

Urban Local Body Elections in Port Blair: Social Engineering among city Voters

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Abstract

Port Blair city, the capital of Union Territory of Andaman & Nicobar Islands is a set of multi-lingual, multi – ethnic and multi- culture center. Time and again it has been extended its boundary, number of population and its political character that we ever seen any city in India. To study the electoral behavior of its voters is really interesting and significant. Since its inception in 1958, every five years of interval, the election to small city has been conducting without interruption is well establish fact. The last Municipal Council's elections was held on 20.09.2015 to elect 24 wards councilors along with three tier Panchayat institutions. The voters of the city have witnessed many changes in elections 2010 and 2015. In many respect, the 2015 elections of Port Blair city has significantly different from its previous 2010 elections. The study area of the paper is to high light the changing behaviour of voters, who are divided in the line of language, regional identity, but not like caste and community.

Keywords: Social engineering, Multi –ethnic voice, demographic equation, delimitation process

Introduction

Local self-government especially the urban local body is also a nerve of Indian decentralized democratic system. People representative urban body becomes more complicated as it accommodate cross –section of people. The metropolitan cities are significantly carried the cosmopolitan culture, economy and atmosphere. Hence study of city elections and role of political parties is as interesting as the city is symbol of modern urban development.

Backdrop of Urban Local Body

Port Blair Municipal Board was set up in 1958 with a small number of population mostly, the family of descendent of war prisoners of 1857 and convicts transported in between 1858-1942. With the span of 58 years of its existence, the city has grown up like a true cosmopolitan town by accepting the people from all over the country. It is a city of multi-lingual, multi – ethnic and multi- culture. Time and again it has been extended its boundary, number of population and its political character that we ever seen any city in India. To study the electoral behavior of its voters

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Multi-ethnic voice presence in Local body elections

After every five year, people use to exercise their fundamental right by casting their votes and constitutes democratically elected urban body by representing multi –ethnic members in terms of language, religions and culture. The last Municipal Council's elections was held on 20.09.2015 to elect 24 wards councilors along with three tier Panchayat institutions. The voters of the city have witnessed many changes in elections 2010 and 2015. In many respect, the 2015 elections of Port Blair city has significantly different from its previous 2010 elections. First, the number of wards has been increased from 18 to 24 along with its area. Few Gram Panchayats have been incorporated under Municipality. The Gram Panchayats are Garacharma: I and II, Bhatu Basthi, Dolligunj, Pathargudda. New six more wards have been created by acquiring these

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Panchayats. Secondly number of voters have also been increased from 74500 in 2010 elections to 113616 in 2015 elections. The equation of vote bank and voters behavior has been significantly changed in respect of community and languages in between two elections. In previous elections to Port Blair Municipal Board, the “Local Born Community” (family of Pre-1942), Tamil and Telegu were predominated the city politics. However, now in many pockets Bengali and Hindi speaking voters have been increased. The Business community, Govt servants and labour class people have been settled in many areas to influence the vote bank.

Moreover, the changing national scenario and last Lok Sabha Elections in UT are also influencing factors to the present Local urban election in Port Blair. The last five year (2010-2015), the Municipality was under the control of Congress Party. Now BJP lead NDA at Center and BJP also won single Lok Sabha constituency of A&N Islands. So, in the 2015 Municipal election, the BJP had given full force to ousted Congress led Council .During 16th. Lok Sabha elections, the ward-wise performance of BJP was so good in Port Blair city. The Congress candidates got second position in most of the wards. Due to increase the area and number of seats of Port Blair Municipality, under delimitation process, the sitting Ward Councilors and aspirant candidates got taught competition in local body election. Nine wards have been reserved for females. The traditional seats of some popular leaders have either reserved or changed the boundary. Hence, they have contested from new wards and faced the new voters.

The voters have increased from 74500 (2010) to 113616(2015) ,i.e. Within five year of gap 65.57% voters have been added due to increase of population and extended its areas by adopted four Panchayats under Municipal jurisdiction .Out of 113616 voters, male voters were 61196 (53.87 %) and female voters were 52420 (46.13 %). For 24 wards, altogether 135 candidates were contested, of which 55 were independent . Both BJP and INC have put their candidates in all 24 wards. However, DMK contested for 8 seats, TDP for 18 seats, AIADMK for 5 and NCP for one seats. The Port Blair Municipal Council recorded 60%, vote turned out.

Table 1.Voting Behaviour of Municipal Council in 2015 elections for 24 wards held on 20.09.2015

Total Voters	Vote Polled	Male Voters		Female Voters	
		Voters	Vote Polled	Voters	Vote Polled
113616	67061	61196	34828	52420	32233
100.00%	59.47%	100.00%	57.00%	100.00%	61.49%

Among city voters, females were more active and female recorded 61.49 % of vote turned out, whereas male voted only 57.00%, which is around 5% less than female vote.

Table 2. Performance of Political Parties in Urban Body Elections 2010 & 2015

Name of the party	Municipal Elections 2010		Name of the party	Municipal Elections 2015	
	Seat contested	Seat Own		Seat Contested	Seat Own
INC	18	9	INC	24	06
BJP	18	4	BJP	24	11+2 *
TMC	16	01	TMC	Nil	Nil
RJD	11	02	RJD	Nil	Nil
TDP	10	01	TDP	18	02
DMK	10	01	DMK	08	01
NCP	07	Nil	NCP	Nil	Nil
CPM	03	Nil	CPM	Nil	Nil
Forward Bloc	02	Nil	Forward Bloc	02	Nil
BSP	02	Nil	BSP	Nil	Nil
JD (u)	02	Nil	JD(u)	Nil	Nil
AIADMK	01	Nil	AIADMK	05	01
CPI	01	Nil	CPI	Nil	Nil
Independent	26	Nil	Independent	54	01
Total contestants	126	18	Total Contestants	135	24

Source: Office of the Election Department, Port Blair, 2015

Altogether 135 candidates were contested, whereas in 2010 number of contestant was 126. In both 2010 and 2015 elections, the INC and BJP contested from all seats. However, very interesting observation is, in present Municipal elections many regional parties did not put their candidates. Surprisingly, in 2010 elections, Trinomul Congress (TMC) Bengal based party contested from 16 seats and own one seat. However, in 2015, party failed to give any single candidate. Similarly, RJD, Forward Bloc, JD (U), CPM, CPI and BSP like regional parties have wind up from city polity's. The NCP contested from only one seat. Perhaps, Telegu Desam Party being a Andara Pradesh based party not only increased its contesting seats from 10 in 2010 to 18 in 2015 but also own two seats, which was one in 2010 election. Once, DMK was second strong party in Municipality since 1967 and shared Municipal power many times has failed to retained its power and activity. This time DMK had contested from 05 seats, which was 10 in 2010 elections. Janata Dal (U), had no significant in islands polities. Party has no political activity and organizational wing, but has a big office at the heart of the city value worthy of crore rupees. Three consecutive elections to Port Blair Municipal Council (P BMC) has shown different aspects of voters behavior in multi-lingual city politics for both national and regional parties. In 2005 urban election,

18 members council, INC got 6 and BJP 5 seats. Congress with the support of other regional party form the council. Basically, INC has had a stronghold among Local (Pre-1942 Family) settlers and Telegu speaking people. Hence, since 1967, Congress had successfully run the Municipality along with Islands Lok Sabha seat. Traditionally, DMK had a good support in city politics, as Tamil business community and labourers constitute second largest group in city.

Perhaps in 2010 elections, INC had captured 9 seats, which was 3 seats more than 2005 election. Subsequently party has to satisfy with only 4 seats. But RJD, Bihar based party retained its two seats in 2010 elections that party captured in 2005 election also. In 2010 election TMC also got one seat. But thing is very clear from last two elections that the CPI, CPM, SP, Forward Bloc, BSP, JD (U), NCP as well as RJD like regional and national parties have lost their credibility among city voters. People supports has been polarized in two major party i.e. Congress and the BJP. The results of 2015 election has shown that BJP is at the centre (Union), so voters of the city have voted in favour of BJP. Therefore party secured 13 seats (and latter two independent candidates joined BJP) out of 24 wards. Congress had lost its popularity and satisfied with only 6 seats.

Table 3. Party position in recent urban election with winning margin of candidates, 2015

S.No.	Ward No.	Name of the Winning candidate	Name of the party In 2015 election	Party in 2010 election	Winning margin (Votes)	Party Changes
1	Ward No.1	Shri S Kurunakaran	DMK	INC	1198	INC to DMK
2	Ward No. 2	Shri Someshar Rao	BJP	INC	1117	INC to BJP
3	Ward No.3	Shri Ramzan Ali	Independent join BJP	INC	96	INC to BJP
4	Ward No.4	Ms.E. Rani	AIADMK	-	267	--
	Ward No.5	Ms. S. Selvi	TDP	---	363	---
6	Ward No.6	Ms. Protima Banerjee	TDP	---	931	---
7	Ward No.7	Shri Inder Pal Singh	BJP	INC	1042	INC to BJP
8	Ward No.8	Shri K Ganeshan	INC	INC	260	Sitting
9	Ward No. 9	Ms. Anusiya Devi	BJP	--	129	---
10	Ward No.10	Ms, Sheela Singh	BJP	BJP	208	Sitting ---
11	Ward No.11	Ms. Vinita Malhotra	BJP	BJP	186	Sitting
12	Ward No.12	Shri SNN Gregory	BJP	DMK	474	
13	Ward No.13	Ms. Upasana Prasad	INC	---	01	---
14	Ward No.14	Shri B Eshwar Rao	BJP	---	134	---
15	Ward No.15	Shri C H Babu	BJP	----	387	----
16	Ward No.16	Ms. S. Usha	BJP	---	349	---
17	Ward No.17	Shri D. Narayan	Independent join BJP	INC	653	INC to BJP
18	Ward No.18	Ms. Rubana Aziz	BJP	---	1294	---
19	Ward No.19	Shri K Muthu	INC	INC	65	---
20	Ward No.20	Shri M Arumugam	INC	INC	307	----
21	Ward No.21	Shri K Arubadi	INC	INC	599	---
22	Ward No.22	Ms. Vaishali Dayal	INC	INC	177	---
23	Ward No.23	Shri Sanjay Meshak	Independent	----	330	AAP to Independent
24	Ward No.24	Shri NK Uday Kumar	BJP	BJP	270	---

Source: Election commission office, Port Blair.

Hence, in 2015 election, the BJP won over 11 seats and INC has satisfied with only six. Independent captured 3 seats, of which after elections, both Ramzan Ali councilor from ward no .3 and Shri D. Narayan councilor from ward no. 17 joined BJP. TDP got two seats and DMK & AIADMK satisfied with one seat each .At the time of elections , many political changes have found in both Congress party and BJP also. In ward no 1. Sitting Councilor Shri Jaradhan Nair left BJP and contested from Congress ticket. Though the Ward no. 2 is dominated by Telegu voters, hence BJP won the seat by given ticket to Someshar Rao. However, Ramzan Ali, a popular and dedicated Congress party leader from ward no. 3 had denied ticket from Congress party. His wife Mrs. Firdosh Bibi was sitting councilor of ward no. 5 from Congress .Now the area come under ward no. 3. As he was denied ticket by Congress, hence he contested

as independent and defeated both BJP and Congress candidates. Latter he joined BJP .From ward no 4, AIADMK candidate Ms. E. Rani won the seat by defeated Ms. Vani Raja from DMK. The Ward no. 4 was so significant as DMK leader Shri M.Raja, the son of DMK founder and organizer of this islands Shri K .Maraduanand was sitting councilor. He left the seat because the ward has been reserved for women . The party has given seat to Ms. Vani Raja, the wife of Shri M.Raja. It was a prestigious fight for the DMK, but they could not retain the seat... Similarly from ward no. 5, DMK candidate Shri RAJA MARUDHAVANAN was defeated by Ms. S Selvi, TDP candidate. It is ascertained that the popularity of DMK is deteriorating among Tamil voters as well as city voters also .On the other hand in ward no. 6, Ms. Pratima Banerjee contested as TDP candidate. The sitting councilor was Abdul Rahaman from TDP. As

the ward was left reserved for female, he put the name of his wife Ms. Pratima Banerjee from same area from TDP ticket. However, in spite of a Bengali, she contested from TDP ticket and won the seat. Due to the popularity of her husband, the sitting councilor, she succeeded.

Shri Inder Pal Singh, the sitting Congress councilor from ward no. 7, who left the Congress before election and later he joined BJP and owned the seat. He retained the seat due his popularity. From ward no. 8, the old Congress party leader Shri K. Ganeshan, the ex- Chairman of PBMC had contested and made good victory continuously for many elections. In the ward nos. 9, 10 and 11, BJP female candidates won their respective seat. Especially, Ms. Sheela Singh continuously won the seat for two consecutive elections and selected for the post of chairperson for one year term. She defeated INC candidate Mr. Moti Chand and Mr. Selva Kumar, an independent candidate. Mr. Selva Kumar was a loyal party worker of INC, but he was denied ticket from ward no. 10 and ticket was given to Mr. Moti Chand. Mr. Selva Kumar, from Tamil community was a strong candidate from ward no. 10 contested as independent candidate and shared the votes from Congress vote bank and given the easy passage to Ms. Sheela Singh to win the seat. Similarly, Ms. Vinita Malhotra, sitting ward councilor retained her seat from ward no. 11 from BJP. Mr. SNN Gregory, got the ticket from BJP and won the seat. Basically he was a supporter of MDMK, a regional Tamil Nadu based party. Very quickly he changed the party and joined DMK party. It is also a regional party of Tamil Nadu. The party has a stronghold in Port Blair city. But after BJP came in power at centre, Mr. Gregory again changed the party and joined BJP. As he has a strong public support from ward no. 12, he owns the seat easily.

Mrs. Upasana Prasad, the mother of Mr. Mahindra Prasad, the sitting councilor of the Junglighat area and most popular young leader in INC party. Actually in 2010, Municipal council election he owned the seat from Trinomul Congress (TMC). But later, he came back to his original party i. e. Congress. He became senior Vice- Chairman of PBMC. However, due to delimitation of area, the same ward was declared reserved for woman. Hence, Mr. Mahendra and his party had decided to nominate his mother Mrs. Upasana Prasad from the area. As the ward no. 13, dominated by both Local pre-1942 families and Bengali. Therefore, Mrs. Upasana is having Bengali background and married to a Local family, so she was natural choice of Congress party to get support of both communities. Therefore, the result of the election of this ward was gone in favour of Mrs. Upasana Prasad. She own this seat by margin of only one vote. The wards no. 14, 15 and 16 were captured by BJP, as the areas are dominated by Telegu & other community voters. The ward no 17 was won by an independent candidate Mr. D. Narayan, he was being denied ticket from Congress party and he being a popular worker in ward no. 17, he

contested as independent and got the public support. Later, he joined BJP to help the BJP to form the council. Ms. Rubina Aziz contested from ward no. 18 from BJP ticket and owned the seat. She married in Hindu family and her family is loyal to BJP. As the ward has been reserved for female, Ms. Rubina was identified as fit candidate from BJP party for this seat. However, ward no 19 to 22 are the extending area of Municipality and dominated by Tamil and few Local families. The Congress party has won these seats by nominating Tamil candidates for wards 19, 20 and 21. However in ward 22, Ms. Vaishali Rani Dayal won the seat by getting support from both local and Tamil votes. The Congress party has successfully in cashed the Tamil and local votes and owned these seats by defeating BJP candidates. However, ward 23 won by Mr. Sanjay Meshak, Local educated and founder of AAP in Andaman. Perhaps, he had decided to contest the Municipal election as an independent candidate. As a good worker of his locality, he got support from his ward and defeated BJP and Congress party candidates. Last seat ward 24 was captured by BJP.

Conclusion Remarks

The victory of BJP in Municipal election 2015 in Port Blair has shown that Congress and DMK both once shared city political power are slowly losing their popularity, as city has become a place of multi-lingual center/residence. Once, only families of pre-1942 (Old Settlers) and Tamil-Telegu communities dominated city in terms of population, but presently, the Bengali from rural Andaman and mainland, Hindi and other linguistic people from mainland are preferring city life and changing demographic equation and vote bank politics. Likewise, many regional parties also lost their existence due to poor leadership and lack of supports from people. The party like RJD, JMM, CPM, CPI, BSP, JD (U), TMC, SP, NCP have lost their ground in city politics. The people's mandates are now with national parties. Few independent candidates have success in recent elections. It was happened because many of them have denied tickets from their party, so they contested as independents and due to their mass support and good works performances in their area they have succeeded. As BJP at central leadership, so voters might have voted in favour of BJP. Once the families of Pre-1942 were considered as vote bank of Congress and Tamil voters were with DMK that concept has changed in recent elections. A good number of Local voters have shifted from Congress to BJP and similarly from DMK to Congress and BJP. Specially, the young and educated voters are keen to support to those parties, who could make some changes in city life by improving infrastructural developments. This election had much significance from various angles. The AIADMK party in Tamil Nadu engaged their MLAs and Minister for campaigning in favour of their candidates in Port Blair during pre-poll campaign. The visited AIADMK state leaders from Tamil Nadu tried to attract the city voters by promising many things to be

provided to voters, if they voted in favour their candidates. Many of the candidates have lost their credibility after change the party for their personal political gain. In such cases the voters rejected them.

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