United), who fought for the second time after the 2009 Assembly election, became the second Party with seven seats and 9.88 per cent vote share. The only regional party of the state- PPA lost the election severely-It just won one seat with 1.73 per cent vote share, whereas the newly entered political Party National People's Party (NPP) won 5 seats with 14.56 per cent vote share. BJP's three candidates Phrupa Tsering from Dirang constituency, Taba Tedir from Yachuli and Kento Jini from Along West constituency, won the election as unopposed candidates. Among the winning BJP candidates, Chief Minister Pema Khandu, his deputy Chown Mein, and most former ministers who contested as the BJP candidate won the election.

Like in other North Eastern states, in Arunachal Pradesh, BJP understands very well that only with the religious card, marginal support base, and weak organisational base, the Party could not challenge the Congress party's dominance in this state. In the North Eastern region, for their electoral gain, the BJP used mainly the anti-incumbency factor of past government and development as a key factor along with identity issues. BJP also transformed itself into a localised form along with its parent-organisation RSS. It was the mastermind in appropriation strategy; it hegemonised the alliance politics with informal mechanisms like North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA).

BJP by following its "mission 60 plus 2" strategy, aimed to win all the seats in the 2019 general and state election in Arunachal Pradesh. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP President Amit Shah, and then Assam's Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, the star campaigner, campaigned for BJP (Economic Times 2019). BJP contested the election by highlighting its development work initiated in the state, including the construction of highways, new air connectivity, power projects, and their initiative towards a corrupt-free transparent government in Arunachal Pradesh. Before the election, the Prime Minister-visited the state many times to inaugurate laying the foundation stone of many development projects. Each time, the Prime Minister highlighted the significance of the government's initiatives. On 9 February 2019, while inaugurating and "laying the foundation stone of projects in Arunachal Pradesh worth over 4000 crores", Narendra Modi highlighted the significance of the Himalayan state where "his government is giving a lot of importance to improve connectivity in the sensitive border

state”. Prime Minister Modi also recognised the frontier state as the symbol of faith for the centre, which provides them with strength (PIB 2019; Business line 2019). Prime Minister also “laid the foundation for constructing a Greenfield airport at Hollongi” and, under the UDAN scheme, inaugurated another upgraded and retrofitted airport Tezu in Arunachal Pradesh. On the same day, he also “laid the foundation stone of Sela Tunnel in Arunachal, which will provide all-weather connectivity to Tawang valley”. PM Modi also inaugurated “the new Doordarshan 24-hour TV channel for Arunachal named DD Arun Prabha”. He also dedicated the 110 MW Pare Hydroelectric plan to the nation, which will provide cheap hydroelectric power to the North Eastern states. Modi laid “the foundation stone for the permanent campus of Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) at Jote”. Under the Ayushman Bharat scheme, Modi “inaugurated 50 health and wellness centres in Arunachal Pradesh. BJP, through these development projects, could successfully convey the message that the development trajectory of Arunachal Pradesh is taking at a faster pace with NDA and Pema Khandu led BJP State government in the state” (PIB, 2019).

Similarly, during the election time, the BJP government also earned the credit of completing two long river bridges over the Brahmaputra and its tributary Lohit River, i.e., the Dhola Sadiya Bridge and Bogibeel Bridge under their regime. These two bridges have strategic importance between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh as it cuts the travel time, remove the communication bottleneck to a number of districts in neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh, and is likely to play an important role in defence movement along the Indo-China border (India Today, 2018). As a result, in his public meeting during the election campaign at Pasighat in the East Siang district, Narendra Modi directly appealed to the people of Arunachal to vote for BJP. In his words,

To protect and develop Arunachal Pradesh, you need to ensure that NDA form government at the centre. The Congress did not give Northeast any place here and even in Delhi. It was Atal Bihari Vajpayee who built a separate ministry for the Northeast. Congress only works for vote bank, even if the country is suffering. (Time8, 2019)

As an effective strategy, BJP has hegemonised the alliance politics through their informal political mechanism NEDA. The experiment of NEDA has helped BJP in throwing out the Congress regime from all the North Eastern states. In Arunachal Pradesh, the BJP has joined

hands with the only regional parties PPA in 2016. Before this NEDA formation, the BJP has an electoral understanding with PPA and other parties like Arunachal Congress in many times. At the cost of regional parties, BJP has been successful in establishing its significant footprint in the political landscape of Arunachal Pradesh as the dominant national player. On 16 September 2016, Congress MLA Pema Khandu along with 42 Congress MLAs defected from INC to People's Party of Arunachal Pradesh, an ally of BJP led NEDA. He formed a PPA government with the support of the BJP. However, in December 31, 2016, Pema Khandu and 33 PPA's legislators left the Party and joined BJP to make Arunachal Pradesh again a saffron state. In the 2019 Assembly election, BJP became the largest Party with 41 legislators and formed a BJP government at state on 29 May. The other political parties like JD (U) and NPP also as alliance partners of NDA and NEDA gave their unconditional support to the BJP state government in Arunachal Pradesh (Arunachal Times 2019; Northeast Today 2019).

The BJP as a party is remarkably more adaptable in terms of localizing its perspective/attitude. It regionalised the Party's viewpoint through their electoral gain. The BJP's significant strategy of co-opting existing political leaders from other political parties proved to be quite successful in ousting the dominance of Congress party from this region. Like other North Eastern states, BJP -has been instrumental in defection politics, which resulted in massive defection among political leaders. Many of them left their original Party and joined the BJP government in the state. The worst victims of the defection and re-defection politics faced by two major parties are INC and PPA. The study clearly makes it evident that the BJP has recorded an inorganic growth in the state politics of Arunachal Pradesh and it is manifested by the increasing strength of the total BJP MLAs in the state in both 2014 and 2019 Assembly elections. During 2014 Assembly election, BJP secured only 11 seats with 30.97 per cent vote share and the INC secured 42 seats with 49.5 vote share, and PPA secured 5 seats with 8.96 vote share. However, on 31 December 2016 BJP formed its government under the leadership of Pema Khandu who contested from INC party and defected to PPA with 42 MLA and formed a PPA government on 16 September 2016. On 31 December Khandu, along with 32 MLA from PPA, again defected to BJP and formed a BJP government. In 2016, among the total 48 MLAs, the BJP's original(own) MLAs were 15. Among them, 30 MLAs were initially from INC party including Chief Minister Pema Khandu, who first joined PPA and then joined BJP, also three MLA from PPA party joined BJP with Khandu government (see Table 6.5).

Table 6.5: BJP MLAs after two Assembly Elections From 2014-2019

BJP after 2016	Strength	BJP in 2019	Strength
BJP Original (own) MLAs	15	BJP Original (own) MLAs	24
INC to BJP MLAs	30	INC to BJP MLAs	15
PPA to BJP MLAs	3	PPA to BJP MLAs	2
Total	48	Total	41

Source: Author's own calculation based on Election Commission of India's statistical report on State Assembly Elections, Arunachal Pradesh from 2014-2019 available at <https://eci.gov.in/statistical-report/statistical-reports/&https://results.eci.gov.in/>

In the same way, during the 2019 Assembly election, although BJP denied ticket to 15 sitting MLAs, including six ministers of the former BJP government, most of the sitting BJP MLAs and former ministers won from their constituencies. Among the total 41 BJP MLAs, nine BJP original members won seats, whereas 15 new BJP candidates became successful, and 15 out of 18 former INC MLA joined BJP in 2016 won from their constituencies. Two former PPA MLAs also contributed two seats as the BJP MLAs in the 2019 Assembly election. The table clearly shows the part-changing trend among political leaders in Arunachal Pradesh, where the leaders are not ideologically committed to any specific party. Over the ticket issue as a form of opportunist politics and because of the dependency factor, the factor of the party at the centre can be seen as the party shifting trend among leaders. Based on table 6, the table 7 provides a detailed elaboration about some specific examples of this study and the party's changing trend among political leaders in Arunachal Pradesh. It examines how party changing direction among politicians becomes a significant factor of a party like BJP's phenomenal rise in a short period.

Table 6.6: Party Changing Trends in Arunachal Pradesh

S. No	Constituency	Name of the MLA	Party in 2014 Assembly Election	Party in 2019 Assembly Election
1.	Lumla (ST)	Jambey Tashi	INC	BJP
2.	Mukto (ST)	Pema Khandu	INC	BJP
3.	Dirang (ST)	Phurpa Tsering	INC	BJP
4.	Thrizino- Buragaon (ST)	Kumsi Sidisow	INC	BJP
5.	Seppa West (ST)	Mama Natung	INC	BJP
6.	Nyapin (ST)	Bamang Felix	INC	BJP
7.	Mechukha (ST)	Pasang Dorjee Sona	PPA	BJP

8.	Tuting-Yingkiong (ST)	Alo Libang	INC	BJP
9.	Dambuk (ST)	Gum Tayeng	INC	BJP
10.	Chowkham (ST)	Chow Tewa Mein	INC	BJP
11.	Namsai (ST)	Chau Zingnu Namchoom	INC	BJP
12.	Miao (ST)	Kamlung Mossang	INC	BJP
13.	Changlang South (ST)	Phosum Khimhun	INC	BJP
14.	Namsang (ST)	Wangki Lowang	INC	BJP
15.	Khonsa East (ST)	Wanglam Sawin	PPA	BJP
16.	Kanubari (ST)	Gabriel Denwang Wangsu	INC	BJP
17.	Pongchau-Wakka (ST)	Honchun Ngandam	INC	BJP

Source: Data Compilation by Author based on Election Commission of India's statistical report on State Assembly Elections, Arunachal Pradesh from 2014-2019 available at <https://eci.gov.in/statistical-report/statistical-reports/&https://results.eci.gov.in/>

Thus, this table shows in Arunachal Pradesh's context how BJP's significant strategy of co-opting existing political leaders from other political parties played an important role in ousting the Congress party from the state.

After this significant electoral victory of BJP in both general as well as state assembly elections, the party also maintained its strong consolidation in the panchayat and municipal elections in 2020. BJP won over 5000 panchayat and five municipal council's seats ahead of the local body polls (EastMojo, 2020). Before the Panchayat and Municipal elections, the party had won in an unopposed manner 96 Zila Parishad members (ZPM) out of total 240 posts, 5410 Gram Panchayat Members (GPM) seats of the 8,291 posts and 5 out of the 20 Municipal corporation (EastMojo, 2020)

6.5 BJP in Manipur

Among the states of North East India, Manipur has a distinct salience in understanding the political dynamics of the region. Manipur is the first state in India to practise adult franchises in 1948 for its assembly election before the first general election for the whole nation in 1952. The political journey of Manipur from a princely state with constitutional monarchy to centrally administered chief commissioner territory and later from a union territory to a full-fledged state of India provide us ample points to understand the changing political dynamics of the state. The socio-cultural ethnic diversity of the state also marked a significant point to understand the power dynamics of the state. The recent rise of BJP as the alternative national player after Congress in the state with its already existing Hindutva forces also raises significant points to discuss the electoral politics of Manipur. This section will discuss the changing political dynamics of Manipur in the context of the recent rise of BJP in the state. To discuss these dynamics, this section is divided into four parts. The first part will discuss the political journey of Manipur and the nature of the electoral politics Manipur has experienced. The second section will discuss the electoral politics of Manipur in the context of Lok Sabha and the State Assembly election and government formation process at the state. The third and fourth section will discuss the recent rise of BJP in the state by looking at its political dynamics.

6.5.1 Political history of Manipur: From Kingdom to an Indian State

“Manipur is situated in the North Eastern part of India comprising both hilly ranges and plain areas”(Nag, 2005). Manipur is “bounded by Mizoram in the south, Nagaland in the north and Assam in the west, and Myanmar in the east” (Nag, 2005). Manipur since ancient time had different names such as “Meitrabak, Kangleipak or Meitei Leipak, Poireipak” and the present name of Manipur is “a new nomenclature which was adopted during the reign of Meitei king Garib Niwaz alias Pamheiba in the eighteen century” (Nag, 2005,p.54). “Manipur, with an area of 22,327 sq km, comprises two regions -the hill and the valley. According to the 2011 census, Manipur has a population of 28,55,790”. The hill area of Manipur constitutes about 90 per cent or 20, 126 sq km of its total area, and 41.1 per cent population live in the hilly region. On the other hand, the valley area constitutes only 10 per cent, i.e., 2, 101 sq km of its total area, where 58.9 per cent population live in the valley area (Nag, 2005; Singh, 2017). The

population of Manipur can be divided into two broad categories—the highlanders and lowlanders. The highlanders consist of almost the scheduled tribe population that splits into two main groups, i.e., the Naga tribes and the Kuki tribes, whereas the lowlanders consist of mainly Meiteis and other communities (Oinam and Akoijam, 2002, p. 520). The valley or plain area is inhabited by the non-tribal people such as the Meitei ethnic groups, primarily Vaishnavite Hindu or Bishnupriya Meitei and Meitei-Pangals who follow Islamic faith and also some other migrant groups. More than 29 tribes inhabit the Hilly region with 34.20 per cent population ethnically divided into the Naga group, Kuki-Chin-Mizo group, and the intermediary groups of the tribe (Singh, 2017; Nag, 2005). Population-wise the Meiteis are the major groups of people in Manipur and the Nagas, the second largest. After Naga, the another major ethnic group in Manipur is the Kuki. Among Kuki, about 37 per cent sub-tribe is divided into two clans, i.e., old Kuki and the new Kuki. “The old Kuki comprises of Kom, Anal, Hmas, Kireng, Choths, Purum, Mantak, Gangte, Vaiphei, Hiroi or Lamgagn whereas the new Kuki tribe include thadou, Singsol, Changloe, Haokip, Simete, Vingson, Changit, Manvungagd so on” (Nag, 2005, p.54-55). The tribal population of Manipur are ‘said to be “recent arrivals nearly 200 years ago compared to the Meiteis who are very old inhabitants” (Zehol, 1988, p. 40 cited in Singh, 2017).

According to the 2011 census in Manipur, Meiteis and others consist of 63.5 per cent of the state population. Schedule Tribe consists of 34.5 per cent population, where Schedule Caste constitutes 2 per cent population of the state. Religion wise as per the last census, “Hindu consists 41.4 per cent of the population, Christian consists of 41.3 per cent of the population, Muslims constitute 8.39 per cent population, Sanamahi 8.18 per cent, Sikhism 0.05 per cent, Jainism 0.05, Buddhism 0.24 and others include 2.98 per cent present population” (Census of India, 2011).

As historian Sajal Nag points “according to the royal chronicle of Manipur, ‘*the Cheitharol Kunbaba*’, the recorded history of the State begins with the reign of King or Meidingu Nongdal Hairen Pakhangba in 33 AD. Meidingu Pakhangba was the first coroneted historical ruler who ruled the kingdom for 120 long years. He was the pioneer to initiate the Meitei state formation in the valley” (Nag, 2005, p.58). During this period, before the Burmese invasion (1819-1825),

there were altogether 74 kings who ruled the kingdom. From 1755 to 1825 Manipur kingdom faced severe attack and invasion from Burmese forces. The Burmese force many times occupied Manipur and annexed some parts of its territory to Myanmar. However, the entrance of the British with the call from the Manipur king into the internal affairs of the kingdom led to a significant change in Manipur. The interaction of Manipur with the British started in 1758 when the Burmese permanently annexed some parts of Manipur, King of Manipur Jai Singh (1750-1798) requested the East India Company at Calcutta to save the kingdom from Burmese invasion. A treaty was signed between the Manipur king and the British in 1762; however, the British could not help the king at that time. In 1819 again, the Burmese attacked and occupied Manipur. From 1819 Manipur was under Burmese suzerainty for seven years. “This period was known as *Chahi-Taret-Khuntakpa* (seven years devastation)” (Ngalengnam, 2002). Manipur King Gambhir Singh fled to Cachar in Assam, which was a British protected area. Manipur King again requested the British for their help. In 1824 British and Burmese had fought the Anglo-Burmese war in many places, including Manipur, and defeated the Burmese force very severely. Manipur King also moved to Manipur and drove the Burmese from Manipur.

In 1826 Burmese forces surrendered and signed the Yandaboo Treaty⁴ on 24th February 1826; “Burmese recognised Gambhir Singh as the Raja of Manipur” (Nag, 2005). In 1826 although Manipur king Gambhir Singh with the British's help, liberated the Manipur Kingdom from the Burmese but came under the British suzerainty as its protected states (Sinha, 1987). Through Yandaboo Treaty, although Gambhir Singh was reinstated as the King of Manipur, the British without any formal agreement, started interfering with the State's internal affairs. British treated Manipur as their protected state, which resulted in the “Anglo- Manipuri battle in 1891, and the British defeated the Manipur king. After this battle, Manipur remained a Princely state under the political control of the British India Empire” (Nag, 2005). From 1891 to 1947 Manipur had been a princely state under British paramountcy. Though Manipur was under

⁴ The Treaty of Yandaboo was signed in the year 1826 between East India Company and His Majesty the King of Ava. This treaty ended the First Anglo-Burmese War. The Treaty of Yandaboo was signed on February 24, 1826 by General Sir Archibald Campbell on the British side, and by Governor of Lagaing Maha Min Hla Kyaw Htin from the Burmese side. Through this treaty, the British had entered and establish.

British paramountcy, Manipur was not annexed into British India(Singh, 2009). In 1946 Manipur raja announced the formation of a constitution-making body as a popular pressure to establish a constitutional monarchy. This led to the enactment of the “Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947”⁵ and the “Manipur Hill People (Administration) Regulation Act, 1947”⁶.

After India’s independence, the Manipur king signed the “Instrument of Accession and the Stand Still Agreement” with the Central government, which gave Manipur political autonomy as the princely state within the Indian union. Simultaneously, Manipur King also inaugurated the Interim Council of Manipur with a Chief Minister (his younger brother) and four ministers from Plains and two ministers from the hills on 14th August 1947 make Manipur a constitutional monarchy (Sinha, 1987). Under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947, the election was held in March 1948, and Manipur became the first state in India after independence to introduce adult franchise on Assembly election. However, on October 15, 1949, the princely state of Manipur merged with the Indian federation through an agreement between the King of Manipur and the Government of India (Sinha, 1987; Singh, 2017). With the merger, first Manipur became a centrally administered territory. Under Part C of India's Constitution, Manipur was converted to a Chief Commissioner administered unit. Since 1950 Manipur became the category “C” State governed by Chief Commissioner with an Advisory Council nominated by the government. In 1956, 1 November, Manipur became a Union Territory, and “Advisory Council was replaced by a Territorial Council composed of 30 elected and two nominated members in 1957”(Nag, 2005).In 1963 Government of India, under the Territorial Act, 1963 formed a legislative assembly with 30 elected and three nominated members. On December 19, 1969, the status of administrator was transferred from Chief Commissioner to Lieutenant Governor. On 21 January 1972, under the “North East Area (Reorganisation) Act, 1971”, Manipur became a full-fledged state with a unicameral legislature consisting of 60 members (Nag, 2005).

⁵ Manipur State Constitution Act 1947 is an act which enabled Manipur State to have a de jure written constitution enacted by the last Maharajah of Manipur Bodhchandra Singh.

⁶

6.5.2 Electoral Politics of Manipur: Nature and Changes

The Political Journey of Manipur started from a Kingdom before independence to a princely state during the British era. After independence, Manipur became a constitutional monarchy and then a centrally administered political unit. Later on, it became a Union Territory to a full-fledged State of Union of India. Manipur is a small state with 22,327 sq km, with 27, 21, 756 populations with a unicameral legislature with 60 electoral Constituents. Out of these 60 Constituencies, 19 are reserved for Schedule Tribes, one for Schedule castes, and 40 seats for unreserved category. The total 60 constituencies are spread over nine districts where Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur falls in valley area that share 40 seats, and the other five districts i.e. Okhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong, Chura Chandpur and Chandel are in hill area which shares total 20 seats (Oinam and Akoijam, 2002). For parliamentary election, Manipur has two Lok Sabha constituencies, i.e., Inner Manipur and Outer Manipur. One seat is reserved for Schedule Tribe. For a long time until 1989 July, both Manipur and Nagaland shared a common governor for the states.

While discussing the electoral politics of Manipur, Oinam and Akoijam (2002) see the nature of Manipur politics as a unique example of an unstable political climate where, “change of party loyalty, shifting alliances both in the individual and collective levels, are as so frequent and ruthless that the state has witnessed ever since it became a full-fledged state in 1972...” (Oinam and Akoijam, 2002, p.519). Bhagat Oinam used the term ‘directionless’ to define the political instability in election politics in Manipur. For Oinam,

the lack of proper political space which offers options in the exercise of adult franchise. Frequent changes of party loyalties and the nurturing of self interest by the elected representatives have not only weakened the foundation of Party based politics, but also led to the loss of collective commitment towards the state and its people. (Oinam,2002, p. 2683)

As Oinam and Akoijam (2002) argued, the electoral politics of Manipur is free from the communal politics that differs from the rest of India. For example, the voting pattern of Meities is not based on whatever religious divide exists among them based on culture. “Although voting is not done on religious grounds in the state, certain identity-based politics do occur, especially in the hills. The grouping based on tribal identity played a crucial role in the

hills”(Oinam and Akoijam, 2002, p.520). In the valley, to some extent, clan lineage plays a crucial role in the election. People tend to vote for candidates close to their kin where a clan is demographically distributed in rural areas. Even in some rural areas, a village as a whole or a ‘Leikai’ tends to go for collective voting (Oinam and Akoijam, 2002, p.520).

Another important nature of the electoral politics of Manipur is the importance of the individual over the Party (Oinam, 2002). In Manipur, candidates rather than political parties get more priority among the electorates (Singh, 2004). For example, in many Assembly elections, individual candidates performed much better than any political party. During the 1972 election, the independent candidates won 19 seats with 31.08 per cent vote share. In the 1980 election, independent candidates won 19 seats with 28.98 per cent vote share, and in 1984 election 21 seats with 43.12 per cent vote share. This is because of the lack of a grassroots party base, which naturally opens up to the only alternatives, the ‘individual’. As Oinam points, “ due to the failure of the political parties to provide specific ideologies and political stand, electorate are not given room to exercise their freedom to choose. The lack of political leadership also account for this vacuum” (2002, p.2685).

In Manipur, as a multi-party state, most political parties were not firmly rooted and active only during the election(Singh, 2017). Most of the political parties are financially weak and can not stand against bigger parties; hence party politics and ideology become secondary where party affiliations often change over time during the election (Singh, 2005). In an interview, professor S. Mangi Sing mentioned,

the regional parties in Manipur are very fragile. Although Manipur has numerous regional parties but none of these parties is strong . Regional parties could not win more than 4-5 seats, so obviously, they will not stand on their own, and the only option is to ally with a bigger party or national Party, whether it is Congress or BJP. In Manipur, regional parties mostly lean towards national parties. And now BJP is the Party in power at the centre, so it is not surprising that they allied with BJP. (Interview with Author, 2019)

Unlike the other North Eastern States, In Manipur, the dependency factor affects a lot in determining the State's electoral politics. “Since being the Party in power at the centre also

being an effective changing factor of state governments in Manipur many times. During the 1977 general election, when the Janata Party formed its first non-congress government at the centre,” then in Manipur, most of the legislators of the current ruling Party INC defected to Janata Party and formed a Janata Party state government at state under the Chief Ministership of Yangmasho Shaza. Yangmasho Shaza was elected to the Lok Sabha on an INC ticket. However, after the Janata Party government's collapse at the centre, the ministry was thrown out of power.

Similarly, during 2001 many INC legislators defected to the Samata Party in alliance with BJP led NDA at the centre. In Manipur from 15 February 2001 to 1 June 2002, Samata Party formed its coalition government with the leadership of Radhabinod Koijam. In the same way, in 2017, the formation of the BJP government in Manipur also can be seen as a significant factor of the dependency syndrome.

In Manipur, opposition parties become very weak to highlight the people’s issue or stand against the ruling party inside or outside the legislative assembly (Singh, 2017). Opposition parties in Manipur continuously have no co-operation among themselves and hence failed to perform their responsibility. As Amarjit Singh mentioned:

Manipur is not known to have an effective opposition in the past. The opposition have always been very weak and divided and often the distinction between the ruling and the opposition parties has been blurred. This was due to the fact that the elected representatives always preferred to be a part of the government so that they also got their share of benefits. (Singh,2017, p.514)

“Electoral politics in Manipur is relatively new but marked by a large number of parties and loose coalition” (Singh, 2017, p.513). In Manipur, since the first assembly election to the present time, the state has been about 16 coalition government (see Table 6.6). Most of the coalition governments were unstable and lasted only for some months. Since its statehood, the President’s rule was proclaimed in the state for more than nine times of about 80 months, nearly seven years (Singh, 2017,p.513).

In the government formation process in Manipur since its first assembly election, Manipur has experienced unstable loose coalition governments most of the time. Only during O.Ibobi

Singh INC led Secular Democratic Front government from 2002-2012 Manipur has seen two stable coalition governments complete their full term. Since 1963 INC as the significant national player in Manipur, has formed its government 13 times, including its coalition governments with different alliance partners. The first regional Party that formed its first government after statehood in Manipur is the Manipur People's Party (MPP). MPP formed its three coalition governments in states in 1972-1974, 1990-1992. The other regional parties Manipur Hills Union (MHU) in 1974, Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) in 1997-2001, formed its unstable state government through coalition politics.

The other national party Janata Party (1977-1979), Samata Party (2001-2002), and recent BJP led coalition government in 2017, along with regional partners like Naga People's Front (NPF), National People's Party (NPP), and Lok Jana Shakti Party (LJP). Thus, since its first state assembly elections, Manipur has 25 state governments, where Indian National Party became the only Party that formed its single-party government and coalition governments. The other national and regional parties could form their government only through coalition politics and politics of defections.

Most of these coalition governments collapse without completing their full terms because of defection politics at large level where legislators' personal ambitions, internal party conflict, opportunistic politics, and dependency syndrome affect a lot in frequent government changes. The Assembly election 1967, 1974, 1980, 1990, 1995, and 2000 hugely affect by defection politics as a result in these terms, more than two unstable governments were formed in Manipur. Because of this political chaos, Manipur has faced President's rule in the state for more than seven years as total time.

After independence, Manipur was the first state in India to conduct a legislative assembly election in 1948 under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947. According to this Act, the Council of Ministers was elected by the legislative assembly members, where the Chief Minister acted as the link between the king and the elected members. It marked a stage of political transition from the king to a democratic government (Das, 2008, p.105).

Table 6.7: State Governments in Manipur

Assembly Elections	Largest Party	Seats of the largest Party	Chief Minister	Term	Governing Party
1967	INC	16	Mairembam Koireng Sing	1/7/1963-11/01/1967 20/03/1967-4/10/1967	INC
			Longjam Thambou Singh	13/10/1967-24/10/1967	Manipur Unified Front
			Mairembam Koireng Sing	19/02/1968-16/10/1969	INC
1972	INC	17	Mohammed Alimuddin	23/03/1972-27/03/1973	MPP, INC (O), SSP
1974	MPP	20	Mohammed Alimuddin	04/03/1974-09/07/1974	MPP, MHU, Socialist
			Yangmasho Shaiza	10/07/1974-5/12/1974	MHU, CPI, INC
			Raj Kumar Dorendra	06/12/1974-15/05/1977	INC (I)
			Yangmasho Shaiza	29/06/1977-13/11/1979	JP
1980	INC	13	Raj Kumar Dorendra	14/01/1980-26/11/1980	INC (I), INC (U), MPP, KNA
				27/11/1980-27/02/1981	INC (I), INC (U), MPP
1984	INC	30	Rishang Keishing	19/06/1981-03/03/1988	INC (I)
			Raj Kumar Jaichandra Singh	04/03/1988-22/02/1990	
1990	INC	24	Raj Kumar Ranbi Singh	23/02/1990-6/01/1992	MPP, JD, KNA, CPI, NPP, INC (S)
			Raj Kumar Dorendra Singh	08/04/1992-10/04/1993	INC (I), MPP
1995	INC	22	Rishang Keishing	14/12/1994-15/12/1997	INC (I)
2000	MSCP	23	Wahemgbam Nipamacha Singh	16/12/1997-14/02/2001	MSCP, MPP, FPM, CPI
			Radhabinod Kaijam	15/02/2001-1/06/2002	Samata Party
2002	INC	20	Kram ibobi Singh	07/03/2002-1/03/2007	INC
2007		30		02/03/2007-05/03/2012	INC, CPI, RJD
2012		42		06/03/2012-14/03/2017	INC
2017	INC	28	Nongthenbam Biren Singh	15/03/2017-till	BJP, NPP, NPF, LJP

Source: Author's own calculation based on Singh (2017), websites from Wikipedia and Map of India

After the re-organisation of the states in 1956 by following the State Re-organisation Commission's report, in Manipur under the Territorial Council Act, 1956 on 2nd September

1957, Territorial Council was formed by 30 elected and two nominated members. It replaced the earlier Advisory Council. After the formation of the first Territorial Council, the election was held in September 1957. In this election, the INC, CPI, Socialist Party, and Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and independent candidates participated; however, no parties won the absolute majority. The Congress party, as the single largest party won 12 seats. H. Dwijamani Dev Sharma, an independent member, was elected as the Chairman of the first Territorial Council. The second Territorial Council was held in 1962, where no party again won an absolute majority. INC became the largest party with 15 seats, and M. Koirang Singh from INC was elected as the Chairman of the Council.

In 1963 this territorial Council was upgraded to a legislative assembly with 30 members under the Territorial Council Act, 1963. The legislative assembly's election was held in 1967. Indian National Congress won 16 seats with 32.53 per cent vote share and became the single largest party. In later, seven independent candidates joined with INC, and the Congress Party under the Chief Ministership of M. Koirang Singh formed its state government in Manipur (See Table 6.6). In December 1967, several legislators defected and created a new coalition United Left Front (ULF). Under the leadership of Longjam Thambau Singh formed another coalition government for a short period. When this coalition did not work, the former ULF member formed a new party Manipur People's Party (MPP) in December 1968. Because of political instability from October 1967 to February 1968, President's rule was imposed in Manipur. During this time, defected legislators again returned to INC, and L. Thomba Singh claimed to form the next government. However, M. Koirang Singh once again formed a new government on 19 February 1968 after President's rule. His government remained in power till 16th October 1969. This government also did not last long due to defection politics. It led to the suspension of the first legislative assembly, and the President's rule was proclaimed again in Manipur.

After the statehood status in 1972, Manipur Legislative Assembly seats were increased from 30 seats to 60 seats. After the statehood, a fresh election was held in March 1972, seven political parties and independent candidates participated. In this election Manipur People's Party (MPP) won 15 seats with 20.17 per cent vote share, and INC won 17 seats with 30.02 per cent vote share. Most interestingly, independent candidates won the highest number of

seats 19 seats, with 31.08 per cent vote share. The MPP, INC (O), SSP and 13 independent legislators formed a coalition government. On 30 March 1972, Mohammed Alimuddin formed a MPP led coalition government but this government hardly lasted one year due to defection politics. Again President's rule after statehood for the first time was imposed for a year.

After this political instability mid-term poll was held in 1974 where MPP as the largest party won 20 seats with 22.55 per cent vote share, another regional party Manipur Hills Union (MHU), secured 12 seats with 9.37 per cent vote share, INC won 13 seats with 27.62 per cent vote share and CPI won 6 seats with 5.54 per cent vote share. Like previous assembly elections, again, this 1974 election also coalition becomes the only option for government formation at the state. During this term, several ministries were formed and changed. There were four coalition governments formed during this period (1974-1979). Mohammed Alimuddin formed the first one led MPP coalition government with MHU, Socialist party and independent candidates. This MPP-led government lasted only four months. Next, on 10 October 1974 Yangmasho Shaiza from MHU formed a coalition government with CPI, INC and lasted for just the next six months. When INC withdrew its support, it had to resign from the ministry. After this coalition government, Raj Kumar Dorendra from the Congress party managed to form a Congress-led coalition government that lasted about two and half years from December 6, 1974, to May 15, 1977.

However, in 1977 with the formation of the Janata Party-led non-congress government at the centre after the 1977 general election, Manipur also shifted its loyalties towards the centre. Many INC legislators defected to Janata Party. Under the leadership of Yangmasho Shaiza formed a Janata Party government at Manipur from June 29, 1977 to November 11, 1979. After the collapse of the Janata Party government at centre on 1979, again Shaiza ministry was thrown out of power. President's rule was imposed in the state till January, 1980. In 1980 Assembly election no any single party won absolute majority to form a single-party government. INC emerged as the largest party with 13 seats and 21.63 per cent vote share. In this election independent candidates won the highest seats 19 seats with 28.98 per cent vote share. MPP just secured only four seats with 6.59 per cent vote share in this election. Like other state elections this time also three different coalition governments were formed by different parties. The first one formed by Raj Kumar Dorendra from INC along with INC (U),

MPP, KNA and independent candidates, which survived 11 months till November 26, 1980. The second one the INC led coalition headed by Rishang Keishang lasted only for three months. However, after five months of President's rule again Rishang Keishang formed another INC led coalition government on June 19, 1981 and completed the term.

In 1984 fourth assembly election, INC became the largest party won 30 seats with 29.82 per cent vote share where independent candidates won 21 seats with 43.12 per cent vote share. Rishang Keishing again formed a Congress government in Manipur which lasted till 03 March 1988. Because of the party's internal power conflict, Rishang Keishing was replaced by Raj Kumar Jai Chandra Singh on 04 March 1988, and this government completed the term.

In the 1990 Assembly election, no political party secured the absolute majority to form a single-party government. There were nine political parties that participated in this election. The INC (I) as the largest party won 26 seats followed by MPP 11 seats, Janata Dal 11 seats, Congress (S) 6 seats, KNA 2 seats, CPI 3 seats and NPP 1 seats. This term had experienced three unstable ministries. Six non-Congress parties formed the first one: MPP, JD, KNA, CPI, NPP, and Congress (S) through an alliance named United Legislative Party (ULP). R.K. Ranbi Singh from MPP party became the Chief Minister and was in power till 6 January 1992 for about two years. Ranbi Singh tried to form a stable government by appointing 27 MLA out of total 34 as ministers or heads of Public Sector undertaking. However, soon some legislators decided to support INC, and as a result, Ranbir Ministry had to resign from the Ministry. President rule was imposed from January to April 1992, and the legislative assembly was kept under animated suspension. On 8 April 1992, a coalition government of Congress-MPP was formed under the leadership of R.K. Dorendra Singh. Again the internal power struggle within the Congress party led to the collapse of the INC-MPP government after one year. Again from December 1993 to December 1994 President's rule was imposed. On 14 December 1994 Rishang Keishing formed a Congress party-led government, completed the term, and again came to power after the 1995 assembly election.

Table 6.8 : Political Parties Performance in Manipur Legislative Assembly Elections 1967-2017

Party		Seats & Vote	Year wise electoral Performance of Political Parties in Legislative Assembly Elections in Manipur											
			1967	1972	1974	1980	1984	1990	1995	2000	2002	2007	2012	2017
National Parties	BJS/BJP	Seats/Vote		0 (0.22)			0(0.71)	0(1.87)	1(3.35)	6(11.28)	4 (9.55)	0(0.85)	0(2.12)	21(36.28)
	INC	Seats/Vote	16(32.53)	17(30.02)	13(27.62)	13(21.63)	30(29.82)	24(33.71)	22(28.65)	11(18.31)	20(26.18)	30(34.3)	42(42.42)	28(35.11)
	CPI	Seats/Vote	1 (5.47)	5 (10.13)	6 (5.54)	5 (7.26)	1 (4.15)	3 (4.14)	2 (5.59)	0 (3.6)	5 (4.4)	4 (5.79)	0 (5.87)	0 (0.74)
	NCP	Seats/Vote								5 (7.87)	3 (9.44)	5 (8.58)	1 (7.23)	0 (0.95)
	JNP	Seats/Vote				10(19.71)	4 (6.08)							
	JD	Seats/Vote						11(19.82)	7 (11.92)					
	SOP	Seats/Vote	4(11.7)	3(5.35)	2 (5.93)									
	AITC	Seats/Vote											7(17.0)	1(1.41)
	NPP	Seats/Vote						1 (0.78)	2(2.65)	0(0)	2(3.03)	3(3.46)	0(1.24)	4(5.05)
	CPM	Seats/Vote	0 (0.67)	0 (0.66)	0 (0.56)	1 (0.57)	0 (0.09)		0 (0.20)	0 (0.30)	0 (0.03)	0 (0.08)	0 (0.02)	0 (0.74)
State Parties	MPP	Seats/Vote		15(20.17)	20(22.55)	4 (6.59)	3 (10.81)	9 (19.4)	18(23.67)	4(7.9)		5(15.45)	0(4.01)	
	KNA	Seats/Vote			2 (2.95)	2 (2.82)	1 (1.55)	2 (2.61)	0(0.25)	0(0.05)				
	MHU	Seats/Vote			12 (9.37)									
	FPM	Seats/Vote							2 (4.91)	6(9.44)	13(18.14)			
	MSCP	Seats/Vote								23(26.28)	7(12.4)	0(1.86)	5(8.39)	
	RJD	Seats/Vote								1 (1.83)		3 (6.67)		
	SAP	Seats/Vote							2 (6.19)	1 (6.68)	3 (8.33)	0 (0.06)		
	ICS	Seats/Vote					0 (3.36)	4 (12.41)	1 (3.91)					
	DRPP	Seats/Vote									2 (3.93)			
	MNC	Seats/Vote									1 (4.03)			
	LJP	Seats/Vote										0 (1.5)	1 (0.55)	1 (2.55)
	NPF	Seats/Vote											4 (7.5)	4 (7.17)
	NCO	Seats/Vote		1 (2.37)	0 (1.74)									
	INC(U)	Seats/Vote				6 (9.48)								
	JD (S)	Seats/Vote								1 (1.58)				
JD(U)	Seats/Vote								1 (1.79)					
Independent	Seats/Vote	9 (48.85)	19(31.08)	5 (24.02)	19(28.98)	21(43.12)	0 (4.35)	3 (7.73)	1 (3.01)	0 (0.33)	10(19.51)	0(3.29)	1(5.06)	
Total Seats		30	60	60	60		54	60	60	60	60	60	60	

Source: Election Commission of India

In the 1995 assembly election INC, the largest party won 22 seats and 28.65 per cent vote share. The other parties include MPP, again after 15 years gap won significant number of seats 18 seats with 23.67 per cent vote share and Janata Dal won 7 seats with 11.92 per cent vote share. The Congress party under the leadership of Rishang Keishing formed a Congress-led coalition government on 24 February 1995 and till 15 December, 1997 it enjoyed support from its alliance partners. Because of the dissidence activities within INC, a group of legislators led by W. Nipamacha Singh floating a new party known as the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) (Singh, 2017,p.510). On 15 December 1997 Rishang Keishing lost the vote of confidence, and newly created MSCP led by W. Nipamacha Singh formed a coalition government with MPP, FPM, CPI. The MSCP again come to power after the 2000 assembly election with 23 seats by forming a new coalition United Front Manipur (Singh, 2017). However, due to the internal power struggle between the Chief Minister and Speaker of the legislative assembly, the party informally divided into two groups where the opposition group led by speaker Sapam Dhananjoy received support from a section of MSCP legislators with INC, BJP, Samata Party and Janata Dal (S). During this period, again, Manipur affected by the dependency syndrome.

Most of the legislators from INC except Rishang Keishing defected to Samata Party under Radhabinod Koijam. Samata Party was one key partner at BJP led NDA government at the centre in that time. As a result, on 15 February 2001, Radhabinod Koijam formed a Samata party-led coalition government at state with the alliance partner MSCP, BJP, NCP, Janata Dal (S). MPP, FPM and one independent MLA. This government also lasted only one year three months due to the internal fight within MSCP, divided into two groups by W. Nipamacha Singh and Th Chaoba Singh. As a result, the Samata party government lost its majority. President rule was imposed at Manipur and the legislative assembly was dissolved.

The state's political instability came to an end after the 2002 Assembly election with the formation of a Secular Progressive Front government formed by INC and its alliance partner MSCP, CPI, NCP under the Chief Ministership of O. Ibobi Singh. This coalition government for the first time in Manipur completed its full term. In the 2007 Legislative assembly election, INC became the strongest party with 30 seats and 34.3 per cent vote share and again formed its Secular Progressive Front government on 2 March 2007. Thus the political instability came

to an end in the state under the Chief Ministership of O. Ibobi Singh INC led coalition government. In the 2012 legislative assembly election, INC under the leadership of O.Ibobi Singh secured an absolute majority with 42 seats and 42.42 per cent vote share. For the first time in the electoral politics of Manipur a political party won a single party absolute majority with more than 70 per cent of seat share (i.e. 42 seats). Party like MPP, CPI, BJP could not win a single seat in this election. INC party consecutively for the third time under the Chief Ministership of O.Ibobi Singh formed its government on 14 March 2012 and completed its full term. However, in the 2017 assembly election, the party could not form its government despite being the largest party with 28 seats with 35.11 per cent vote share. For the first time in the electoral politics of Manipur, BJP as the other national party in the state made a spectacular electoral victory with 21 seats and the highest vote share 36.28 per cent in the state. And most surprisingly, the second-largest party BJP managed to form a coalition government with NPF, NPP, LJP and defected INC MLAs. As we have seen in most legislative assembly elections, Manipur has faced severe political instability due to defection politics and dependency syndrome.

Table 6.9: Major political parties' performance in Lok Sabha Elections in Manipur

Year	BJP	INC	CPI	NCP	NPP	MPP	MSCP	NPF	IND
1977	---	2 (45.31)	0(11.50)	----	----	0 (23.45)	----	----	0 (11.16)
1980	---	1 (22.99)	1 (9.74)	---	----	0 (6.89)	----	----	0 926.23)
1984	0 (6.96)	2 (34.95)	0 (9.45)	----	----	0 (17.71)	----	----	0 (25.94)
1989	0 (2.27)	2 (45.04)	0 (5.64)	----	----	0 (17.09)	----	----	0 (12.19)
1991	0 (8.10)	1 (38.38)	-----	----	0 (0.19)	1 (20.04)	----	----	0 (3.12)
1996	0 (5.25)	2 (40.17)	0 (4.01)	----	----	0 (6.70)	----	----	0 (23.05)
1998	0 (12.61)	0 (18.60)	1(20.47)	----	----	0 (15.44)	1(25.39)	----	0 (0.62)
1999	0 (1.02)	0 (25.29)	0 (3.95)	1(13.49)	----	0 (16.25)	----	----	0 (6.63)
2004	0 (20.65)	1 (14.88)	0(10.11)	0(10.37)	----	0 (7.44)	----	----	1 (22.46)
2009	0 (9.5)	2 (42.96)	0(14.09)	-----	----	0 (7.6)	----	----	0 (8.2)
2014	0 (11.98)	2 (41.91)	0(14.05)	0 (4.39)	----	-----	----	0(20.01)	0 (3.06)
2019	1 (34.33)	0 (24.71)	0 (8.3)	0 (0.16)	0 (1.91)	0 (0.11)	----	1(22.55)	0 (5.31)

Source: ECI

However, this has not been reflected in the Lok Sabha elections. In most of the Lok Sabha elections, the Indian National Congress party won almost both seats. There was an exception only in 1998, 1999 and the recent 2019 Lok Sabha election (see Table 6.9). INC as the dominant national party in the state has won most of the Lok Sabha elections in Manipur since

its statehood. Other Parties like CPI in 1980, 1998 Lok Sabha elections were able to win one seat. NCP as the national party, won one seat only in the 1999 Lok Sabha election. The first regional party in Manipur MPP won only once in the 1991 Lok Sabha election. Another regional party MSCP won one seat during the 1998 Lok Sabha election. BJP as another national Party in the state, although contested every Lok Sabha elections since 1984, only in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the party abled to create its account by winning its first seat with 34.33 per cent vote share. Within a very short period in the electoral politics of Manipur, NPF becomes a popular party in Hill areas. In its second election in Manipur, the party won its first Lok Sabha seats from the Outer Manipur constituency in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. Like other North Eastern states, in comparison with assembly elections, the Lok Sabha election is mainly dominated by the national party in Manipur.

6.6 BJP in Manipur: Temporal Rise?

Like other North Eastern states, although the entry of Hindutva forces in Manipur started in the 1950s through the activities of RSS and its linked organisation. However, BJP as the Hindu Nationalist party was not successful in establishing its significant electoral footprint in the state till the recent 2017 assembly election. The rise of the BJP as the important national party in the state can only be seen during the 2017 assembly election and the recent 2019 Lok Sabha election.

Like Assam, Manipur is a multi-diverse state in terms of ethnic, linguistic; religious communities include different tribal and non-tribal groups. As already discussed, the major population is divided into three major groups- the Meiteis, the Nagas and the Kukis. Since its statehood, the state has experienced an unstable political situation wherein most of the assembly elections and no party won a single party absolute majority to form a single-party government, which resulted in the formation of short-term coalition governments in the state. However, Congress as the dominant national party in the state for a long time, able to uphold its dominance in Lok Sabha and most assembly elections. Unlike other North Eastern states, we can not strongly call Manipur as the Congress state because of its political instability in assembly elections. In Manipur, there is a large number of regional parties contesting both assembly and general elections. Still except two-three major national and regional parties, most of these parties have no significant influence in the state politics of Manipur. From this context,

BJP as the alternative national party has very minimal role in the state's electoral politics. Although BJP has been contesting both assembly and Lok Sabha elections in Manipur since 1984, the party has to limit with zero seat and nominal vote share most of the time. As table 6.10 shows BJP's political performance in both assembly and Lok Sabha elections since 1984 in Manipur.

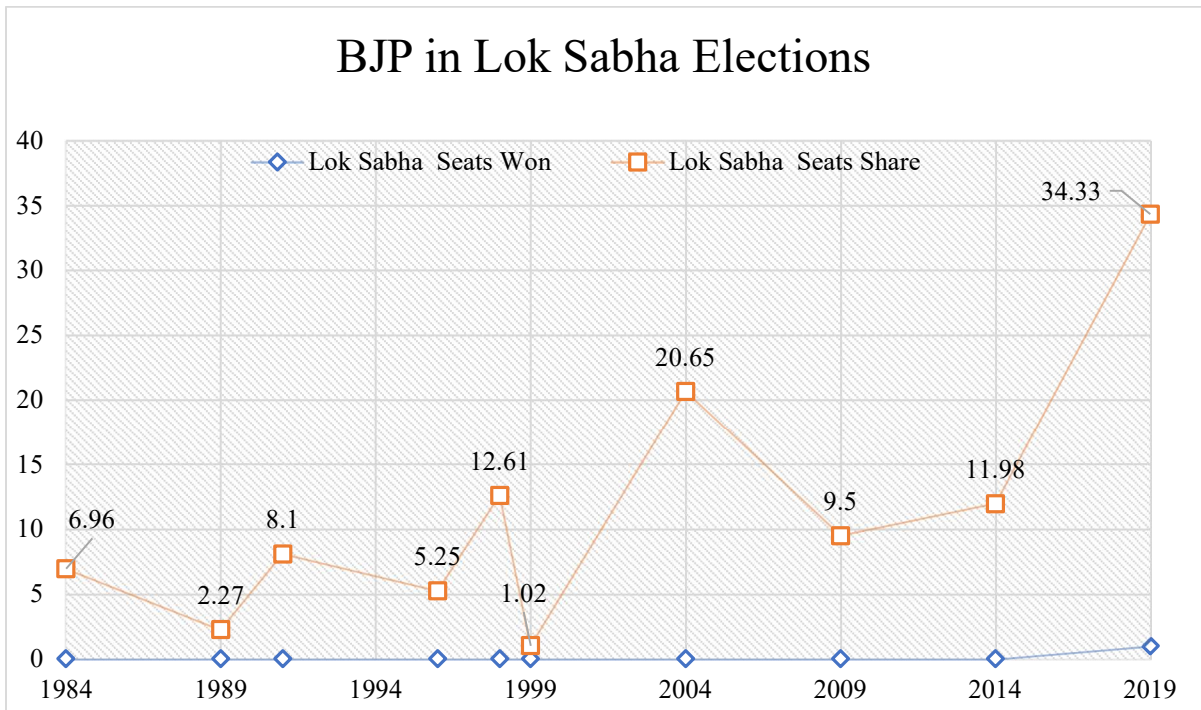
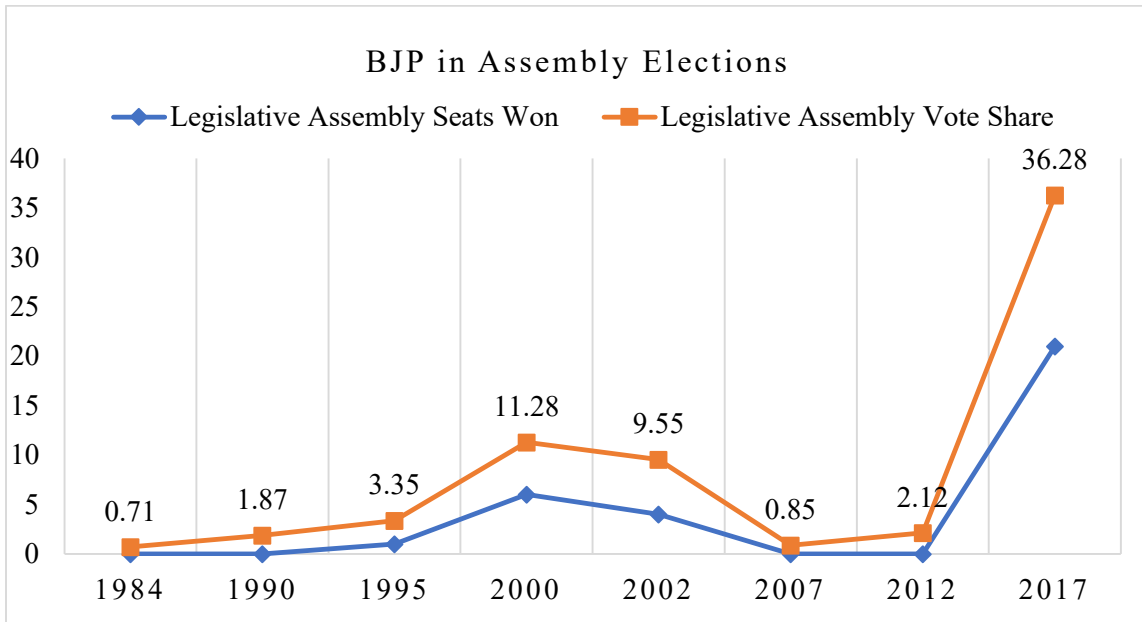
In the Lok Sabha elections from 1984 to 2014 elections, BJP did not win any single seat but had to limit with a small number of vote shares in every general elections. Only in the 2019 general election for the first time, BJP won one seat with 34.33 per cent vote share (see Table 6.10). Dr Raj Kumar Ranjan Singh from the Inner Manipur constituency won the seat from BJP. Same way, in assembly elections also since 1984, BJP contested every state elections in Manipur. BJP, for the first time won one seat with 3.35 per cent vote share in 1995 assembly election. In 2000 and 2002 assembly elections, BJP continuously won 6 seats with 11.28 per cent vote share and four seats with 9.55 per cent vote share. However, in 2007 and 2012 assembly election, BJP has not won a single seat in Manipur. In the 2017 assembly election, the party has achieved a spectacular phenomenal electoral victory with 21 seats as the state's second largest party. BJP also won the highest vote share of 36.28 per cent in this election. These two graphs show the significant rise of BJP as the significant player in both assembly and general election in terms of vote share and seats in Manipur.

Table 6.10: *BJP in Legislative Assembly elections and Lok Sabha Elections in Manipur*

Year	Lok Sabha		Year	Legislative Assembly	
	Seats Won	Vote Share		Seats Won	Vote Share
1984	0	6.96	1984	0	0.71
1989	0	2.27			
1991	0	8.1	1990	0	1.87
1996	0	5.25	1995	1	3.35
1998	0	12.61	2000	6	11.28
1999	0	1.02	2002	4	9.55
2004	0	20.65	2007	0	0.85
2009	0	9.5	2012	0	2.12
2014	0	11.98	2017	21	36.28
2019	1	34.33			

Source: Election Commission of India

Figure 6.2: BJP's rise in Lok Sabha and Assembly Elections in Manipur



By observing this phenomenal rise of BJP in recent (2017 AE and 2019 LE) two elections, although it is difficult to predict BJP's future as the dominant party in the state. However, we can examine the factors that have helped BJP to make such a phenomenal electoral victory in these two recent elections in Manipur.

This work has analysed the rise of BJP as a dominant national player in the North Eastern region by introspecting multiple factors. Some of these are common factors, and some are state-specific which need to be examined in Manipur's context. Scholars analyse these factors as localisation of BJP, social polarisation and appropriation of ethnic space (Sharma et al., 2020). The significant contribution of RSS as the parent organisation of BJP through their different activities in states like Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura can also be seen as an important factor in this case. Simultaneously, the Party's activity in defection politics in these states, strategy of appropriating political elites from other political parties, forming a political coalition with regional parties can also be seen as a significant factor in its rise in North East India. In the context of Manipur, this study will try to analyse the rise of BJP through its strategies like localisation of party and party agendas, party's involvement in state's internal politics, appropriation of ethnic space and BJP's role in defection politics in Manipur and also the anti-incumbency factor of former Ibobi Singh's Congress government in Manipur.

6.6.1 BJP in 2017 and 2019 Elections: Politics and Strategy

Before BJP's coming to power in Manipur, the Congress party under the leadership of O. Ibobi Singh formed a stable government for 15 years since 2002. In the history of Manipur's state politics, O. Ibobi Singh became the first long-serving chief minister heading state government continuously for three terms. However, during this Congress regime in the state, Manipur had to experience many complex conflicting issues, including ethnic conflict, insurgencies, killing innocent civilians in the state, and Inner Line Permit in Hill and Valley areas. At the same time, development and corruption became significant issues in the state. Most importantly, the Ibobi Singh government's decision to create "seven new districts through the carved out of the existing nine districts in December 2016" led to a blockade by the United Naga Council became a significant factor. The Ibobi Singh government's political legitimacy gradually declined due to this underdevelopment, continued insecurity, rampant corruption, nepotism,

and divisive ethnic politics in Manipur (Choudhury, 2017). Amid these complexities, “the prevailing political situation in Manipur leading up to the elections- with an ongoing economic blockade on the two national highways and conflicts between the dominant communities- provides an explanation for the BJP’s rise to power in the state” (Kamei,2017)

As we have discussed, Manipur has total nine districts where four districts are valley districts and five are hill districts”.¹ While Naga tribes dominated the state's major portion of territory, including Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong and Chandel districts, Kuki and Zomi tribes dominated Churachandpur. At the same time, the valley areas with more than half of the state's population are dominated by one major community, i.e. the Meitei community. As a result, since 1949 historically, state politics is mainly dominated by the Meitei community. It enjoyed more representation in the Assembly with 40 seats out of 60 seats in the Assembly.

Similarly, a long-standing demand of the Naga rebel groups for creating a greater Nagaland by incorporating the Naga speaking areas of Manipur is firmly rejected by Meiteis who dominate the power structure in the state (Jha, 2017). Thus, state politics is affected by a tussle between these major communities' power dynamics in the state. During Ibobi Singh’s government in Manipur, “the Naga tribal groups have been opposed to a series of decisions they termed as “anti-tribal” and politically motivated” (Kundu, 2016). Among these conflicting issues, one major issue between the valley and hill in the state is the introduction of “Inner Line Permit” (ILP).² On 28 August 2015, the O. Ibobi Singh Congress government without any discussion at Assembly passed three controversial bills, i.e. “the Protection of Manipur People Bill”, “the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill”, and the “Manipur Shops and Establishments (Second Amendment) Bill (Hindustan Times)”. The Bills were the product of agitation by the non-tribal Meitei communities in the Imphal valley for introducing an Inner Line Permit to control and restrict the entry of outsiders into the state (Hindustan Times, 2016). However, the tribal groups from Hill people did not participate in this agitation.

Through these bills the state government proposed to bring the whole Manipur under the inner line permit to control the influx of outsiders to the state (Kamei, 2017). At the same time, the

¹ Four districts Imphal east, Imphal west, Thoubal and Bishenpur are valley districts. The other five districts Ukhrul, Senapati, Tamenglong, Chandel and Churachandpur are hill districts

² Inner Line Permit (ILP) an official document by the government that allows an Indian citizen to travel into a restricted or protected area a specific time period.

tribal areas in Manipur already have Constitutional protection under Article 371 C that prohibits the non-tribals from purchasing land in such protected Tribal areas. However, except for these protected areas, there is no prohibition on buying lands anywhere else in the state. For a long time, this exception in the state become a sticky point for the Meiteis in the valley. While the Meitei community actively supported the Congress government's decision to introduce ILP for the entire state, the Nagas and Kukis strongly opposed this decision. They considered these bills a threat to their rights over their land and identity. The tribal population was angry over the bills. They considered it an attempt by the Meitei dominated government to grab tribal lands that are already protected by the Sixth Schedule of the constitution (DailyO, 2017). "With the elections approaching, land reforms being pushed by Ibobi Singh's government means that non-tribals (Meiteis) too would now be able to buy tribal land in the hill districts" (Kundu, 2016). The central government also returned the bills to the state government for re-examination in June 2016. It is argued that the Manipur government has not made any attempt to explain details about the Bills to the people (The Hindu, 2015). So, the three bills' passage led to protests by tribal student groups on August 31 and September 1 in Churachandpur.

The protesters, mainly the Naga tribes, attacked the residence of many MPs and MLAs. Houses of many MLAs were set on fire. The violence spread across many districts. The situation became worse in Churachandpur town, where a small-scale battle ensued between the Police and agitators (The Hindu, 2015). As a result, "the state government's crackdown killing nine protesters in police firing in Churachandpur worsened the situation among the protesters and the government" (Kundu, 2016). As a mark of protest for the three Bills' complete rollback, the protesters refused to bury nine protesters' bodies till 245 days since the killings (Hindustan Times, 2016). The nine people belonging to different tribal communities killed during the protest against the bill were considered the "tribal martyrs". This incident fuelled the anti-Congress sentiments among the protesters.

Another major incident that increased the anti-Congress sentiments in the state among the Naga communities in the Hills was the Congress government's decision to create newer seven districts from the state's existing nine districts. This decision by Ibobi Singh's government led to "loud protests by United Naga Council (UNC) and other Naga leaders who have alleged that

the Okram Ibobi Singh government's aim is to divide the Naga people" (Mukherjee, 2016). After this decision by the Ibobi Singh government, "the United Naga Council-a civil society organisation of the Naga community people of Manipur has imposed a blockade on National Highway-2 (Imphal to Dimapur) and National Highway-37 (Imphal- Jiribam) in protest against the creation of the new district in the Sadar Hills and Jiribam regions in the state" (Kamei, 2017). The State government tried to justify this decision in the name of development and administrative efficiency in the region and accommodate the Kuki community's longstanding demand to create new districts since the 1970s. The Meitei communities support this decision. The Naga community vehemently opposed this demand of Kuki and Meitei groups. The Naga community believes that creating a new district, specifically the Jiribam district, will make some Naga villages come under the Meitei communities' jurisdiction, which will badly affect their greater idea of Nagaland. As Richard Kamei point out:

According to the UNC, the creation of the districts reflects an attempt to take away and divide the Naga's ancestral lands without their consent- in particular, a part of the Sadar Hills and Jiribam regions, which was carved out from Naga-dominated districts in the state. (Kamei, 2017)

UNC's blockade on two main National Highway severely affected the whole state, mainly the valley regions. Because of this blockade all trucks carrying supplies to Imphal were stopped, which "resulted in inflation in prices and shortages of food, fuel and other essential commodities". The blockade even becomes stronger as a "total shutdown" when "UNC president Gaidon Kamei and information secretary Stephen Lamkang were arrested on 25th November" (The Hindu, 2017 a). As a reaction to this blockade, some "section of the Meitei community in the valley also imposed counter blockades and restricted the transport of goods to the hill district". "The prevailing political situation in Manipur leading up to the elections-with an ongoing economic blockade on two national highways and conflicts between the dominant communities provides an explanation for BJP's rise to power in the state" (Kamei, 2017).

To talk about the rise of BJP in Manipur before the 2017 assembly election, BJP had nothing. BJP had no representatives in the assembly as well as member of parliament in Lok Sabha. Even it had no such significant organisational base including popular leaders and potential

candidates. In this context, the only important thing is the party is in power at the centre that gives the party a psychological and political boost (Jha, 2017). As a marginal party with a limited vote share, BJP understands it very well that they had to start with zero in Manipur. In such a situation, BJP was in search of taking the right opportunity to enter the state politics of Manipur as the strong alternative force of the Congress party in Manipur. During that time, Manipur went to poll under the effect of a long-running economic blockade from 1 November due to the Congress Government's decision to create the new district. Amid these complexities along with the anti-incumbency factors, development and corruption issues of the Ibobi Singh government, BJP used the anti-Congress sentiments and made inroads into the hill districts. Before the 2017 assembly election in 2015 June, BJP won 21 seats out of 144 seats in six district autonomous district council's election against Congress's 46 seats. BJP also won 10 seats against the Congress's 12 seats in the Imphal Municipal Corporation election in June 2016. By observing this new political development in the state, it is predicted by the political analyst that it is due to the growing popularity of BJP as a strong alternative to the 15 years Congress government has forced to take such a new decision to save the majority Meitei vote bank at the valley which antagonises the Naga tribes in the Hills.

Before assembly elections, BJP was also playing a balancing role in the state politics of Manipur by tying up with the Naga People's Front. In 2015 September, the BJP government at the centre signed the historic Naga Peace Accord with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Isac Muivah (NSCN-IM), backing the violent protest by the UNC in the hill district that imposed an indefinite economic blockade on Imphal Valley. Through this Naga Peace Accord, the BJP gained the popularity and confidence of its Naga community in the hills. Simultaneously, the Congress party accused the BJP for signing the Accord and creating turmoil in the state.

During the election campaign with the ongoing economic blockade in Manipur, several high-profile leaders of BJP, including “Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP chief Amit Shah, home minister Rajnath Singh came to Manipur as star campaigner and addressed the public rally for the party” (Hindustan Times, 2017). Prime Minister Narendra Modi in an election meeting at (place) on 25th February 2017, verbally attacked Chief Minister O. Ibobi Singh as “10 per cent chief minister and running the most corrupt government” (The Hindu, 2017). He criticised the

Congress government for poor infrastructure, development and said, “What the Congress government could not do in 15 years, our (BJP) government will do it in 15 months” (The Hindu, 2017). In this meeting, he was also shared his commitment to “protect the territorial integrity of Manipur” while clarifying about the Naga accord [that] “there is no single reference to ditching the Manipur people or its interests in the Naga Accord” (The Hindu, 2017). PM Modi “promised to end the crippling economic blockade in Manipur if BJP comes to power” (The Hindu, 2017). In another rally in Manipur on 1 March 2017, BJP President Amit Shah again assured the masses that BJP would leave the “ongoing economic blockade by any means within 24 hours after forming its government in the state”. For the first time in the 2017 Manipur assembly election, the state witnessed a tough fight between Congress and the saffron party. Although the BJP did not announce a chief ministerial candidate and any allies but during the election campaign the state BJP president K. Bhabananda Singh mentioned, “The BJP’s face for Manipur election is Narendra Modi and his good governance” (Business Standard, 2017). In the absence of a strong organisation with popular leader, the BJP was primarily dependent on Modi’s image and the local candidates' strength. In an interview with the author, Manipur BJP’s general secretary N. Nimbus on 26 February 2019, while explaining the rising factor of BJP in the state mentioned the anti-incumbency factor of the Congress government and Modi’s image as the major factor that the party relied on during election campaign. During the election campaign in Manipur, the then state BJP Spokesperson and present Chief Minister N. Biren Singh focused on primary issues for voters and BJP in the election are “territorial integrity of Manipur and corruption and human rights violations” (Reuters, 2017). Referring to the Party agenda, N. Biren Singh emphasised, “One person in every family will have a government job. Girls will have free education until graduation. A highway protection force will be formed, and health insurance schemes will be there for below-poverty-line groups” (Reuters, 2017).

In Manipur, as an alternative national player of Congress party, the BJP’s major challenge was to “articulate a coherent party platform and agenda and BJP displayed a remarkable adaptability in Manipur” (Jha, 2017, p. 204). For BJP as a right-wing party with a Hindu Nationalist image was very difficult to push the party’s own core agendas in a state like Manipur, where the major portion of the population belongs to the Christian religion. The BJP has tactfully avoided the ‘Hindu nationalism’ agenda during the election, even too in the

Meitei-dominated valley area. In this context, the editor of the Free Imphal Press, renowned intellectuals from the state Pradip Phanjoubam mentioned that BJP has not pushed North Indian cultural hegemony in the region (cited in Jha, 2017, p.207). In this context, the adaptability of the party is very much reflected in Manipur in many cases. First, BJP does not push its anti-beef agenda in Manipur. As the BJP's then general secretary Ram Madhav remarked on this issue, "we respect the cultural diversity of the region" (Jha, 2017). Secondly, during the election BJP in a flexible way selectively gave ticket to local tribal Christian candidates in hills reserved seats. This strategy helped them to win seats in hill areas and expand their support base in such areas despite their Hindutva image (Jha, 2017). While explaining the BJP's phenomenal victory in the assembly election in Manipur, a senior journalist from North East India, Samudra Gupta Kashyap, analyses

What do T Thangzalam Haokip of Henglep, Vungzagin Valte of Thanlon, V Hangkhanlian of Churachandpur, Samuel Jendai Kamei of Tamenglong and Nemcha Kipgen of Kanpokpi have been common? They are all tribals, members of the new Manipur Assembly, elected on BJP tickets. More significantly, they are all Christians, and have been elected from constituencies where almost 99 per cent voters are Christian. The election in Manipur has dismantled the myth that the BJP is a party that belongs to and works only for Hindus. (The Indian Express,2017)

BJP become popular among the Christian tribal population at the hill region with another name, i.e. BJP is actually the Bharatiya Jesus Party. In the 2017 election in Manipur, "the party's Christian candidates often referred to the BJP as the Bharatiya Jesus Party to allay apprehensions about its alleged anti-minority character" (Hindustan Times,2018).

One effective strategy of BJP for coming to power in the North East Region is co-opting existing political leaders from other political parties through the destruction or neutralisation of political opponents. In Manipur's context, BJP was instrumental in ousting the ruling Congress's dominance from the state by bringing the political leaders from other political parties like Congress (INC), Trinamool Congress (AITC). BJP by following a top-down approach has exploited and appropriated the growing dissatisfaction among some Congress leaders within the Ibobi's camp. As it tried to convince a large number of "old-time Congress members to switch sides- particularly those members of the legislative assembly who enjoyed their standalone popularity but were unhappy with the state-of-affairs in their party"

(Choudhury, 2017). For BJP, this strategy works quite well for its electoral benefit. The current Chief Minister of Manipur N. Biren Singh is a significant case in this context. Nongthombam Biren Singh, a footballer-turned-journalist, started his political career in Democratic Revolutionary People's Party (DRPP), who won the first assembly election in 2002. Suddenly, Biren Singh switched to the Congress party which came to power after the President rule in 2001. He became the cabinet minister in the first two terms of Ibobi Singh government and was elevated to the position as the Congress's spokesperson (Akoijam,2017). However, N. Biren Singh left the Congress party after falling out with then Congress chief minister Ibobi Singh over his exclusion from Cabinet after a reshuffle in Manipur state government. In 2016, July N. Biren Singh joined the BJP. The same way Thongam Biswajit Singh is now a cabinet minister in the state government and other leaders like Khumukcham Joykishan Singh, Oinam Lukhoi Singh from All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) party joined BJP before the election.

Another crucial strategy of BJP during the Manipur assembly election was using social media campaign with a highly professional efficient team for its electoral advantage. Before the five months of assembly elections in November 2016, BJP started “a highly pitched social media campaign on Manipur with more than 100 WhatsApp groups, a number of Facebook pages, Twitter handles, Twitter channels. The campaign for BJP was run by a three-member election management team (EMT) Rajat Sethi, Shivam Shankar Singh and Shubhrastha under BJP's then General Secretary Ram Madhav” (Factor daily, 2017). While referring to the BJP's election management teams' social media campaign journalist Syeda Ambia Zahan mentioned:

The EMT mounted a tailor-made campaign in each constituency, enabling a direct connect with the voter, based on linguistic profile, gender and age group. It used party workers to get WhatsApp contact details of voters. Data used to target Congress was obtained from various surveys, news reports and RTI replies. (Factor daily, 2017)

During the assembly election, the Election Management Team of BJP mainly used WhatsApp groups like [BJP4ImphalEast], [BJP4Ukhrul] to spread various constituency-related information. In such a WhatsApp group, they mainly focused on people's problems and how the Congress government dealt with this and promised to solve BJP after coming to power. On Facebook, they have one major Facebook page [BJP4Manipur], and on Twitter, they also used [BJP4Manipur] twitter channel that mainly highlighted the corruption and Manipur's problems

to the national media. Through this social media campaign, BJP specifically tried to influence voters in Manipur and to capture the shifting perceptions of the voters (Factor daily, 2017).

In the 2017 Assembly election, the BJP contested in all the 60 seats alone and won 21 seats with the highest vote share 36.28 per cent in Manipur. Out of these 21 seats, the BJP -won 14 seats from the valley area and seven seats from the hill area. In the Hill area BJP won two seats from Kuki dominated area and five seats from Naga dominated area however, among these five seats only Tamenglong was the Naga dominated constituency. At the same time, Congress as the single largest party won 28 seats with 35.11 per cent vote share. From Valley out of total 40 seats, Congress won 19 seats and from the hill area 9 seats where 4 seats from the Kuki dominated area and 5 seats from the Naga-dominated area. In valley Naga People's Front (NPF) won all the four Naga dominated constituency seats.

The election result was declared on 11 March and after the declaration of the result, BJP claimed to have the support of 11 small party MLAs to form the government in Manipur. At the same time, the Governor of Manipur Najma Heptullah, a former Congress leader who shifted her alliance to the BJP, surprisingly mentioned that the verdict was anti-congress and it was the BJP which had the majority support (Tripathi, 2018). When the Congress leader and the incumbent Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh met the Governor, he showed the list of 28 Congress MLAs and claimed to have support of four NPP MLAs with him. However, the Governor was not satisfied because the Congress leader had shown an ordinary piece of paper with four NPP MLAs names as evidence. Later NPP leader Conrad Sangma also called the letter shown by Congress as fake (Shekhar, 2017). Governor Najma Heptullah asked Ibobi Singh to resign first so that the government process could be initiated.

Congress as the largest party with 28 seats just needed three more seats to form the government, whereas BJP as the second-largest party with 21 seats needed the support of 10 more MLAs. After the election result, Congress was confident of forming its government with the support of like-minded secular regional parties like NPP. When asked about the alliance with NPF for government formation in the state, Manipur state Congress chief T.H. Haokip refuted entirely by saying, "The Congress will never go for an alliance with the NPF and the BJP. We are open for alliance with any other party" (Livemint, 2017). In this context, while mentioning the relationship of INC with NPF, Pradip Phanjoubam pointed:

Since it was unlikely the NPF would extend support to the Congress as the latter was vehemently opposed to its main election plank of facilitating the severance of Naga-dominated areas of Manipur to be part of a Greater Nagaland being pursued by the Naga militant organisation, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah)—NSCN(IM), the Congress's only hope was to enlist the support of the four NPP legislators. The Congress could have courted the support of two other MLAs, one of the Trinamool Congress and the other an independent but even that would not have helped it to reach the magic number of 31. (Phanjoubam, 2017, p.26)

In response to the interviewer's questions as part of this research work, the BJP's General Secretary in Manipur N. Nimbus mentioned how the anti-congress sentiment among the regional parties helped BJP in forming a post-poll alliance and a coalition government. He also mentioned, when BJP became the second-largest party with double-digit i.e. 21 seats, all the regional parties with anti-congress sentiments preferred BJP as their alliance partner so that Congress did not again come to power in the state. For N. Nimbus, BJP formed its first government in the state because of the support received from the regional parties based in Manipur.

On Sunday 12 March 2017, the BJP submitted a list containing names of 32 legislators to the Governor, claiming the support of 11 other MLAs, including BJP's 21 MLAs. The Governor of Manipur on 14 March invited the Bharatiya Janata Party-led alliance to form government in the state and asked leader N. Biren Singh to prove his majority as soon as possible. While not inviting the single largest party INC first to form the government, Governor Najma Heptulla in a press meet justified it as, "the responsibility of the Governor is to see who has got the majority, who will be working for the interest of the state and have the stability" (The Hindu,2017).On 15 March 2017, BJP for the first time in Manipur formed its coalition government with the support of 12 MLAs from the National People's Party (4), Naga People's Front (4), the Lok Janshakti Party (1), All India Trinamool Congress Party (1), an independent MLA and former Congress MLA Th. Shyamkumar Singh.

After the 11 days of assembly elections and five days after the government formation, Chief Minister N. Biren Singh won the floor test in the assembly by voice vote. However, if the formation of council of minister in BJP led coalition government is observed keenly, "the

NPP's crucial position in the equation became evident in the distribution of cabinet berths when the new BJP government was sworn in on the afternoon of 15 March" (Phanjoubam, 2017, p.26). In the 12-member Council of Ministers, BJP had to ensure this first that all the four NPP legislators not only got cabinet berth but also NPP party as the major partner must have the deputy chief minister post in the government. NPP party leader Y. Joykumar Singh became the deputy chief minister with the additional portfolios.

Table 6.11: BJP Government after 2017 Assembly Election in Manipur

No	Name of the Minister	Portfolio	Political Party
1	N. Biren Singh	Chief Minister, Home, Transport, General Administration, Sericulture, Tourism, IT, Vigilance and other departments not specifically allocated	BJP
2	Y. Joykumar Singh	Deputy Chief Minister, Finance, Excise, Taxation, Science & Technology, Economics and Statistics and Civil Aviation	NPP
3	Th. Biswajit Singh	Public works, Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, Information & Public Relations, Administrative Reforms, Commerce & Industries and Power	BJP
4	T. Radheshyam	Education, Labour and Employment	BJP
5	Nemcha Kipgen	Social Welfare and Cooperation	BJP
6	V.Hangkhanlian	Agriculture, Veterinary and Animal Husbandry	BJP
7	L.Jayantakumar Singh	Health, Family Welfare, Law & Legislative, Art and Culture	NPP
8	Karam Shyam	PDS and Consumer Affairs, Weights & Measures, Revenue, Relief & Rehabilitation	LJP
9	Letpao Haokip	Youth Affairs, Sports, Irrigation & Flood Control	NPP
10	N. Kayisii	Tribal and Hill Areas Development and Fisheries	NPP
11	Th. Shyamkumar Singh	Forest & Environment, Horticulture & Soil Conservation, Town Planning and MAHUD	INC (Defected to BJP)
12	Losi Dikho	PHED, Printing & Stationary	NPF

Source: Manipur Public Information Centre

BJP also rewarded one ministerial berth to its another major alliance partner NPF and the lone Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) MLA. BJP also inducted its defected MLA from Congress Th. Shyamkumar Singh to the Council of Ministers. Excluding these seven ministers, the Chief Minister N. Biren Singh and another BJP MLA, a strong contender for chief minister's post

Th. Biswajit Singh and the other three BJP MLAs got a ministerial position in this coalition government.

After the government formation, seven more Congress legislators in Manipur switched camps to join the BJP. From the Congress party “Yengkhom Surchandra Singh, Ngamthang Haokip, Oinam Lukhoi Singh, Sanasam Bira Singh, Kshetrimayum Bira Singh, Paonam Brojen Singh joined the saffron party”. Earlier, “T Shyamkumar left the Congress and joined BJP government as the Council of Minister on March 15. On 18 April, Congress MLA Ginsuanhau Zou and 14 party workers joined the BJP” (Scroll,2017; The Hindu, 2017). After this defection, the Congress party asked the Speaker to disqualify these seven MLAs under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution through Anti-Defection Law. However, the speaker-did not take any action. As a result, the party submitted a writ petition before the High Court of Manipur. On 23 July, after hearing the two separate petitions filed by MLA Congress for disqualification of the Minister Th. Shyamkumar Singh under the anti-defection law, the High Court refused to pass any order by citing it as the shortfall of its jurisdiction under the tenth schedule (The Indian Express, 2019). Regarding this petition, Justice KH. Nobin from Manipur High Court made an observation:

It may not be appropriate for this Court to pass any order for the time being, as regards the inaction or indecision on the part of the Speaker to take a decision and moreover, the judicial discipline and propriety demand that High Court shall refrain from issuing a writ petition of quo warranto to declaring the public office of the minister being held by the minister as illegal. (The Indian Express, 2019)

While welcoming this political development, Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh commented, “It shows that more and more elected representatives now trust Narendra Modi’s leadership and the developmental works undertaken by him” (News18, 2017).

Following the formation of its first state government in Manipur, another triumphant electoral victory of BJP came in the form of winning its first Lok Sabha seat in the 2019 general election. Although BJP has continuously fought the Lok Sabha election in Manipur since 1984, the party had to console itself with zero seats and a very marginal vote share. However, after its first state government formation, BJP won Inner Manipur Parliamentary Constituency with 34.33 per cent vote share. BJP candidate Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh defeated the Indian National

Congress candidate Oinam Nabakishore Singh with the margin of 17,755 votes. The other seat Outer Manipur Parliamentary Constituency won by BJP's allies Naga People's Front with 42.37 per cent vote share where BJP's Houlim Shokhopao Mate @ Benjamin became the second candidate with 34 percent vote share. Similarly, on 19 June, 2020 BJP's candidate Leisemba Sanajaoba, the titular king of Manipur won the lone Rajya Sabha seat defeating the Congress candidate.

6.7 BJP in Manipur: After Governance

On 14 March, 2018 Chief Minister of Manipur N. Biren Singh warmly greeted and wished the people of Manipur on the occasion of the first anniversary of the BJP government in the state. In his greetings the Chief Minister highlighted the success of his BJP led coalition government in the state to make a blockade and bandh free state since the BJP led government came into power on 15th March, 2017. The Chief Minister further stated that:

Government has made continuous effort to remove the emotional and developmental gaps between various communities of the state. the Government is focusing on all-round inclusive and harmonious development in the state. Since day one, the government adopted citizen-centric and corruption free approach, thus the process of regular and structured interaction with public such as "Meeyamgi Numit" and "Hill Leaders' Day" was initiated and has been successfully to reduce the grievances and problems faced by the people of the state. The government is committed to maintain transparency and good governance in the state. (Government of Manipur, 2018).

To evaluate the N. Biren Singh led BJP government in Manipur, it would be imperative look back three years before when the Congress party was in power continuously for three terms. During Okram Ibobi Singh's Congress government, Manipur struggled with lots of issues from corrupt administration to continuous blockade and conflict between different ethnic communities and extra-judicial killings. The gap between hill (Tribals) and valley (dominant Meitei community) in Manipur continued to widen due to different burning issues between hill and valley over Inner Line Permit; three controversial bills and hostile situation based on the decision of creation of new districts by Congress government. After coming to power, N. Biren Singh inherited this complex situation along with his government. However, after government formation, the first significant measure that the N. Biren Singh administration has undertaken

that is to bridge the gap between hill and valley and to smoothen the differences between the major communities (Jha, 2017; Roy, 2020, Interview with NEDA Convener Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and RSS Prant Pracharak, M.M. Ashoken). Even in government formation process for the first time in Manipur politics, as Jha mentioned, BJP had succeeded in

bringing together a unity government in the true sense by having a Naga Party, the Naga People's Front, joint the coalition.... Two major forces Meiteis and Nagas represented by different political parties- came together. Politics in the state had been a zero-sum game between the two communities, and the NDA was able to break that. (Jha, 2017, p.209)

In N. Biren Singh government, both Naga, Meiteis and other communities through different political parties NPP, NPF and BJP became part of the BJP led coalition government by holding different key positions in council of ministers as well as different government offices. After coming to power, BJP government in Manipur has passed some significant bills such as the Manipur protection from Mob Violence Bill, 2018; the Manipur International University Bill, 2018 (Manipur Today, 2018). N. Biren Singh has strategically created a popular image of being accessible to every public to listen their problems for one specific day in every month as “*Meeyamgi Numit*” or People Day (Interview with BJP General Secretary N. Nimbus, 2019). The Government is also popularising the mission of “go to village” among common people under which government administration has been trying to reach to every villages to understand, and comprehend their problems and concerns. With the slogan, “go to the hills”, N. Biren Singh led BJP government occasionally organised cabinet meetings at hill district head quarter so that the image of the Meitei dominated government was not seen as anti-tribal. Chief Minister himself personally attended a day in every month to solve and discuss the hill people's problems in his office (Ngaihte, 2020). After coming to power, for the first time N. Biren Singh BJP government “held the first ever festivals in Ukhrul Hills which is occupied by Tangkhul Naga. This festival at hill can be seen as landmark development in Manipur where for the first time a large population of Meitei communities from valley visited Ukhrul and joined the festival” (Roy, 2020).

In terms of coming to understanding with the protesters after killing of nine protesters during the protest against creation of nine district, BJP government successfully “struck a deal with

the agitating tribal bodies and the tribal martyrs were buried” (Ngaihte, 2020). “Projecting a new optimistic face, the government orchestrated grand-looking reception programmes at all districts headquarters. Special packages were announced” (Ngaihte, 2020). At the same time, the government’s “image was solidified further with a number of achievements”. The government successfully deals with the question of prolonged economic blockade and BJP “government cracked down on bandhas and highways blockades and restored normalcy” in the state. “Naga groups' demand against the decision regarding the creation of new districts was conciliated by the state governments regular meetings in hill district head quarter” (Ngaihte, 2020). In Manipur state-wide bandhs and economic blockade called by different civil organisations in many times that lasted for long days have now become a thing of the past. Moreover, the incidences of violent protests and stone pelting incidence by different civil society organisations have gradually come down to a considerable extent in Manipur. “The only violent protest that the BJP government faced was a 85 day long agitations by students and teachers of Manipur University demanding the removal of newly appointed VC Adya Prasad Pandey in 2018” (Roy, 2020). “The apprehensions relating to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) were subdued since the state government had successfully persuaded the centre to extend the Inner Line Permit regime to Manipur” (Ngaihte, 2020).

Although BJP managed to form a coalition government with the help of 12 MLAs from different regional parties, however within the government the chief Minister N. Biren Singh’s attempt to position himself as the only main face of the Manipur government in an authoritative manner dissatisfied many ministers and party workers in the state. Some ministers like Y. Joykumar Singh, the Deputy Chief Minister from NPP party and Th. Biswajit Singh from BJP party was very much critical about his (CM’s) position. As a result, “in June 2019 N. Biren Singh divested Deputy CM Y. Joykumar Singh of his Finance portfolio and the portfolio of BJP’s Th. Biswajit Singh”. After this development, Th. Biswajit approached both Ram Madhav and Himanta Biswa Sarma and BJP’s central leadership and with their intervention, his portfolio was restored back (Roy, 2020). However, the internal division between N. Biren Singh and Deputy CM Y. Joykumar Singh from NPP party has been intensified after this removal. This inter-regime crisis got aggravated due to N. Biren Singh’s one-man style of managing the state affairs without any discussion with his alliance partner. Even the post-poll coalition was formed to form the government without any common minimum programme and

common agenda among the alliance partners. Consequently, it diluted the internal division among its alliance partners. In April 2020 in a meeting to discuss the pandemic lockdown, the Deputy Chief Minister Y. Joykumar Singh raised the irregular distribution of rice under the National Food Security Act. He publicly criticised the Chief Minister for ‘making false promise’. And this led to again removal of all other portfolios from his ministerial position. As a result of this inter-regime crisis, on 17 June, 2020, all four NPP MLAs and the lone AITC candidates and one independent MLA withdrew their support. Three BJP MLAs K. Subhashchandra, T.T. Haokip and Samule Jendai resigned from the party and joined opposition Congress. Because of this political crisis, ruling BJP party lost the support of total nine legislators from its strength and became minority in the house. Opposition leader Okram Ibobi Singh welcomed this change and proposed setting up a Secular Progressive Front with the NPP MLAs and newly joined three BJP MLAs to form a Congress-led government. However, with the intervention of NPP party chief Conrad Sangma, BJP’s NEDA Convener Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma and Central leadership of BJP Government, the NPP four MLAs re-extended their support to N. Biren Singh government and took their ministerial charge (Time 8, 2020)

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has tried to understand the rise of BJP as a significant national player in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh after the General Election of 2014 in terms of its multi-level electoral strategies from coalition politics to defection politics. By analysing these two states' electoral politics in the context of BJP’s rise, the study has tried to understand some basic questions like-Why and how do changes of a party in power at the centre bring corresponding changes in party in power at the state level in North East India? After Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur can be considered as significant case study to understand the recent rise of BJP in the North East region from a comparative perspective. Although, it’s difficult to examine the rise of a national party like BJP with its Hindu nationalist ideology in a multi-diverse state like Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh from a comparative perspective, however, these states significantly help to understand the common factors like the issue of “Ruling Party Syndrome”, defection politics, coalition politics in terms of understanding the rise of BJP in these states.

Chapter 7

BJP and Federal Politics in North East India

7.1 Introduction

North East India (“North Eastern Region, NER”), situated in India's easternmost region, mainly comprises eight states i.e., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Though all eight states are multi-diverse states from different perspectives but from geographical and political-administrative views, the region is being treated as one homogenous entity, i.e., North East India or NER, which is very problematic to understand the dynamic specificity of the region. Alexander Mackenzie in his book “*History of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal*” probably first used the term “Northeast Frontier” to “identify Assam including the adjoining hill areas and then princely states of Manipur and Tripura” (Haokip, 2011, p.111).

During the colonial period, the region became part of British India in 1826 through Yandaboo Treaty. Under British India, North East India became a part of Bengal Province. Assam attained her statehood in 1874 (Nayak & Mishra, 2013). “Historically, successive legal and administrative decisions taken between 1874 and 1935 gave the areas of the North East a distinct identity” (Sachdeva, 2000, p.1). “British colonial policies towards the region had a significant impact in independent India’s constitutional arrangement and administrative system” (Singh, 2006, p.329). The historical transformation that has taken place in the North East region since colonial time enhance the understanding of the evolution of federal system of governance in the region.

The North East region is considered as a homogenous region, and accordingly Indian state also treated this region as a whole in implementing governmental projects and policy allocations. After independence during the state reorganization process in 1956, India was restructured into 14 new states with 6 Union Territories. In this state re-organisation process, Assam was created as the only state by integrating all other parts from the North East region,

excluding princely state Manipur and Tripura as Union Territories. This led to various insurgent movements, separatist state demands by different ethnic groups. As a result, the Indian Government also tried to fulfil the political aspiration of these different ethnic groups. Gradually, several new states were formed, starting with Nagaland in 1963. In 1971 Indian government enacted a new state reorganization act named “North East State Reorganisation Act, 1971” to re-create the political map in this region that formed different states like Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh.

However, “despite the creation of several new states, the basic problem of integration and balanced economic development remains” (Sachdeva, 2000, p.2). Despite the abundance of natural resources, North East India remains economically backward and underdeveloped. “The pace of development has not been rapid in spite of the efforts made specially through the programmes taken up under the successive five years plan” (Yogi, 1991). Since independence, many governments formed and completed their term at the centre, but the North Eastern states remain backwards and neglected in terms of economic development. However, after the 2014 general election, the ruling BJP government at the centre is seen giving particular importance to this region. Through this observation, this chapter will try to understand the developmental trajectory of North East India mainly focusing BJP government’s approach towards this region.

7.2 BJP in North East Region

BJP was not very successful as a single polity-wide national party before the 2014 General Election, however, in the post-2014 period, as a coalition maker party it has emerged as more popular and widely accepted by other political parties under the banner of NDA. As Katherine Adeney (2013) observed, “The BJP was quick to adopt the new realities of coalition politics, realising that its message of Hindutva would not appeal to a pan-Indian base” (Adeney, 2015, p.10). Since its formation, BJP has successfully won the single party absolute majority in the 2014 and 2019 general elections as a dominant national party in India with remarkable electoral presence in all five regions, as analysed in **table 7.1**.

Table 7.1: *BJP's Seats and seat share region wise*

Year	Total Seats	North East	East	South	North	West					
1999	182	2	1.1%	11	6.04 %	19	10.43%	115	63.2 %	35	19.23 %
2014	282	8	2.83 %	25	8.87 %	22	7.80 %	174	61.70 %	53	18.80%
2019	303	14	4.62 %	46	15.18 %	29	9.57 %	163	53.80 %	51	16.83%

Source: Author's calculation based on Election Commission of India's data

Note: **North Zone** -consists of total 220 seats including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Chandigarh, Delhi NCT, Bihar, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. **South Zone**-consists of 132 seats including Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Kerala, Lakshadweep, and Andaman & Nicobar Island. **East Zone** consists of a total of 88 seats including West Bengal, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand. **North East Zone** consists of total 25 seats including Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. **West Zone**- consists of 78 seats including Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu.

Table 7.1 shows BJP's territorial expansion as a polity-wide party in the 1999, 2014 and 2019 general elections. In these elections, BJP has gradually increased its seat share in all other regions where BJP is otherwise considered a weak party compared to the North and West region. North East region shares a total of 25 seats in Lok Sabha election where BJP has gradually increased its seat share from two seats to 14 seats in the recent 2019 general election. After independence, for long decades, most of this region's states were politically dominated by the Congress party. Most of the States from this region like Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, are considered as the Congress party's stronghold. However, after 2014's General election, the electoral trend of this region dramatically shifted to an opposite direction with BJP's phenomenal electoral victory in states like Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Nagaland. BJP's emergence in North East India is a spectacular phenomenon for many reasons. Scholars and political analysts have called this rise as inorganic growth of BJP in North East or rise through co-opting local political leaders, localisation of BJP from its North Indian identity. By following the recent state assembly elections in North Eastern states, it is seen that BJP has adopted multiple strategies from its alliance politics to politics of development to machine politics that this study has discussed comprehensively.

To examine the recent phenomenal rise of BJP as the dominant national party in the North East Region, this study has tried to understand how does the youth voters from North East India see this political change in North East India. For this purpose, this study has done its fieldwork

survey with 120 youth voters studying in six different universities¹ in three North Eastern states, i.e., Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. This study has found a large section of youth voters believe that because of BJP's development initiatives towards the North East India in recent times, BJP has emerged as a dominant national party by replacing the Congress party from this region. At the same time, the other factors like BJP's alliance understanding with regional parties and the anti-incumbency against Congress also helped BJP come into power for the first time in most of the North Eastern states after the 2014 general election. The table 7.2 shows 25 percent of the respondents think that due to BJP's development initiatives towards North East India, BJP becomes successful in replacing Congress from this region. This stimulated the present study to explore BJP's development politics in the North East region.

Table 7.2: *The reasons for BJP's rise in NE India*

BJP's development initiatives towards North East region	25 %
BJP's alliance with different regional parties in the region	23%
Anti-incumbency of past government	19 %
People wanted an alternative	27 %

Source: Based on author's fieldwork survey, 2019

Another important question here was which government they consider better served North East India's interest, that was followed by diverse responses. Among the respondents, 16.67 per cent think both the parties have made lots of works and reasonable efforts towards the North East region, so it's not easy to answer for them. However, a comparatively large section of youth voters among the respondents, i.e., 25 percent, think that BJP has done lots of development works. For them, after coming to power, BJP has given utmost importance to this region. On many occasions, Prime Minister and DoNER minister and other officials also made this claim. At the same time, a significant section of youth voters among the respondents (15.83 percent) think the Congress party better served the interest of North Eastern states.

Table 7.3: *Which Govt better serve the interest of North East India?*

BJP	INC	Both Parties	Neither one	Can not say
25 %	15.83 %	16.67 %	17.50 %	25 %

Source: Based on author's fieldwork survey, 2019

¹ Give details about my field work including universities

To understand the recent political change after the 2014 general election in North East India, the study has tried to understand the youth voter’s take on current overall conditions of North East India by taking some development indicators. “Even after more than four decades of their existence, the states of this region continue to be in the backwaters of economic development and still needs a great deal of concerted effort to bring them at par with the more developed states of the country” (North East Council, n.d.). For this study, opinion was sought regarding the overall conditions of North East India in the last fifteen years. The majority of youth voters are of the opinion that the overall conditions of North East India as a whole in transport, connectivity, roads and bridges and electricity has improved a lot, whereas, in education and employment, medical and health care, and transparency in administration, the overall conditions of North East India are not up to the mark.

Table 7.4: *How do you think the conditions of North East India in recent times?*

Indicators	Improved	Remain same	Deteriorated	Do not know
Transport and connectivity	66.67 %	27.50 %	4.17 %	1.66 %
Roads and Bridges	65 %	25.83 %	5.83 %	3.34 %
Education and Employment	16.67 %	50.83 %	26.67 %	5.83 %
Electricity	50.83 %	39.17 %	4.17 %	5.83 %
Medical and Health care	38.33 %	52.50 %	2.50 %	6.67 %
Transparency in administration	29.17 %	36.67 %	25 %	9.16 %

Source: Based on author’s fieldwork survey, 2019

7.3 Development trajectory in North East India

The region “North East India” is a post-independent, post-partition construction (Bezbaruah,2016); however British administration had a significant contribution to evolve this identity. Although prior to independence, the region was economically prosperous, in the post-independence era, the region has been perturbed by economic backwardness and underdevelopment.

“The partition of the region not only took the economy backwards by over a quarter of a century but also caused structural retrogression to a patronage-dependent economy from the Centre and Government-spending propelled economic growth” (North Eastern Council and MDoNER, 2008, 8). The economy of North East India was severely affected by partition

mainly because the region's string between India and the world was cut from the mainland and worsen its geographical isolation. After partition, the land-link between North East India and the rest of the country was brought down to a narrow corridor around 10 km wide at its narrowest point, known as "Siliguri Corridor" or "Chicken's Neck". Resultantly, North East India has to share its 98 percent border with foreign countries and only 2 percent with India. (North Eastern Council and MDoNER, 2008; Kathuria and Mathur, 2020). While discussing the development trajectory of North East India, the World Bank report pointed

The path of NER's growth and development changed with the division of the Indian subcontinent, first in 1947, with the split of colonial India into India, West Pakistan, and East Pakistan, and then in 1971, with the separation of East Pakistan from West Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. This division interrupted inland water, road, and railway connections through Bangladesh and meant the loss of access to the Port of Chittagong, the gate-way to East Asia and Southeast Asia. The loss of connectivity contributed to the region's falling behind the rest of the country in the pace of economic growth and development. (Kathuria and Mathur, 2020, 41)

During the early plan period, India's Central Government mainly followed a "public sector led industrial and economic development strategy" that failed to address the North East region's diverse problem (Bezbaruah, 2017, 24). During that time, the central government did not give too much attention in infrastructure development, where social and community service became priority in national and state plans. The state government did not have enough resources to address their problems. At the same time, the Zonal Council Act, 1956 clubbed the whole region of North East India under the Eastern region along with West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa (Bhuyan, 2005). As a result, "the apparent indifference of the Central Government to the region came to be locally viewed as an attitude of neglect for the region. The feeling gave birth to a sense of alienation" (Bezbaruah, 2017,24). Before the formation of the "North Eastern Council (NEC)", "the plan priorities of the North Eastern states deviated to a large extent from the priorities in the national plan" (Borah, 2009). During that time, only social and community service sectors had received priorities in state plans, whereas the most important sectors like the development of transport and communication sector was not given so much attention (Borah, 2009).

Likewise, the central government did not allocate any large projects to develop infrastructure for this region. Hence, lack of funds was the major obstacle for the states to take big projects for the development of infrastructure. Consequently, “the region failed to keep pace with the development at par with the rest of the country” (Borah,2009). This implies, for a long-time, North-East India remains one of the most economically backward regions compared to the other parts of India due to “its lack of infrastructure, poor governance, and issues like low productivity and lack of access to the market in both domestic and international” (Ramabrahmam and Hnamte, 2016). North Eastern Region Vision 2020 also highlighted some of the significant challenges as

Inadequate development of basic developmental infrastructure, geographical isolation and difficult terrain that reduces mobility, high rainfall and recurring flood in the Brahmaputra valley, lack of capital formation and proper enterprise-climate, slow technology spread, absence of a supporting market structure and adequate institutional finance structure, low level of private sector investment. (North Eastern Council and MDONER, 2008, 215)

Along with this, centralised planning, the Government of India’s decision to create one unit by submerging all the areas of North East under Assam through the State Reorganisation Act, 1956, created high tension among different ethnic communities. Simultaneously, “the provisions of the six schedule of the Indian Constitution also did not resolve the regionalist demands of the region. Issues of underdevelopment, poor governance, low economic achievements led to insurgencies, ethnic conflict and alienation in the region” (Ramabrahmam and Hnamte, 2016, 890). To respond to this “growing public discontentment in the region, the Central Government started paying greater attention to the social turmoil and economic hardship in the region” (Bezbaruah, 2016, 8). In 1971 the parliament passed five acts, i.e., “the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971”, “the 27th Amendment of the Constitutions of India Act”, “the Government of the Union Territories (Amendment) Act”, “the Manipur Hill Areas Act and the North Eastern Council Act”. These Acts paved the way for creating many new states in North East India like Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya and Mizoram and North East Frontier Tracts that in later phase known as Arunachal Pradesh became Union Territories (Nag,2011, 268). Along with these developments, the most significant political development for the North Eastern region was- the creation of the “North Eastern Council (NEC)” under

“North Eastern Council Act, 1971” that bring together all the states of this region into an institutional arrangement. Under the NEC Act, 1971, the NEC has been designated as

--an advisor body and may discuss any matter in which some or all of the States represented in that Council, have a common interest and advise the Central Government and the Government of each State concerned as to the action to be taken on any such matter, and in particular, may discuss and made recommendations with regard to: a) any matter of common interest in the field of economic and social planning; b) any matter concerning inter-State transport and communications; c) any matter relating to power or flood control projects of common interest. (NEC Act, 1971)

On 7 November 1972 North Eastern Council was inaugurated “for securing balanced and coordinated development and effecting coordination among the North Eastern States” (Ramabrahmam and Hnamte, 2016, 892). Since its formation, the NEC acts as a planning and funding agency. On 20th December 2002, Vajpayee led NDA government passed “North Eastern Council (Amendment) Act, 2002”, which made NEC the regional planning body for the North Eastern Areas. As a result, NEC got more power from an advisory body to a planning body. Balveer Arora, while assessing the role of Zonal Council, NEC as a mechanism for multi-state Cooperation in India, found NEC as the successful idea of regional cooperation in economic development. In comparison with Zonal Council, NEC as the nodal agency for North East Region became successful in working as a mechanism in the intergovernmental works and promoting multi-state regionalism (Arora,1995, 84). NEC also can be seen as an advantage point for collective bargaining power in the negotiations for increased central assistance (Arora,1995, 84). As M. D. Bhuyan argues,

Inauguration of NEC signalled the dawn of a new horizon in Indian planning in as much as it is the first regional planning authority that stands in between the planning commission at the national level and the state planning boards of the North Eastern state at the state level. (Bhuyan, 2005, p.48)

NEC as a function for securing balanced development of the North East region formulates “a unified and coordinated regional plan in addition to the state plan in regard to matters of common importance to that area” (NEC Act, 1971, 2). Similarly, NEC also prioritises the “projects and schemes included in the regional plan and determines the implementation stages” (NEC Act, 1971, 2). In terms of deciding “the location of projects and schemes included in the

regional plan, NEC will forward to the Central Government for its consideration” (NEC Act, 1971, 2). The North East Council also reviews, monitors the “implementation of the projects and schemes under the regional plan and recommends measures for effecting coordination among the concerned state governments” (NEC Act, 1971, 2). The Council also “timely review the efforts undertaken by the states represented in the council to maintain security and public order in the region and make recommendations for necessary steps in this regard” (NEC Act, 1971, 2).

Since its formation, NEC became a significant player in the development efforts of the North East region. As “the nodal agency for the economic and social development of the North Eastern Region” (North Eastern Council, n.d.), NEC mainly focused on certain priority sectors such as transport, communication, power, and health. However, gradually other sectors like agriculture, industry and manpower development etc. also got included in NEC’s development efforts (Borah, 2009). “Over the last thirty-five years, NEC has been instrumental in setting in motion a new economic endeavour aimed at removing the basic handicaps that stood in the way of normal development of the region and has ushered in an era of new hope in this backward area full of great potentialities” (NEC, n.d.).

NEC marked “the beginning of a new chapter of concerted and planned efforts for rapid development of the Region” (NEC, n.d.). Before establishing NEC, the overall development of the sectors like transport, communication and power etc. were not all impressive.

Table 7.5: *Budget Allocation of North Eastern Council (2012-2021)*

Financial Year	Actual Budget Allocation (In Cr)
2012-13	770
2013-14	700
2014-15	579
2015-16	773
2016-17	920
2017-18	1075
2018-19	1055
2019-20	1237
2020-21	1474

Source: Annual Reports of MDoNER and NEC.

NEC has funded various projects across all the sectors for the overall development of this region. Significantly NEC has brushed up its financial performance. During the last 10 years, the budget allocation for NEC has increased from 700 Crore to 1474 crore (See Table 7.5), which expanded its development activities in various projects and schemes.

NEC has primarily emphasised on strengthening connectivity and transportation of the region that plays a significant role in all developmental activities. According to NEC's official reports and website, NEC has constructed a total of 10,500 km roads for improving inter-state connectivity (NEC, n.d.; NEC, 2020). In the power sector, "NEC also assisted in installing 694.5 MW of power plants and construction of 2540.41 km of transmission and distribution lines". NEC also gave funds for the upgrading and improving the infrastructure of the existing Airports of the region. In association with the "Airport Authority of India (AAI)" on 60: 40 (where NEC funded 60 percent and AAI funded 40 percent) basis, NEC funded for the advancement of the infrastructure of five major Airports of the region, namely Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Imphal and Umroi. NEC also funded for construction of new airports like Tezu in Arunachal Pradesh and Pakyong in Sikkim. (North Eastern Council, n.d.)

In October 1996, "the former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda led Central Government announced a new initiative for the North Eastern Region (NER), a policy decision to earmark at least 10% of Plan Budgets of the Central Ministries/Departments for the development of NE States" (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India, 2020). After this, Vajpayee led BJP coalition government at the centre (from the 1998-99 Union Budget onwards), "created a pool of non-lapsable Central funds (NLCPR) for funding the development projects in the region so that resources gap could be filled up" (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India, 2020). For that purpose, "10 percent of the budgets of the central ministries were earmarked for the development of NER, and unspent balances were to accrue to the NLCPR for future spending on NER" (North Eastern Council, n.d.).

The Government of India in July 2018 made the "Union Minister of Home Affairs as ex-officio Chairman of the North Eastern Council (NEC) and Hon'ble Minister of State (I/C), MDoNER as Vice Chairman of the Council. For a better functional integration between M/o DoNER and NEC, Secretary, DoNER has been made the ex-officio Member, North Eastern Council and

Secretary, North Eastern Council as ex-officio Additional Secretary in the Ministry of DoNER”. Under this new arrangement, with “Home Minister as Chairman and Minister of DoNER as Vice Chairman, NEC and all the Governors and Chief Ministers of North Eastern States as Member would provide a forum for discussing inter-state matters more comprehensively and also consider common approaches to be taken in future”. As an affective change, just like Zonal Councils, NEC could also now “discuss such inter-State issues as drug trafficking, smuggling of arms and ammunition, boundary disputes etc”. Thus “the NEC's repositioning will help it become a more effective body for the North Eastern Region” (PIB, Government of India, 2018).

The Central Government in January 2020 approved “the allocation of 30 percent of NEC's allocation for new projects under the existing Schemes of North Eastern Council for the development of deprived areas; deprived/neglected sections of society and emerging priority sectors in the North Eastern States” (PIB, 2020).

“The policy reorientation on infrastructure in the region came to the forefront with the establishment of the Department of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) in 2001” (Ziipao, 2020). In Central Government, the “Department of Development of North Eastern Region” is the only Ministry with territorial jurisdiction. Ministry of DoNER mainly emphasises addressing the special needs of the NE region. “It coordinates with various Ministries/Departments primarily concerned with development activities in NER” (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, 2020). Sanjib Barua pointed the creation of DoNER as a cabinet-level Department in Union Government to bridge the region's 'developmental gap' (Baruah, 2009). As Baruah mentioned, "Northeast India is the only region in the country whose development is the special mandate of a department of the national government" (2009: 1). The official website of MDoNER define the Ministry as

The Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region is responsible for the matters relating to the planning, execution and monitoring of development schemes and projects in the North Eastern Region. Its vision is to accelerate the pace of socio-economic development of the Region so that it may enjoy growth parity with the rest of the country. (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, n.d.)

DoNER was created to coordinate the developmental efforts in North East India and also to strengthen North Eastern Council. However, under section six of the “North Eastern Council (Amendment) Act, 2002”, NEC remains under the administrative control of the Ministry of DONER (The North- Eastern Council (Amendment Act, 2002). Since then, both NEC and DoNER started working together for the planning and development of the region. This Act under section two also added Sikkim as the eight-member state of NEC.

Initially, “the DONER ministry worked within the Ministry of Home Affairs” (Baruah, 2005, 45). The Ministry was upgraded to a full-fledged Ministry in 2004. Since its inception, DoNER has been playing a very significant role in the advancement of the region. DoNER mainly prioritises infrastructural and connectivity projects, livelihood projects and inclusive growth of NER (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India, 2020). The Ministry implements various schemes, including schemes of “Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR)” that has been restructured as “North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS)” and “Special Packages through State Governments of NER and some Central Ministries”. The NLCPR Scheme mainly bridges “the gap in infrastructure sector of the North Eastern Region by providing financial assistance to the projects prioritized by the State Governments. Funding of projects under NLCPR scheme is on 90:10 sharing pattern between Central and State Governments” (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India, 2021, 19). However, on 15 December 2017, the Central government restructured the existing NLCPR scheme with a new “North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS)” with 100% fund by the Government of India. Under this scheme, the Central government will provide financial assistance for the projects of, “a. Physical infrastructure sectors relating to water supply, power, connectivity enhancing tourism; b. Social sector of education and health for creation of infrastructure in the areas of primary and secondary sectors” (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India, 2021, 21). This NESIDS schemes have become very significant for the infrastructure development of this region. Under the scheme, only those projects are taken up which are not covered under any scheme of the Government of India or the State Government. Since the approval of NESIDS on 15.12.2017, so far 80 projects worth Rs.2111.13 crore have been sanctioned by MDoNER (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India, 2021).

The Ministry of DoNER, while allocating funds under NESIDS scheme to the states every year, mainly follows a Normative allocation formula based on some criteria. The Ministry distributes the funds among the states of this region based on “weightage attached which are derived on certain parameters, e.g. Area, Population, Human Development Index, Road density, Percentage of census etc.” (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India, 2021, 22). Table 7.7 shows the normative allocation weightage parameters through which every state get total projects and funds under this scheme.

Table 7.6: Normative Allocation Weightage Formula

Sl. No	Characteristics	Weights attached
1	Area	25 %
2	Population (census 2011)	25%
3	Human Development Index	15 % (in inverse proportion)
4	Road density per 1000 sq km	7% (in inverse proportion)
5	Percentage of census villages Electrified	6 % (in inverse proportion)
6	Number of Hospital beds (Allopathy) per 1000 persons	6 % (in inverse proportion)
7	Percentage of households having safe drinking water	6 % (in inverse proportion)
8	Completion rate of NLCPR projects	10 %

Source: Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India reports.

On the basis of this Normative allocation weightage parameters as mentioned in Table 7.6 adopted by DoNER, the State-wise percentage of normative allocations are below in table 7.7

Table 7.7: State-wise percentage of Normative Allocation

Sl. No	State	Percentage %
1	Arunachal Pradesh	13.06
2	Assam	27.78
3	Manipur	9.98
4	Meghalaya	10.76
5	Mizoram	10.42
6	Nagaland	10.18
7	Sikkim	6.54
8	Tripura	11.28
	Total	100

Source: Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India reports.

Along with these NLCPR schemes, the Ministry also launched various schemes like “Social and Infrastructure Development Fund (SIDF), North Eastern States Roads Investment

Programme (NESRIP), North East Road Sector Development Scheme (NERSDS), North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS), Special Accelerated Road Development Programme for North East (SARDP-NE)” for the development in the region (Ziipao,2020, 212; PIB, Government of India, 2019).

On February 21st, 2018 Government of India formed “NITI Forum for North East” to examine various proposals both at the Central and State level and formulate plans for the region's rapid development. The forum has been constituted under “the chairmanship of Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog and co-chairmanship of Minister of State (IC), DoNER. The forum members include CEO, NITI Aayog, Chief Secretaries of North Eastern States, Secretaries of key Ministries/ Departments, retired bureaucrats, economists and academicians”. The forum's main aim is to “ensure the sustainable economic growth of the North Eastern Region (NER) of the country and periodically review the development status in NER”. NITI Forum for North East will identify “various constraints on the way for accelerated, inclusive but sustainable economic growth in the North East Region of the country and to recommend suitable interventions for addressing identified constraints” (PIB, Government of India, 2018). The ‘NITI Forum for North East’ first meeting was held in Agartala, Tripura on 10th April. In that meeting, the Forum proposed that “the development projects in the NER would be based on the concept of HIRA (Highways, Inland Waterways, Railways and Airways) as spelt out by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi” (PIB, Government of India, 2018).

The Ministry of DoNER has given significant efforts to different infrastructure projects in the region. The Ministry has emphasised on improving rail, road, air and inland waterways connectivity in the region. During this period, the Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways is implementing the “Special Accelerated Road Development programme for North East (SARDP-NE) under Bharatmala Pariyojana Phase-I, spanning over a period of five years (2017-18 to 2021-22), wherein roads of NER, aggregating to 3,528 km have been included for improvement” (PIB, Government of India, 2018). “Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has constructed 3178 km of roads in NER during 2014-15 to 2018-19. During the same period, under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), 22,882 km of roads was constructed, while 987 Km roads were constructed by Border Roads Organisation (BRO). NEC has completed 33 road projects during 2014-15 to 2018-19” (PIB, Government of India,2020).

7.4 BJP and Development Politics in North East India: After 2014 General Election

While examining the causes of BJP's significant electoral growth in the region, it is argued that in terms of development discourse in North East India, BJP has successfully garnered more credit compared to Congress party that has successfully transformed into electoral performance. From the creation of Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) to reviving the North Eastern Council by giving more autonomy and power as regional sub-planning body, BJP has earned much credit which benefited them in their political consolidation. In the name of development politics, BJP has taken special initiative to increase air, railway, road and connectivity in the North East under their mission Make in North East. On June 04, 2018, the DoNER minister Dr Jitendra Singh launched "Make in North East" initiative, as a follow-up to the "Make in India" initiative inspired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. In 2016, 24 May, BJP along with different regional parties from the region formed a grand alliance named "North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA)" as umbrella platform for strengthening coordination among its alliance partners in North East India. Through this initiative, BJP as their development politics "emphasised on increasing coordination among the states of the region as NEDA's primary objective, and identified development and connectivity as two key solutions to the woes of the region" (Kashyap, 2016b).

BJP understands it very well that unlike other parts of India, BJP cannot play with their Hindutva politics alone for political consolidation in this region. That is why BJP from very starting showed their strong commitment of all-round development in this region. Strategically BJP has targeted road connectivity, bridge construction, expansion of railway service from different remote areas of this region to national capital. Strategically during elections, BJP picked the issue of the miss-rule of Congress party in this region, issues like poor governance, systemic corruption, inadequate infrastructure facilities, and poor delivery of public services. The BJP in their 2014 election manifesto also emphasised on initiating "concrete steps to address the issue of development of Northeast by empowering the Ministry of DONER with a broader charter and non-lapsable funds for the rapid development of the region" (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014). The party is also emphasising on "enhancing connectivity within the region and the rest of the country along with a particular emphasis on massive infrastructure

development of Actual Control in Arunachal and Sikkim” (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014). The other issues include addressing “flood control in Assam and river water management, issues of infiltration and illegal immigrants in the Northeast region” (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014). During an election campaign at Tuensang in Nagaland, Modi said “Unless the northeast is developed, the dream of having a developed country will not be achieved and therefore the BJP government is paying special attention to the requirement of the region” (Money Control, 2018). In 2019 election manifesto too BJP committed to “focus on the development of infrastructure and improved connectivity in this region to ensure that the North Eastern states duly participate in the economic progress of the country. “The party will continue to take the necessary steps to leverage the tremendous potential of hydro-electric, tourism, horticulture etc. in the North Eastern states” (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2019). While discussing BJP Government’s initiatives towards North East Region, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his official website mentioned the party’s achievement in North East region as follows

From being the ‘Neglected States of the Nation’ to ‘Look and Act East Policy’, the past five years have been transformational for North East India. The last time North East India received undivided attention from lawmakers and policymakers was when Late Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the first Prime Minister to spend a night in the region. His tenure was dotted with multiple initiatives that aimed to connect North East India through infrastructure and technology, including the conception of a separate ministry, a non-lapsable pool of funds for the North Eastern Region, inclusion of Sikkim as a member of North Eastern Council and a dedicated department for the development of North East region. (Narendra Modi, 2019)

Through their development politics, BJP has successfully replaced other national parties like Congress and CPI (M) from the North East region and consolidated its power as a dominant national player within a concise period. BJP has adopted multiple strategies for political consolidation in North East India. The stellar performance of BJP in the recent election in Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland is a proof of this thing. In the name of development politics, the Modi government’s big push for road, railway infrastructure, and various steps to boost the regional economy helped them bring the masses closer to the BJP. Because of these development initiatives initiated by BJP government in North East India, BJP emerged as a

dominant national player in the region in 2019 General Election also. We need to analyse some of its activities in the region-

As a development initiative, during this period, the BJP at centre has given special importance on enhancing the connectivity, transport, infrastructure development within the region to adjust with the rest of India.

7.4.1 BJP's initiatives towards roads and highways

Poor connectivity in North East India has always been a major obstruction in the economic progress of the region. In North East India, BJP government has “branded its policy to build infrastructure in northeast as Transformation by Transportation” (The Economic Times, 2018). After 2014 GE, BJP government at centre is seen undertaking various initiatives for improvement of roads and highways and bridges in the region. “One of the first things the NDA government did after coming to power in 2014 was to set up National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), which was given the mandate to construct highways in the Northeast and hilly areas of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir” (Das Gupta, 2019). For fast-track road construction, the “National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (NHIDCL)” is working on “construction/upgradation/widening of National Highways in the Region” (PIB, 2019). In the last five years, for better connectivity and road infrastructure, the central government under “Special Accelerated Road Development Programme for North East (SARDP-NE), a road of the length of 6418 km have been approved and about 5273 km road has been sanctioned for execution at an estimated cost of Rs.57,518 crore. Out of total length of 5723 km sanctioned, a length of 3029 km (as on 31.3.2019) has been completed against total expenditure of Rs.30,315 crore” ((PIB, 2019). “The road ministry has also sanctioned over 12,000-km stretch of highways projects entailing a cost of Rs 1,90,000 crore” (Das Gupta, 2019).

During the last five years, Modi government has constructed “a length of 23093.39 km of rural roads in the region under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) with an expenditure of Rs.10731.99 crore. Besides this, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region has also taken up road infrastructure gap filling projects under NLCPR-State (624 nos. of road and bridge projects for Rs.6474.00 crore with approximate road length of 8400 km), NERSDS (13

projects having total length of 329.72 km of road worth Rs.1120.41 crore) and schemes of NEC (180 projects having a total length of 11000 km of road worth Rs.6580.00 crore)” (PIB, 2019).

Based on the road transport and highway ministry’s data, it is said that during last ten years (2009-2019) the BJP government has constructed more roads than the UPA government in North East. “From a mere 0.6 km of national highways built per day during the UPA era (2009-14), road construction more than doubled, touching an all-time high of 1.5 km per day between 2014 and March 2019” (Das Gupta, 2019). As per government’s data, from 2014-2019, the BJP government has built 2,731 km of national highways across the eight North Eastern states whereas during UPA government from 2009-2014 had built 1,079.25 km (Das Gupta, 2019a).

In terms of enhancing the connectivity, BJP government has also completed many rail and road bridges in the North East region. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 26 May, 2017 inaugurated “the strategically crucial and India's longest 9.15-km river bridge connecting Assam and Arunachal Pradesh near the China border on the third anniversary of his government” (Firstpost, 2017). The bridge was named after Bharat Ranta Dadasaheb Phalke awardee and legendary lyricist-singer late Bhupen Hazarika. On 25th December, 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated India’s longest rail-cum-road bridge in Bogibeel over the Brahmaputra River in Assam. In his inaugural address, Modi took a veiled dig at the erstwhile Congress government saying, “In four and half years, Bogibeel bridge is the third bridge that has been constructed over Brahmaputra, while in 70 years of Independence, only three bridges have come up over the river. The process of constructing five more bridges has been initiated. Bogibeel is a tribute to former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee,” (The Economic Times, 2018). It is noteworthy that “The Bogibeel project was a part of the 1985 Assam Accord and was sanctioned in 1997-98. The foundation stone was laid by then prime minister HD Deve Gouda on January 22, 1997, but the commencement of work on the project was done by Vajpayee on April 21, 2002” (The Indian Express, 2018). “The bridge will accelerate socio-economic development of upper Assam and the eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh. It has been constructed for a double line broad gauge track and a three-lane road; this bridge is aimed at being the lifeline of the North Eastern part of the country and will facilitate connectivity between the North and South banks of Brahmaputra in the Eastern region of Assam and

Arunachal Pradesh” (Hindustan Times, 2018). “The construction of the bridge also assumes strategic importance as it will facilitate the rapid movement of troops along India’s nearly 4,000 km border with China” (Hindustan Times, 2018).

7.4.2 BJP’s initiatives towards the railways Network

One of the major achievements of the BJP government in North East Region is rapid expansion of railway network. According to the Ministry of Railways, “of the eight North East state capitals, Agartala, Guwahati and Itanagar have already been connected with broad gauge rail network since 2014. The deadline for connecting all the state capitals with broad gauge rail network is 2020” (Das Gupta, 2019 b). During the last five years, the BJP government at centre has given great emphasis on quick execution of infrastructure projects and the funding of infrastructure projects for Railways has increased. “The average annual expenditure in New Line / Gauge Conversion / Doubling infrastructure projects during 2014-19 was ₹26,022 crore per year as against ₹11,527 crore per year during 2009-14 which is around 126% more than during 2009-14” (PIB, 2019). As per Railway ministry’s data “the average railways budget allocation for the North East also increased by 161 per cent during this period — from Rs 2,122 crore to Rs 5,531 crore, on a per year basis (Das Gupta, 2019 b). Between 2014 and 2018 according to the Railway vision document for 2020, over 900 km of meter gauge track was converted to broad gauge and this was 3.2 times compared to four years ago.

Before BJP came to power at centre in 2014 General election, most of the North Eastern states were not connected through railway network. Only Assam was connected with national capital, another state from the region Tripura was connected within the state through meter-gauge only. However, Modi government converted this meter gauge into broad gauge to connect the state with rest of India. On 13 January 2016, Tripura got its first BG passenger train and later on 13 July 2016 it was expanded up to the National capital. Similarly, on 7th April 2014, Indian Railways created history by connecting Arunachal Pradesh with rest of India through railway network. BJP government commissioned a BG railway line in Arunachal Pradesh up to Naharlagun in February, 2015. On 20th February, 2015 Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off from Itanagar the AC Express between Naharlagun and New Delhi and the Intercity Express between Naharlagun and Guwahati that connects Itanagar to the Capital of India and other places. On 3rd July, 2021, Manipur also entered India’s railway map when the first

passenger train from Assam's Silchar railway station to Vaingaichunpao railway station in Manipur entered for a trial run (Hindustan Times, 2021). Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh expressed his gratitude towards the Central Government for this initiative. Biren Singh tweeted, "Historic moment for Manipur as the first trial run of a passenger train from Silchar to Vaingaichunpao in Tamenglong was successfully conducted on Friday. The people of Manipur are immensely grateful to PM @narendramodi Ji for the transformation brought under his leadership" (Singh, 2021).

For North East Region, "the Government of India is executing 15 new rail line projects of 1,385 km length at a cost of over Rs 47,000 crore. In 2016, then railways minister Suresh Prabhu laid the foundation stone for the Rs 2,315 crore, 88-km Dhansiri-Kohima railway track, connecting Kohima to the national railway network" (The Economic Times, 2018). After Assam, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh, BJP government is now taking initiatives on creating new BG lines to connect the remaining Capitals of North Eastern States. By 2023, the Central Government is aiming at initiating five major Indian Railways projects in the region to connect the capitals of all the North Eastern states. Among these projects, "Mizoram's capital Aizawl is to get Indian Railways connectivity through the 51 km long Bhairabi Sairang project, which is expected to be completed by March 2023. Kohima, the capital of Nagaland to get the rail network through 82 km long Dimapur-Kohima project. This rail project is expected to be completed by the month of March 2023. On the other hand, the capital of Sikkim Gangtok will get Indian Railways connectivity through the 44 km long Sivok-Rangpo railway project" (Nag, 2020).

7.4.3 BJP's initiatives towards air connectivity

Another significant achievement during BJP government in this region is development of air connectivity. During this period, the Airport Authority of India in collaboration with North Eastern Council has taken various initiatives for the upgradation, improvement of the infrastructure of major airports in the region like Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Imphal etc. Similarly, government has taken initiatives for construction of new airport like Tezu in Arunachal Pradesh, Umroi in Meghalaya and Pakyong in Sikkim.

"The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has allocated Rs 3,400 crore for the upgradation of airports in the North East region" (The Economic Time, 2019). According to the government,

“projects worth Rs 934 crore have already been completed while the rest would be over in the next two or three years. The aviation projects in the North East include re-carpeting of the runway at Silchar and Lilabari airport and an aviation manpower training institute; development of Rupsi airport; a new integrated airport and an engineering workshop at Agartala; expansion and revamp of existing terminal building and runway at Dimapur; installation of an instrument landing system (ILS) at the Shillong airport; and operationalisation and development of the Tura airport” (The Economics Time, 2019). Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 28 September, 2018 inaugurated first greenfield airport at Pakyong in Sikkim, around 33 km from the state capital, Gangtok. The Pakyong airport will pave way for direct connectivity to Sikkim with the rest of the country as the state has no direct railway link at present (The Hindu Business Line, 2018). Before Arunachal Pradesh assembly election 2019, Narendra Modi laid “the foundation stone for the construction of Greenfield Airport at Hollongi and inaugurated retrofitted Tezu airport. The terminal at Hollongi will be constructed at a cost of Rs 955 crore with an area of 4100 sq m and has peak handling capacity of 200 passengers per hour” (PIB, GoI, 2019).

With these development initiatives, BJP government at centre seems to be trying to establish in firm sense that BJP is always stands for the all-round development of the North East region. While addressing the first election rally during 2021 Assam assembly election in Guwahati on 21st March, 2021, Modi mentioned, “The northeast region would be the key development hub of India and the NDA government has already re-established air, rail, road and water connectivity between the region and other parts of the country” (The Statesmen, 2021). While addressing a rally at Gohpur, Assam on March 14, 2021, India’s Defence Minister Rajnath Singh urged the people of Assam to vote for BJP by saying, “Northeast was neglected by the Centre before BJP came to power... Nobody would talk nicely to ministers from here in Delhi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi ensured that a central leader visits northeast each month to interact with people so they do not feel ignored” (Zee news, 2021). The defence minister also mentioned, “Our government gave Bharat Ratna to music legend Bhupen Hazarika while the previous governments neglected him. This shows our commitment and emotions towards people from Northeast and Assam” (Zee news, 2021).

In 2019, the BJP government at centre posthumously awarded Bharat Ratna to music legend Dr. Bhupen Hazarika on the eve of 70th Republic Day. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was the second person from North East region to receive this prestigious highest civilian award from Indian government. Before him, Assam's first Chief Minister Gopinath Bardoloi also received this prestigious award during Atal Bihari Vajpayee led BJP Government in 1999. Gopinath Bordoloi was a prominent Congress leader and former Chief Minister of Assam who had significant contribution towards North East during State reorganization process. He was conferred the title of "Lokapriya" because of his immense popularity among masses. Bordoloi played a significant role to "keep Assam united in times of partition, especially when parts of Assam were to merge with East Pakistan, erstwhile East Bengal"(Phukan, 2014). Similarly, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was the most popular cultural icon, a poet, music composer, singer, actor, journalist, author and filmmaker from Assam. He was popularly known as the 'Bard of Brahmaputra' and Assam Ratna (India Today, 2019). Reference to Gopinath Bordoloi and Bhupen Hazarika getting Bharat Ratna award during NDA regime was significant. Congress party's failure to recognise these two prominent personalities from Assam and BJP's strategic victory to recognise them with Bharat Ratna gave the BJP upper hand during election. Narendra Modi during his election rally criticised Congress party for failing to recognise these two legends; he said "I want to ask Congress, why they failed to confer Bharat Ratna to those who really deserved it? I feel proud that BJP got the chance to give Bharat Ratna to Gopinath Bordoloi & Bhupen Hazarika: PM Shri @narendramodi #NorthEastForModi" (BJP, 2019).

On 7th July, 2021, BJP government at centre reshuffled and expanded the Union cabinet where for the first time five politicians from the North Eastern states got different ministries in the same Union Cabinet. For the first-time, North-East India had highest ever representation in the union Council of ministers. Assam's former Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Kiren Rijiju from Arunachal Pradesh were included as cabinet ministers whereas Rameswar Teli from Assam, Pratima Bhoumik from Tripura and Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh from Manipur were included as Minister of State in the Union cabinet (The Economic Times, 2021). Before this, during 2014 NDA government too, three representatives from North East Sarbananda Sonowal, Rajen Gohain and Kiren Rijiju were included as Ministers of State in Union government. It is significant in the sense that since National front (1989) government, North East has had no cabinet minister in Union cabinet. On the contrary, in earlier Union

governments, the region as a whole used to get a token representation of one or two (The Print, 2021; The Economic Times, 2021). According to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) sources, “the move came as the North East has supported the BJP wholeheartedly, from Assam to Manipur. Moreover, the BJP does not want to dilute its hold in the region, which offers 25 Lok Sabha and 14 Rajya Sabha seats” (The Print, 2021).

Although in terms of political significance and electoral arithmetic, the North East India does not have much importance in national politics due to its tiny number of representatives, for the BJP and RSS, the North East Region holds importance to fulfil their “Akhand Bharat” (greater Undivided India) mission (Longkumer, 2019). Both RSS and BJP consider North East India not as peripheral states but as the heart of India (Longkumer, 2019). In this context, Grant Wyeth, an Australian political analyst made an interesting observation about BJP’s interest in North East India as

The BJP’s penetration into the northeast also demonstrates its comprehension of the strategic importance of the region. Political instability in the northeast has the potential to be exploited by China for its territorial claims, as well to add disruption to India’s most geographically sensitive point. So, although these states are electorally insignificant to winning federal government, the party understands it requires a strong presence in the northeast to maintain understanding, influence and control over the larger geopolitical issues that are present within it. (Wyeth, 2018)

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has tried to understand the role of BJP in the North East region in terms of its political activities, governmental policies under two NDA governments i.e. from 1999-2004 and present 2019 government. This chapter examines BJP government’s initiative of the creation of “Ministry of DoNER (Development of North Eastern Region)” and restructuring the North East Council as a regional planning body and also in the name of “Make in North East India” mission how BJP government is playing a significant role to consolidate its strong political position in this region. This chapter also tries to examine the propose hypothesis, i.e., in the name of federal politics, BJP is trying to consolidate its position as dominant political force in North East India by giving expression to certain institutional format (Like DoNER) for development of this region.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

The study has examined the emergence of the BJP as a dominant political force in India's North Eastern states by observing the shifting trend of electoral politics in North East India, specifically three states i.e., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur. The study mainly concentrates on the political aspect of Indian federalism under BJP and its strategy for coming to power both at centre and states, mainly its phenomenal growth in India's North East region. By following William Riker's proposition of measuring federalism with party system in Indian context, the study has examined the emergence of BJP Dominant system and its political expansion in the North East region after 2014 general election.

The study has tried to understand the rise of BJP as the second dominant-party system or BJP Dominant system in India and its impact on Indian federalism. It also examined the causes and outcomes of changing the political landscape of North East India through the current emergence of BJP as a viable alternative to the Congress regime. To understand the BJP's electoral strategy of political coalition, the study has explored the research questions like How did the BJP manage to oust Congress's dominance and tilt the political axis in its favour by the strategic formation of NEDA to recognise and accommodate the political aspirations of various regional parties in North East India? To understand the "Ruling Party Syndrome" and defection politics in North East India, the study has enquired the research question Why and how does change of party in power at the centre bring corresponding changes in party in power at state level in North East India? The study also examines, how does BJP's parent organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh help BJP in expanding its electoral base in North East Region, specifically in Assam, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh? In the name of federal politics, How BJP is trying to consolidate its position in terms of a developmental aspect of the North East Region.

As this study has discussed North East India is crucial to understand the complex dynamics of Indian federalism in the context of party politics. India has followed a demos-enabling

federation with an asymmetrical framework to accommodate all diverse identities, minimising regional differences, and protect the cultural, linguistic, religious interests of the different minorities and aboriginal tribal communities by making a special arrangement under asymmetrical federalism. As part of constitutional asymmetry through different constitutional provisions the North Eastern states get special privileges in tribal administration and also protecting endangered tribal identity and recognised their rights over their land and forests. However, under political asymmetry the eight states of this region become politically less significant due to its small number of representatives at parliament. As a result, compare to other politically significant states, the all-North Eastern states don't have much bargaining power in terms of raising their state issues as well as making substantial impact in the national level decision making process. Because of this political asymmetry, the North Eastern states having a natural inclination towards the party in power at the Centre due to their heavy dependency on grants and financial aids from the central government. This dependency syndrome has significantly influenced the electoral politics of North East India to a great extent in terms of "Ruling Party Syndrome", defection politics and alliance politics in the region.

The study has enquired into the rise of BJP as a dominant national player in the North East region by introspecting multiple factors where some of these are common and some are state specific factors. While discussing BJP's rise as a formidable player in Assam along with Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, this study has engage with three main political dynamics i.e., BJP's electoral strategies as formation of political coalition, co-opting of political elites from other parties and secondly, BJP's localisation in terms of party agendas, ideological position and political expansion through the activities of its parent organisation RSS and thirdly, BJP's development politics towards the region for its political consolidation.

It's worth mentioning that the issues of electoral politics have been dealt with in the context of North East states only on individual state centric consideration. While BJP's consolidation and rise in the region in recent period has been an electoral reality, there has not been any significant research that undertakes a comparative study of the same taking the states of the region in view. It is in this light, this study seeks to fill that gap by bringing a comparative study of the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur vis-à-vis the rise of BJP. Although, it's difficult to examine the rise of a national party in a multi-diverse region like

North East India from a comparative perspective, however, Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh significantly help to understand the common factors like the issue of “Ruling Party Syndrome”, defection politics, coalition politics and role of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in BJP’s rise in these North Eastern states.

In this research while understanding the rise of BJP dominant system in Indian federalism and its political expansion as dominant player in North East region, this study has found a vast difference between the BJP before and after 2014 general election. After the 2014 and 2019 general elections, India’s party system has seen a major transformation from a competitive multi-party coalition-dominated system (1989-2014) to a new dominant party system centred around the recent rise of BJP as the dominant national party. As of 2019, BJP is India's largest political party in terms of its dominance in parliament and state assembly elections. Before 2014, BJP as the national party, under the compulsion of coalition politics, followed the "coalition dharma" strictly to maintain their multi-party minority coalition government. The party was even ready to sacrifice its core ideology, party agendas for the sake of power. However, after the 2014 general election with the single party absolute majority position in the national election, BJP started maintaining a dominant party-style government with a surplus coalition at the Centre. However, in some states where BJP has majority formed its state governments and where the party has no majority, BJP even did not hesitate to become a junior partner for expanding its political presence in that state. After 2014, under the one-party dominant system, BJP has sought to centralise political power and asserted its ideological hegemony that led to political majoritarianism to electoral authoritarianism. After coming to power within six months, BJP has legislated some significant enactments that proved how BJP tried to assert its dominant party-style government with imposing its ideological hegemony that led to political majoritarianism in India. To fulfill its long-standing ideological projects, BJP has abolished article 370 to remove the special constitutional status enjoyed by Jammu and Kashmir since its formation. The same way BJP also enacted the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019. The same way BJP's stand on implementing the National Register for Citizenship can also be seen as party's bold move towards imposing a strong ideological hegemony with a political majoritarianism.

In the context of North East India also, during initial period after 2014 general election, BJP is seen deviating from its narrative in the rest of the country and taking a dual stand from “Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan” party to one that homogenise regional parties and their agendas to become a locally electable political entity. BJP has adopted multiple strategies from selective use of Hindutva politics in Hindu majority states like Assam, Manipur, and Tripura for their electoral gain. Simultaneously, in other Christian-dominated states Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland, the party has other agendas so that as an insider party, BJP can establish itself as a significant player. BJP is seen adopting a two-pronged strategy in the North East for their electoral gain, instead of fighting with regional players, projecting itself as an anti-congress, anti-left force to unite all the regional parties under one common platform through the formation of North East Democratic Alliance. At the same time, BJP’s parent organisation RSS also became a significant contributing factor for its rise in the region. Before independence, RSS and its different affiliate organisations have been actively working among different sections of people through their different activities like setting educational institutions, cultural forum, welfare programmes etc. Through such works they not only got popular recognition among different marginal, backward section of people but also expand their organisational network in different parts of Assam and other North Eastern states. BJP as their political wing got electoral benefit from these activities. In North East India the RSS has worked as an election machine for BJP during election time. Its work is not only limited to promoting Hindutva but also as an election machine or machine politics for BJP during election time. Before the 2014 general election, in most North Eastern states, the BJP has neither any significant support base nor organizational base. However, the RSS has worked for establishing footprint of its political wing in North Eastern states. In terms of development discourse in North East India, BJP has successfully garnered more credit which they have successfully converted into electoral performance compared to Congress party. In the name of development politics, BJP has taken special initiative to increase air, railway, road and connectivity in the North East under their mission of Make in North East.

After capturing power in most of the North Eastern states, BJP is seen imposing majoritarian agendas towards this region both ideologically and politically. Although regarding beef issue, the party has different exceptional agenda towards North East India in comparison with other parts of India. However, BJP’s core Hindutva agenda came to forefront in the region through

some of its policies, agendas like Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019. Through this act, in the name of persecuted minorities, Indian government will give the citizenship status to illegal Hindu, Christian, Jain, Sikh religious people in neighbouring country like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh etc. This act deliberately excluded the Muslim religious people, Tamil people of Sri Lanka and Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar. Similarly, Assam government's The Assam Cattle Preservation Bill 2021 also significant in this context. "The bill would replace the existing Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 1950, which allowed the slaughter of the cattle above the age of 14 after approval from local veterinary officers" (The Hindu, 2021). According to this Bill, "No one will be allowed to sell beef or beef products in any form except at places permitted by the government. Beef would not be allowed to be sold in areas that have a predominant population of Hindu, Sikhs, Jains, and other non-beef-eating communities or within a radius of five km of any temple, satra (Vaishnavite monastery), or other religious institutions belonging to Hindus, or any other institution or area as may be prescribed by the competent authority" (Parashar, 2021).

From the 2014 general election to the recent 2019 general election and all of the state assembly elections, the North East region has experienced a tectonic shift with the unexpected growth of a saffron party in general and state assembly elections. BJP, within a very short period, replaced the Congress dominance from this region. The major question raised here is- why Congress party failed to uphold its dominant position in both Lok Sabha and state assembly elections after 2014 GE. Is it because of "ruling party syndrome" or dependency factor in North East India or absence of strong leadership from opposition party and due to opportunistic politics, that led to defection among political elites in the region? Before 2014 GE, BJP was considered a politically insignificant player in most of the North Eastern states. However, after 2014 general election, BJP become the king maker party in this region with its umbrella platform NEDA where most of the regional parties joined the political coalition and maintained a underlying cooperation even when they can not contest the election together due to BJP's Hindutva image. Along with this coalition strategy, BJP's significant strategy of co-opting existing political leaders from other political parties proved to be quite successful in ousting the dominance of Congress party from this region. Like other North Eastern states, BJP has been instrumental in defection politics, which resulted in massive defection among political leaders. Many of them left their original Party and joined the BJP government in the state. In

these three states i.e., Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur during this period many prominent Congress and other regional parties' leaders joined BJP before and after election and also rewarded with important position from the party. For example, Assam's former Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, current Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Manipur's Chief Minister N. Biren Singh and Arunachal Pradesh's Chief Minister Pema Khandu is classic example in this case which proves BJP's inorganic growth in North East region. During fieldwork survey also, this study found most of the youth voters have the opinion that BJP came to power as major party or junior partner in all the eight North Eastern states due to its development politics towards the region and also because of past government's anti-incumbency issues people of North East wanted an alternative and BJP became an alternate in these case through adopting multiple strategies like making coalition, development politics and co-opting political elites through defections. However, in upcoming elections, it will be interesting to see how the political elite of North East India will take BJP, if it loses the next general election. Or in terms of development politics, it will be imperative to see the deepening of BJP's political consolidation in North Eastern states can led to a deeper imprint in prospering the region at the same level of the other states of the Indian Union.

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Appendix-1: List of Interviews with Date and Place

22 December, 2018

1. Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam Chief Minister, NEDA Convenor, New Delhi,

11 February, 2019

2. Prof. Nani Bath-Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, Doimukh.

24 February, 2019

3. M.M. Ashoken- RSS Former Prant Pracharak, Manipur and Member, Executive Council of North East India, Seva Bharti Office (Manipur Seva Samiti), Imphal, Manipur.

25 February, 2019

4. Prof S Mangi Singh, Manipur University, Manipur.
5. Robin Blackie - Bharatiya Janata Party –Manipur Unit, Treasurer
6. Haobijam Gitajen Meitei- General Secretary (Administration), Manipur People's Party

26 February, 2019

7. N. Nimbus- General Secretary (Organisation)- Bharatiya Janata Party –Manipur Unit
8. Dr. Usham Deben Singh, Ex-MLA Manipur.
9. Dr. O Ratnabala Devi, Assistant Prof, Manipur Central University

1 March, 2019

10. Ranjib Sharma, RSS Spokesperson of Assam (Sampark Pramukh), Guwahati.

8 March 2019

11. Prof. Sandhya Goswami, Gauhati University, Assam, Guwahati.

22 March, 2019

12. Samudra Gupta Kashyap, retired Senior Journalist from Assam at The Indian Express-Guwahati.

13 November, 2019

13. Sashikant Chauthaiwale, Senior former Prant Pracharak, Assam at Keshab Dham, RSS Main Office, Guwahati, Assam

9 December, 2019

14. Surendra Talkhedkar, Northeast Organising Secretary of Seva Bharti Purvanchal, Guwahati, Seva Bharti Purvanchal Office.

22 May 2020

15. Sunil Mohanty, RSS Prant Pracharak, Arunachal Pradesh.

Appendix 2: Survey Questionnaire and Interview Questions

Survey on Youth from NER's opinion about electoral change in North East India

My name is Tarun Gogoi and I have come from Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University as a PhD research scholar. I am conducting a survey on the opinion of youth voters of North East India on politics and electoral change in North East India. The findings of this survey will be used for my PhD research and writing scholarly works. This survey is an independent study and is not linked to any political party or government agency. Whatever information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Participation in this survey is voluntary and it is entirely up to you to answer or not any questions that I ask. I hope that you will take part in this survey as your participation is important for my research. It will usually take 10-20 minutes to complete this survey. Please spare some time for the interview and help me in successfully complete the survey.

Name of the Respondent-

<u>Gender</u>	Male	Female
---------------	------	--------

University/ College-

State-

Address-

Date of Interview-

Time of Starting-

Q.1. What is your age?

Ans.:-

Q.2. Which District you belong to?

Ans.:-

Q.3. Do you consider yourself to be politically engaged or politically active [awareness]?

Ans. Yes

No

Can not Say

Q.3. Do you know your Lok Sabha Constituency?

Ans.:- Yes

No

Q.3. A-If yes, please mention the name-

Ans.:-

Q.4. Did you vote in the last following election?

A	National Election	YES	NO	CAN NOT SAY
B	State Election	YES	NO	CAN NOT SAY
C	Local (M/P/A) election	YES	NO	CAN NOT SAY

Q.4. A- If Yes then which Party you vote

A	National Election	Name-	Can not Say
B	State Election	Name-	Can not Say
C	Local Election	Name-	Can not Say

Q.4. B- If No- Do you intend to vote in Lok Sabha/ State Assembly Local election after you reach 18 years?

Ans. Yes-

No-

Do not Know-

Q.5. If you have voted in last election, will you vote the same party for next election? Suppose in next coming Lok Sabha Election?

Ans. Yes -

No-

Can not Say-----

Q.5 A- What is the reason of Voting or not voting the same

Ans.

Q.6. Thinking of how you have voted in previous election, how do you consider yourself?

Ans. BJP Supporter--

INC Supporter—

Other Parties (Name)-

Not support any party/Neutral—

Q.7. In next Lok Sabha Election, which party will you vote for

Ans. Party-

Not prefer to Answer-

Q.8. Thinking about your state and Northeast as a whole which issue consider you the most important that government should give importance (open ended)

Ans.

Government Spending	Development		
Economic Growth	More access to facilities for poor		
Security			
Employment			
Immigration			
Health Care			
Education			

Q.9. After 2014 General Election BJP become a dominant national party by replacing INC party from centre as well as many states. In North East India also significantly within a very short time BJP become a dominant national party by capturing many states in NEI like Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura and other states. For you what are the reasons behind this electoral change?

Ans.

A.- BJP Party's development policies, initiative towards North East Region
B.- BJP's alliance with regional parties of North East India
C.-Anti-incumbency factor of past governments in North East India.
D.-People wanted to see an alternative of Congress Party in Northeast India
E.-[Open]

Q.10. Do you think BJP at centre able to give proper importance to your state in terms of development and other issues?

Ans. Yes—

No.-

Q.11. Do you think BJP has a different image in terms of party agenda, activities, policies in North East Region in comparison with other parts of India ?

[Suppose BJP's Dual stand on Beef issues, Hindu Nationalist agenda, appropriation of local issues, cultural icons]

Ans. Yes-

No.-

Same-

Q.12. After 2014 General Election in North East India with the formation of North East Democratic Alliance in 2016, BJP become alliance partners with more than 10 regional parties include National People's Party (Meghalaya), Mizo National Front (Mizoram), NDPP- National Democratic People's Party (Nagaland), NPF-M (Naga People's Front Manipur), IPFT- Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, BPF- Bodo People's Front in Assam. So do you think National Parties still become the dominant factor in determining the nature of electoral politics in North East India ?

Ans. Yes-

No-

Q. Since independence in North East Region most of states we have seen Congress party as ruling party for long period but after 2014 General Election, now BJP with their alliance partners capturing all North Eastern states. We have seen the governmental policies, activities of both this ruling party in NEI in terms of Railway connectivity, Air Connectivity, Road connectivity and other government projects. So in terms of North-East in comparison of this two national parties government at centre for you which one better serve the interest of North East People ?

Ans. Bharatiya Janata Party-

Indian National Congress-

Neither One-

Both of the National Parties-

Can not say-

Q. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the performance of BJP led NDA government at centre over the last five years-

A.- Satisfied	C-Somewhat satisfied
B.- Somewhat dissatisfied	D-Dissatisfied

Q -How would you rate the BJP led central as well as your state government's performance?

A.- Very Good	B.- Good
C- Bad	D- Very Bad

Q- I will ask you to assess the work done by your state as well as central government in last five years. Do you think it has improved or deteriorated?

A) Connectivity- Rail Road, Air Connectivity, Road Connectivity. [Transport and communication]

A.-Improved	B.-Remain Same
C-Deteriorated	D- Do not know

B) Roads & Bridges

A.-Improved	B.-Remain Same
C-Deteriorated	D- Do not know

C) Medical & Health Care

A.-Improved	B.-Remain Same
C-Deteriorated	D- Do not know

D) Education and Employment

A.-Improved	B.-Remain Same
C-Deteriorated	D- Do not know

E) Water Supply

A.-Improved	B.-Remain Same
C-Deteriorated	D- Do not know

F) Flood Control and Irrigation

A.-Improved	B.-Remain Same
C-Deteriorated	D- Do not know

G) Electricity

A.-Improved	B.-Remain Same
C-Deteriorated	D- Do not know

H) Transparency in Administration

A.-Improved	B.-Remain Same
C-Deteriorated	D- Do not know

Q. As a Youth from North East India what do you think has been the most important issue North East faced over the years?

Ans.

Q. How do you take BJP's decision to give citizenship status to Hindu Bengalis and other persecuted minorities from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan through Constitution Amendment Bill ?

Ans. I support this stand-

I do not support this stand-

Q. Do you support CAB Bill?

Ans. Yes

No.

Q. Since independence we have seen many central government as well as state government change and come to power. Do you think along with these changes, the over all development, condition of North Eastern region, its people also change or improve ?

Ans.

Improved	Not Improved
Remain Same-	

Q. A. If Not improved what are the main reason for you?

Ans.

Q. Do you think government at centre give proper attention, importance to the North Eastern states like other Indian states ?

Ans. YES

NO

Q. If Not what are the reason behind this for you

Ans.

Q. As asymmetrical federal nature in India we have unequal state representation in Rajya Sabha, only 14 Member out of 250 Member from North Eastern states in Rajya Sabha and same way In Lok Sabha also out of 545 Members from NEI we have only 25 Representatives at the same time state like Uttar Pradesh has alone 80 members in Lok Sabha. By observing this asymmetry in Parliament, do you think state must have equal representation in Rajya Sabha ?

Ans. Yes

No

Q. By observing this fact (unequal representation in Parliament) do you think in terms of federal politics/ electoral politics North Eastern states with less political significant status not able to get so much attention from central government like other politically significant state Uttar Pradesh, Bihar etc.?

Ans. Yes

No.

Background Data

Q. What is your Tribe ?

Ans.

Q. What is your caste?

Ans.

ST	OBC
SC	OTHER

Q. What is your religion ?

HINDU	CHRISTIAN	SIKH	OTHER
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MUSLIM	BUDDHIST	JAIN	No-Religion

Q. Area/Locality

Village	Town
---------	------

Q. Which language is spoken in your house ?

English	Hindi
Assamese	Bodo
Manipuri	Other
Bengali	-

Interview questions for

Honourable Minister

Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma

Minister for Finance, Transformation & Development, Health & Family Welfare, PWD

Government of Assam,

NEDA Convener

Interviewer

Tarun Gogoi, Doctoral Scholar

Centre for Political Studies

Jawaharlal Nehru University

For PhD Research title “Changing Contours of a Federal Polity in North East India: The Rise of the BJP in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.”

Q.1. After 2014 General Election and many state assembly elections, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) abled to establish what Pratap Bhanu Mehta called “BJP dominant system” or India’s second dominant party system as defined by Suhas Palshikar. **In this context, as BJP’s “Go-to Man” in North East India for you, how has BJP become a dominant national player by replacing other national parties in Northeast India?**

Q.2. In Rajat Sethi’s Book “*The Last Battle of Saraighat: The Story of BJP’s Rise in the North-East*” mentioned about BJP’s rise in Assam mainly in 2016, Assam Assembly election as the result of meticulous planning, careful and consistent groundwork and a creative campaign strategy along with the hard works done by RSS under its broad organizational networks from 1946 in Assam. **Sir by observing Assam and Tripura Assembly elections, how do you see the role and contribution of broad organizational network of RSS in Northeast India for BJP’s rise?** As we all know from 1946 RSS through their social welfare programme created a constructive image in people’s imagination of North East India.

Q.3. In an Indian Express Article titled “*Leader, Cadre, Parivar*” dated 6 April, 2018, BJP’s National general secretary Ram Madhavji while discussing the secret of BJP’s growth and success mentioned three key factors i.e. leader, cadre and parivar. The role of leader from Vajpayee- Advani to Modi-Shah and secondly the role of Sangh Parivar and thirdly the role of alliance partners as political parivar. **As BJP’s key person from North-East India, how do you see the role of these three key factors in North East India in terms of BJP’s rise as dominant national player by replacing other national parties in this region?**

Q.4. Sir, before North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) as a political coalition in North East India, Purbanchaliyo Lok Parisad or North Eastern People’s Conference in 1978 tried to create

an effective unified platform of the regional parties of NE region. In 2013 also with the initiative of regional parties like AGP, NPF a new political coalition named North East Regional Political Front was created as common platform to protect the interest of the region, however NEDA is the only one political coalition in Northeast with a national party back up. **As a NEDA convener how do you evaluate its role as a common platform of NE?**

Q.5. Most of the regional parties in North East now prefer BJP as their national partner rather than Congress and other parties in this region. **As NEDA convener what do you think the reason behind this political change in Northeast India?**

Q.6. In newspaper, while discussing about the formation of NEDA they cited about Guwahati Declaration. Sir, what is Guwahati Declaration?

Q.7. Who are the current members of North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA)? What about the PPA and NPF's partnership with BJP?

Q.8. What are the position of political parties i.e. LJP, JD (U), and NPF in NEDA who as alliance partners formed government with BJP in different North Eastern states like LJP in Manipur, JD (U) in Nagaland and NPF in Manipur?

Q.9. Political parties like HSDP- Hill State People's Democratic Party, PDF- People's Democratic Front and UDP-United Democratic Party in Meghalaya formed coalition government with NPP and BJP. Sir, are these three parties which I have mentioned share common platform with other NEDA members?

Q.10. While mentioning the main objectives of NEDA, BJP's president Amit Shah mentioned "Main objective of NEDA will be all round development of North East and better coordination among the States and Central government." While addressing media you have mentioned the purpose of NEDA not only for electoral seat adjustment but also as coordinating forum to sort out boundary, law and other disputes. **So now as NEDA convener what do you think NEDA only works as electoral alliance mechanism for BJP's rise but also focuses other issues which you have mentioned earlier?**

Q.11. From first NEDA Conclave (2016) to Third NEDA Conclave (2018), we have seen by following "Congress free North East" mission the seven states of North-East India are run by BJP and its alliance partners under the banner of NEDA. NEDA become a bonding factor, a regional alliance to geo-cultural alliance in BJP President Amit Shah's word. **So what kind of mutual understanding exist among BJP and its alliance partners in NEDA? Is there any**

Common Minimum Programme like agenda followed by NEDA? From first NEDA conclave to Third NEDA conclave, what types of programmes, policies, initiatives have taken by NEDA for North East Region?

Q.12. While discussing the BJP's rise in Northeast India, scholars from Northeast observed- BJP has transformed itself from a "Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan" party to one that has co-opt regional parties and their aspirations. So In comparison with rest of India, in Northeast we have seen BJP as an insider party with accommodative approach focusing on localization of party in an inclusive way. **How do you give your opinion on this? Do you agree?**

Q.13. Sir, you have changed the party from Indian National Congress to Bharatiya Janata Party and now has become an important minister of Government of Assam and convener of NEDA. You have experiences in both the parties as important political leader holding key position as Cabinet Minister of Assam government in both regimes. As an experienced politician how do you differentiate between the two party in terms of their vision, policies, governmental activities towards North East Region?

Interview with RSS Officials from NER's on their organizational Activities

My name is Tarun Gogoi and I have come from Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University as a PhD research scholar. I would like to take an interview with you as RSS office bearer or associate with RSS regarding activities of RSS in North East India. The interview will be used for my PhD research and writing scholarly works. This is an independent study and is not linked to any political party or government agency. Whatever information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. I hope that you will give me this interview as your participation is important for my research. It will usually take 10-20 minutes. Please spare some time for the interview and help me in successfully complete the interview.

Name of the Respondent-

Position/ Affiliation-

Area/Zone/Prant-

State-

Address-

Date of Interview-

Time of Starting-

Background

Age	Tribe	Area	
Caste	Religion	Service-	

Questions

Q.1. How long you have been associate with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ?

Q.2 What is the motivating factor or inspiration for you to join RSS ?

Q. 3 What are the functions, works you perform as RSS officials ?

Q. 4 How do you share your experience with RSS?

Q.5 As an RSS officials for you what is the motto, goal, objectives of RSS?

Q. 6 How do you evaluate/ explain the role of RSS in the socio-cultural aspect of Indian People?

Q. 7 In terms of Northeast India, (Assam/Manipur/Arunachal Pradesh) how do you explain the role/activities/ programme of RSS ? As we know since pre-independence India, RSS is playing

a significant role in Northeast India through their different activities (for example in terms of social welfare programme). How do you see its acceptability among common people in this region ?

Q.8 How does RSS work in tribal and tea-tribe areas in Assam?

Q. 9 As we know since the formation of Bharatiya Jana Sangh to Bharatiya Janata Party, RSS as the parental organisation share the same platform in terms of ideological perspective. How do you see the relation between these two? Can we say both as inseparable part of each other ?

Q.10 Do you think without the help, support, guidance of RSS, BJP can not establish themselves as complete successful political party?

Q. 11 In conversation with media and intellectuals many RSS officials already mentioned that mainly RSS helped BJP directly 2 times during election (National Politics) i.e. during 1977 elections (after National Emergency in 1975 during Indira regime) and recent 2014 Lok Sabha election. In terms of North East also do you see RSS's role as election machine (working for party's support) during elections? How do you see the role of Lok Jagaran Manch (Assam) and Citizen Forum (Manipur) in this context ?

Q. 12 In an Article in Indian Express BJP's General Secretary Ram Madhav Ji mentioned the BJP's growth or rise factor mainly based on three key factors i.e. Leader, Cadre and Parivar. The role of leader from Vajpayee-Advani to Modi-Shah and secondly the role of Sangh Parivar and thirdly the role of alliance partners as political parivar. As RSS officials from Northeast India, how do you see the role of Cadre in terms of BJP's rise in Indian politics ?

Q.13 Before 2014 General election and 2016 Assam Assembly Election, BJP's position was just like a marginal player with 0-10 seats and very few vote shares but during 2016 elections we have seen BJP's phenomenal growth as the largest party with 60 seats and 29.51 percent vote share. So it forced us to think about RSS because before BJP's rise RSS become very active in terms of its different social, welfare activities in Assam. By observing Assam and Tripura election results do you think RSS has played a significant role in this rise? If so how can we see the direct/indirect role of RSS though RSS did not take credit for this rise?

Q.14 In terms of Assam, do you think RSS helped fill the BJP's grassroots vacuum in Assam?

Q.15 In 2018, January, RSS organized a mass-contact programme in Assam named "LUIT PORIYA HINDU SAMABESH" where along with more than 35,000 RSS Swayamsevak, several heads of village bodies, more than 20 tribal kings from Karbi, Naga, Khasi, Hajong, Tiwa, Garo, Mishing etc. communities and Satradhikar (?) joined the programme. How do you see this development as RSS's ability to appeal the masses at large in a inclusive way ?

Experts View on Electoral change in North East India in terms of BJP's Rise in Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.

Q-After 2014 General Election and many state assembly elections, BJP abled to establish a new party system what Pratap Bhanu Mehta defined as “BJP Dominant system” and Suhash Palshikar see it as India’s second dominant party system. In North East also with the formation of first BJP led coalition government in Assam and then in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and in 2018 in Tripura as well as other states BJP become dominant national party by replacing Indian National Congress party from these states. Sir/Ma’am, as an expert from North East India, how do you see this change? For you what are the reasons fors this change?

Q-While discussing BJP’s rise in North East India, on the basis existing literature some scholars from Northeast India observed that BJP has transformed itself from a “Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan” party to one that has co-opt regional parties and local issues. So in comparison with other parts of India, in Northeast we have seen BJP as an insider party with accommodative approach focusing on localization on party in a inclusive way. Sir/ma’am, how do you give your opinion on this? Do you agree?

Q-In terms of BJP’s rise in North East India- do you think BJP is taking a dual standard role in terms of party agendas, activities, attitude towards North East. On the one hand in larger frame they have their Hindu Nationalist agenda which is very vibrant in other parts of India at the same time in Northeast for their electoral expansion BJP’s projection of insider party focusing localization of party agenda, identity and avoiding contentious issues like Beef ban, Hindutva agendas, projection of Bharat Mata in traditional attire of North East India so that it able to create an alternative space by replacing other national party.

Q-In Northeast India with the formation of North East Democratic Alliance in 2016 BJP become alliance partners with more than 10 regional parties of North East India including BPF, NPP, MNF, IPFT, NDPP where AGP, NPF, PPA also once share same platform under NEDA political coalition. Sir/ma’am, it is seen that most of the regional parties prefer BJP as their national partner rather than other parties. How do you see this political change in Northeast India ?

Q. Do you think Regional parties of North Eastern Region by giving support to BJP led NEDA submerge their own party agendas, regionalization aspirations ? Can we see this trend as weakening of regional forces over nationalization of Indian politics ?

Q .In Assam and other states of Northeast India, before BJP’s rise, RSS with its broad organizational networks has played a significant role through various works infields like social, educational, health care etc. In this context, by observing Assam and Tripura Assembly elections, do you think RSS has significant role and