
Role of RSS in the expansion of BJP in Assam

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ABSTRACT

The Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS) is a formidable key organization of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It provides ideological and organizational strength to the party. The RSS occupies the central position in the Sangha Parivar. It has been compared to the sun, with all other organizations that move around it. The RSS is regarded as an Ideological and Organizational actor of the BJP. At present, the Sangh Parivar's vast network is spread in almost all aspects of the society and politics of Assam. The Sangh Parivar was active in appropriating Sankardev, a popular socio-cultural and religious reformer of Assam. Sankardev, in the 15th and 16th centuries. The popularity of Saint "Sankaedev" was extensively used by the Sangh Parivar. In the year 1979, RSS's primary education wing Shishu Shiksha Samiti was established. In the same year in Guwahati, on Sankadev's birth anniversary, its first school was established and named Sankardev Shishu Niketan. A Powerful organisation of Vaishnav devotees, the Sankardev Sangha, invites important leaders of RSS and Sangh Parivar in their programmes. The Sangha Parivar in various Hindu *sammelans* (assemblies) organized by the Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) also invites *sattradhikaris* (chief of the *Sattras*). In Assam, the Sangha Parivar has taken traditional cults and symbols that are linked with Kamakhya and Sankardev Sattratraditions instead of its traditional mass mobilization techniques of appeals in the name of Hindu gods like "Lord Ram" or "Ram Mandir of Ayodhya. On the issue of immigration the stand of Sangh Parivar and other regional organization like the AASU and the AGP is quite different. The RSS successfully controlled the BJP leadership which is mostly of the non RSS background. Threat of marginalization from the infiltration of "Bangladeshis" and the presence of a large number of Muslims has worked in favor of the RSS in the region. Apart from this, alliance with the regional organizations that protested and led people's movement against the "Muslim Bangladeshis" also worked in favor of the RSS and the BJP. Therefore the basic objective of this paper is to highlight the role of RSS in the expansion of BJP in Assam.

Key Words: RSS, BJP, Hindutva, Assam.

Introduction

The RSS is a formidable key organization of the BJP. It provides ideological and organizational strength to the party. This Organization has got more than 56,859 shakhas (branches) till 2016 and more than 2500 full time pracharaks (propagandists) today. The RSS occupies the central position in the Sangha Parivar. It has been compared to the sun, with all other organizations that move around it.

The RSS is regarded as an Ideological and Organizational actor of the BJP. The main source of the Hindu nationalism that links the three groups is the RSS. Since the three are linked by the common ideology, a complete deliberation of their functions and boundaries is difficult. There is an overlapping of functions and personnel among the three i.e. BJS, RSS and VHP. The RSS is the largest and most influential organization committed to Hindu Revivalism. Main objective of the RSS is to restore the sense of community among Hindus. It was established in 1925 at Nagpur by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, who had earlier been a revolutionary. He and others believed that the Hindus had lost control of their country first to the Muslims and then to the Britishers because of divisions among them. Regaining control would be difficult, Hedgewar argued, unless the Hindus perceive themselves as a community. The RSS was intended to be a kind of educational body whose primary objective was the training of Hindus so that they should work united to regain India's independent status. According to Angelo Panebianco "every second office bearer of the party at both centre and state level is or has been either a full time RSS pracharak or a member."

Data Source and Methodolgy:

The study is based on descriptive and analytical method. Data for the study has been collected from various books, journals, articles and news papers etc.

Main Frontal Organizations

The BJP can be placed in Duverger's model of 'federal party'. In addition to two major non-political components of Sangh Parivar like RSS and Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the BJP has got sizeable number of supportive groups. All these groups play a major role for BJP's political and electoral prospects. Their relationship with BJP has been shaped by historical factors and ideological moorings. The leaders and observers of Indian politics suggest that

despite their close relationship the BJP, the RSS and the VHP maintain considerable organizational and functional autonomy. Each seems to have its own goals, functionaries and area of operation. Each has created its various supportive organizations and agencies which provide them with workers as well as finances to operate in their respective areas.

- **Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS)**
- **Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)**
- **Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)**
- **Vidya Bharati**
- **Seva Bharati**
- **Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram**
- **Bajrang Dal**

Appropriating Sankardev by RSS

At present, the SanghParivar's vast network is spread in almost all aspects of the society and politics of Assam. The SanghParivar was active in appropriating Sankardev, a popular socio-cultural and religious reformer of Assam. Sankardev, in the 15th and 16th centuries, led neo-Vaishnavite reform movement to simplify Hinduism, which is called "Ekasaraniya Nama Dharma". He established the *sattras* (monasteries) throughout Assam. The *Sattras* became socio-cultural and religious centres for organizing community prayers, providing religious discourses and a platform for performance of the *Bargeet* (devotional songs), the *Ankiya Naat* (one kind of drama) and the *shravana-kirtanas*. The *Sattriya* dance, a dance form was also created by him. The institution of *sattras* emerged as centre of equality as their simplicity draw people irrespective of castes, class or religion. The *Sattras*, *Sattriya* culture and the institution related with Sankardev have been given high respect and position in the society of Assam.

The popularity of Saint "Sankardev" was extensively used by the SanghParivar. In the year 1979, RSS's primary education wing ShishuShikshaSamiti was established. In the same year in Guwahati, on Sankardev's birth anniversary, its first school was established and

named Sankardev Shishu Niketan. They have tactfully selected the timing, name and the medium of instruction in Assamese. Their basic objective was to attract the Assamese students in large numbers. In a short time, these schools became popular. On the other hand, in the Bengali dominated areas like Barak valley, the medium of instruction was Bengali. Many *acharyas* (teachers) of these schools are *swayamsevaks* of the RSS, from different parts of the country but they are fluent in local languages. Syllabuses of these schools are same as that of RSS run *shishu mandir* throughout the country. This syllabus includes mainly Sanskrit, Vedic mathematics, geography, history, science. Along with chanting of Saraswati Vandana, Shanti path and Gayatri mantra, Sankardev's ethos was also incorporated. Singing of Borgeet and events to celebrate Sankardev's birth and death anniversary are also mandatorily observed in these schools. Along with the RSS founders like Hedgewar and Golwalkar, and pictures of Bharat Mata, the picture of Saint Sankardev was also placed. At present, 490 such schools are under operation across Assam under the banner of Shishu Shiksha Samiti.

A Powerful organisation of Vaishnav devotees, the Sankardev Sangha, invites important leaders of RSS and Sangh Parivar in their programmes. The Sangha Parivar in various Hindu *sammelans* (assemblies) organized by the VHP also invites *sattradhikaris* (chief of the *Sattras*). Illegal immigration of Muslims from Bangladesh and conversions by Christian missionaries are the common concerns among these organisations. In fact, some of the *sattradhikaris* are of the VHP background and they are crucial in communicating a feeling of strong *Hindutva* to these institutions. Reports have clearly mentioned that Borduwa *Sattrah* suffered massive encroachment by the Bangladeshis, and therefore needs to be rescued. A report published in the "Organiser" also glorifies the role of Saint Sankardev in incorporating several tribal groups within the fold of Hinduism.

It is important to mention that Mahapurush Sankardev was a proponent of Hinduism and who also prevented conversion to Christianity among the tribes. In the state, the impact of Neo-Vaishnavism is visible regarding the softening, and in many aspects abolition of unequal or biased orthodox practices, and rituals of Hindu society and caste system. Hence, by and large Assam is free from social evils like communalism and casteism.

Therefore, from the beginning, proponent of *Hindutva* have adopted unique techniques for operating in the region and to establish it in the Peoples cultural and political imagination

as the region is much more complicated than other parts of the country. In Assam, the SanghaParivar has taken traditional cults and symbols that are linked with Kamakhya and SankardevSattratraditions instead of its traditional mass mobilization techniques of appeals in the name of Hindu gods like “Lord Ram” or “Ram Mandir of Ayodhya”. Along with this by providing welfare services in the sphere of education, health and cultural development, by its affiliated organizations, it consolidates its support base. SanghParivar has used the local icons so that they can connect with the people easily.

Hindutva: The Role of various socio cultural organizations of SanghParivar

While analyzing the BJP’s rise in the state, role of various socio cultural organizations of the SanghParivar in spreading the ideology of Hindutva can be recognized. In Assam, the BJP and RSS’s gradual emergence and the AIDUF’s establishment in 2005 has a contribution in transforming the Assamese-Bengali division to a Hindu-Muslim division. Issue of Illegal immigration of Bangladeshis has been used by various SanghParivar organizations to mobilize the people. They successfully picked up this sensitive issue and able to gain the confidence of the people.

On the issue of immigration the stand of SanghParivar and other regional organization like the AASU and the AGP is quite different. The Sanghparivar always maintains a distinction between the Hindu Bangladeshis and the Muslim Bangladeshis. They consider Hindus as refugees and Muslims as infiltrators. However AASU and AGP favors deportation of illegal foreigners or Bangladeshis irrespective of any religion.

The RSS successfully controlled the BJP leadership which is mostly of the non RSS background. Because of this victory of the BJP in Assam is regarded as exceptional. It was a great success for the BJP in Assam as it became a favorite from the beginning of 2016 assembly elections, whereas few years ago its presence was negligible. Credit for this also goes to the RSS pracharaks, karyakartas and the persons who made such political strategies. The feeling of Hindutva in the region was inculcated by the RSS. The SanghParivar supported the popular Assam movement and also worked on changing the ethnic and identity base politics of Assam to an anti Muslim aspect. By using anti Bangladeshi card, it prepared a fertile ground for the BJP.

The BJP for the first time made an alliance with the BPF and other tribal groups. It also welcomed the talented and mass based leaders from the AGP as well as the INC who

never had ideological affiliation towards the RSS. This has created a new set of leadership in Assam ignoring the ideological aspect. These new leaders have also helped BJP in gaining ground in many areas.

Threat of marginalization from the infiltration of “Bangladeshis” and the presence of a large number of Muslims has worked in favor of the RSS in the region. Apart from this, alliance with the regional organizations that protested and led people’s movement against the “Muslim Bangladeshis” also worked in favor of the RSS and the BJP. Further, the conversion process going on in the tribal areas of Assam from the colonial days also provided ground for them to play the anti- Christian card. These issues all together helped the RSS and the BJP to make its stronghold.

The above discussions have clearly stated the important role of the RSS and its affiliated organizations in building a strong support base for the BJP. They have not only utilized the political sentiments of people but they have also reached out to the socio cultural emotions of people in the region. To highlight that for any political party to flourish it is important to gain the confidence of the people. The RSS has done that ground work for the BJP to some extent through its organizations and various techniques.

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