CHAPTER 6

The Strategy & Tactics of the BKS

Interest groups are normally understood as those organizations which seek to influence the formulation and implementation of public policy for the advancement of their causes. Thus any interest group would definitely have some idea of what its end goals are vis-à-vis government, and it relentlessly pursues those goals. How the interest group would seek to achieve those goals is determined by the choice of strategy of that group. As Baumgartner and Leech observe, “when a group and its lobbyists decide to work on a particular issue, they must make decisions about which governmental targets to focus on and what type of approach to use”. Thus a group seeking to influence tax policy in India will most likely concentrate its effort on the Indian Parliament and the policy formulating wing of the Union Finance Ministry in the North Block, rather than on the Income Tax implementation authorities. A group with little public support will endeavor to keep things quite while a group hoping to expose the higher-ups may select a strategy based on publicity and confrontation.

Gais and Walker divide the tactics groups use into ‘insider strategies’ and ‘outsider strategies’ depending on whether the strategy would be used by groups that are insiders to the political process or groups that are outside the dominant political subsystem. Insider groups are regarded as legitimate by the government and are consulted on a regular basis. Outsider groups either do not wish to become enmeshed in a consultative relationship with officials, or are unable to gain recognition. Another way of looking at them is to consider them as protest groups which have objectives that cannot be satisfied in the routine fashion in the consensual democratic polity.

It would be worthwhile at this point to discuss what strategic options the various interest groups indeed have to fulfill their goals. Jeffrey Berry identified four different types of interest group strategies.

(i) Law, which includes the tactics of litigation and administrative intervention.

1 Baumgartner, Frank R and Beth L. Leech, op. cit. p 147
(ii) Confrontation, which includes protests, releasing research results, holding bands in the Indian context.

(iii) Information, which includes making personal representations to the various wings of government, sending letters direct lobbying, engaging in public relation campaigns etc.

(iv) Constituency influence, which covers such tactics organizing letter-writing campaigns, setting up contacts by influential group members, helping the legislators in their election campaigns etc. by various means.

As Schlozman and Tierney argue, it is not that any one group will follow only one type of strategy, rather they differ from group to group and from issue to issue. The choice of these strategies would depend upon both, the internal group characteristics and the external political context. Examples of organizational characteristics like resource availability would certainly affect the choice of strategy. As regards the external political context, the salience of the issue, the degree of conflict involved and the receptivity of the government official concerned, would affect the choice of strategy.

In an insightful article, Maloney, Jordan and McLaughlin similarly argue that most interest groups do not have a real choice of strategies, but are constrained by a range of factors. Among those they identify are-

➢ The groups' internal organizational resources including money and staff, which lead groups to pursue insider strategy;

➢ How the groups' objectives fit in with those of decision-makers. If there is a good fit, an insider strategy is more likely;

➢ The perception of power and sanction of the group; if decision-makers are aware that a group is powerful, they may be more willing to listen to it;

➢ History of a group's choices made at an early stage may influence the strategic style of the group; and

➢ Nature of their demands on the system; if it is incremental demand, the appropriate means is by insider negotiation over details.

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Thus, there is a complex interactive relationship between the goals and demands of a group, its internal resources, its acceptability to the decision-makers and the strategy it pursues. The set of tactics available to each group may differ, but no group has just one strategy. Depending on the issue they pick different strategies. To quote Baumgartner and Leech, "the most effective groups may not be those that are best at any one given strategy, but rather those that have the greatest repertory of strategies and those who are most skillful in choosing the right strategy for the issue at hand" 6.

**BKS AND ITS STRATEGY.**

Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, like any successful interest group, has utilized practically all strategies and has approached all wings of government – totally in tandem with what the theorists of interest groups have said. The interest group activities of the BKS related to power sector can be divided into following several periods, when its strategies changed as per the change in the external environment;

(A) 1986 – 1987;
(B) 1987 – 2000;
(C) 2000 – 2003; and
(D) 2003 – present.

(A) **The 1986 – 1987 Period.**

As we have outlined earlier, the BKS (Gujarat) unit was set up in 1986. Naturally, the group was not yet well-known among the rural populace, nor was its ideologically allied political party – the Bharatiya Janata Party – in the seat of power. Yet, 1986 provided the BKS an opportunity to launch itself in the forefront of agricultural interests. In early 1986, several agricultural leaders (who later became the core of the BKS), especially from North Gujarat, Saurashtra & Kutch, led a major farmer agitation where the most important demand was the replacement of the GEB’s thirty year old policy of pro-rata metered tariff by a flat tariff. The agitation consisted of *gram-bandh*, (village closure), *pravesh-bandh* (not to allow the elected representatives to enter the village),

6 Baumgartner & Leech op cit, pp 147 – 148.
road blockages in several parts of Gujarat often by felling the road-side trees. Police had to intervene in Sabarkantha and Banaskantha districts and it resorted to the use of tear-gases and firing in the air to disperse the violent crowds.

In one particularly tragic event about 25 people died in a tractor accident while crossing the unmanned railway crossing. As the agitation gathered momentum in the latter half of 1986, the state government had series of discussions with BKS and other agitating farmers at the level of Cabinet Ministers, and one after another, the demands continued to be accepted by the State Government. In December, 1986, the Government announced a new power tariff bill with a progressive structure of flat tariffs applicable to all water pumps with motors of varying horse-power ratings.

Table 6.1: The New Flat Tariff Rate Announced by GEB in December, 1986.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEM Capacity (h.p.)</th>
<th>Applicable Flat Rate (Rs. Per h.p. per year)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 7.5</td>
<td>Rs.192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 - 10</td>
<td>Rs.360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 15</td>
<td>Rs.540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 - 30</td>
<td>Rs.600</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 plus</td>
<td>Rs.660</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Distribution Department, Gujarat Electricity Board.

It was expected that the agricultural sector would welcome the governmental proposal, but BKS response to it showed its class bias. As the rates were high for the large tube-well owners, who would thus face increasing business risk in the water market, the stir was intensified and the new demand was to have a common slab for all tube-well owners having 10 hp plus rating to be kept at Rs.360/HP/year. When the government refused to budge on this issue, the BKS even spoke for reintroduction of pro-rata metered tariffs, though it was not accepted.

The agitation continued in the large tube-well districts of Mehsana, Banaskantha, Sabarkantha and Vadodara (which were later to be the strongholds of the BKS) and the BKS gave a call for non-payment of electricity bills. By November 1987, the total of
such arrears had mounted to Rs.65 crores and GEB started failing in the payments to the
Central government owned power stations (namely of National Thermal Power
Corporation), resulting in the reduction of power supply. It led to a desperate GEB
cutting off the power supply to 120 villages in Mehsana, Sabarkantha and Vadodara
districts in November 1987, as majority of well owners in these villages had refrained
from paying the electricity dues. This led to further unrest and even the elected members
of the then ruling party – Congress- started speaking against the then Chief Minister Sri
Amarsinh Chaudhary. The government changed the Chairman of GEB who was a serving
bureaucrat and replaced him by an ex-Minister who promptly restored power supply to
these 120 villages. By the end of November, the government succumbed to the pressure
of the BKS and fixed flat rate tariff for all 10 HP plus water pumps at Rs.500/HP/year.7
The BKS withdrew its agitation, and gained the leadership in the agricultural sector – a
position which continues unchallenged even today.

If we analyze the BKS’s strategy in this period, it was totally an ‘outsider
strategy’ as pointed by Gais and Walker8. This was because it did not have many
supporters in the state level political decision-making bodies. The BKS, which was close
to BJP, largely represented the interest of the large farmers of whom majority belonged to
the Patel caste, whereas the Congress at that time represented the KHAM (Kshatriya,
Harijan, Adivasi and Muslim) constituency, which did not have much land holdings and
who represented the rural non-Patels9. The second reason why the BKS had to then adopt
the ‘outsider’ confrontationist attitude was because it was seeking a fundamental change
in the entire agricultural power pricing policy. As Maloney, McLaughlin and Jordan
observe, it is only those groups who have “incremental demands (that) the appropriate
means of influencing policy is by insider negotiations over detail”10. Since the demands
of the BKS at this point were far from incremental, it was only natural that they had this
confrontationist attitude.

It would also be worthwhile to understand those environmental factors which
resulted in the success of the BKS’s strategy in this period. First, as pointed out in an
earlier chapter, there was an overall underlying critical requirement of groundwater in
several parts of Gujarat and the water pumps would become highly economical only

8 Compiled from various newspaper reports, discussions with farmers and the BKS leaders.
9. Gais & Walker, op. cit
11. Maloney, McLaughlin and Jordan op cit. p 34
when flat power tariff was introduced. There were also tremendous complaints against
the GEB meter - readers, who often indulged in petty corruption and harassment. Thus
there was a groundswell of support in the agricultural community for the abolition of
metered tariff in favor of flat rate tariff and that too at a lower rate. Second, what actually
triggered off this agitation was the similar withdrawal of metered tariff by states like
Punjab and Tamil Nadu\textsuperscript{11}. The third factor was the very poor rainfall followed by acute
drought in most parts of Gujarat in those years. Large number of rural populace,
including small farmers used to work in government relief sites. In such a drought
situation, denying the demands of the agriculturists became increasingly difficult for the
State Government.

\textbf{(B) The 1987 - 2000 Phase.}

By 1987, the BKS had acquired sufficient clout in the rural areas as the main
player to raise agricultural issues with the State Government. It had won the major battle
against government in the power sector by getting the flat rate tariff replace the metered
tariff, and that too at a much lower rate than that which prevailed previously. Its major
aim now was to consolidate these gains. Naturally there was no requirement for any
confrontationist strategy but rather as Berry says, what was required was the strategy of
providing ‘information’\textsuperscript{12} which includes personal representation to the government
decision-makers. Thus, the BKS now adopted an ‘\textit{insider strategy}’ as it was now
considered a ‘legitimate’ group and was consulted on a regular basis.

Several factors helped them gain this ‘insider’ status, as we can see from the list
of factors required for ‘insider’ status as drawn by Maloney, McLaughlin and Jordan\textsuperscript{13}. As these authors say if there is a good fit in the group’s objective and those of the
decision-makers in the government, an insider strategy is more likely. Here we find that
in the 1990 general elections for State Assembly Chimanbhai Patel of Janata Dal became
Chief Minister of Gujarat, with the support of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Except for
some brief interventions, the BJP continued to be the ruling party in this phase. As BKS
was ideologically aligned to BJP, it had greater access to the governmental decision-
makers than at any time in the past. Second, as Maloney et al say, if decision-makers
perceive the group as powerful, they may be more willing to listen to it and insider status

\textsuperscript{11} In fact Tamil Nadu Flat Rates were extremely enticing to farmers at Rs 75 / hp / year, which were introduced
\textsuperscript{12} Berry, Jeffrey, 1977. op. cit
\textsuperscript{13} Maloney, McLaughlin and Jordan, 1994 op. cit pp 32 – 36
may be readily granted. Indeed by this time the strength of BKS was very well recognized by all political parties as the major representative of the agricultural sector. The third factor was that now the demands were incremental in nature - ‘insider negotiations over details’ as Maloney et al. say - rather than fundamental ones. All these factors ensured that the BKS got an insider status.

A BKS representative was now formally inducted in the Board of Directors of the Gujarat Electricity Board, where he sat with the officials of the State Government, and where he could protect the interest of farmers from inside rather than petitioning from outside. There were negations regarding tariff during this period and as mentioned earlier, the changes were only incremental. From 16th November, 1990, the rates for category of more than 10 HP were reduced to Rs.360 per HP per annum. From 23rd January, 1992 only two slabs were introduced. Upto 7.5 HP the rates were Rs.350/- per HP per annum and more than 7.5 HP the rates were Rs.600 per HP per annum. From 1st April, 1997 this was further changed and the rate for motors upto 7.5 HP was Rs.350/HP/year. But for motors of 7.5 HP and above the rate was reduced to Rs.500/HP/year. Along with this HP based tariff, the metered tariff was also continued and its rate was 50 paise per unit from 1st June, 1993.

As we have observed earlier, in this period of consolidation and ‘incremental’ demands, the BKS made tremendous gains. From mere 2187 Million units consumed by the agriculture sector in 1986 – 87, by 1999 – 2000, the agriculture sector was consuming 14914 MUs. Thus the total subsidy transfer for power supply in agriculture sector was Rs.63.2 crores in 1986 – 87, which became Rs.4362.9 crores in 1999 – 2000. (See Table. In Chapter.............). The number of consumers also increased from 189012 in 1985 – 86 to 566232 in 1999 – 2000.

The other ‘incremental’ demand of the BKS was for increasing the hours of power supply. Every year during the pre-monsoon summer season, especially when the rainfall was erratic, there was additional requirement for power supply for agriculture. The GEB and the government had to bow to these pressures, even at the cost of cutting power supply to the industries for additional days. This was despite the fact that the major

15 To maintain a semblance of even-handedness, a representative from the industry sector was also inducted, normally the President of the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industries
16 The details are provided by Distribution Department, GEB
source of revenue to the GEB was from the industries and that GEB had to buy costly power from Independent Power Producers to supply power to the agriculture sector. The BKS did not have to resort to any protest or confrontation for getting this additional power supply to the agriculture sector, but it became a norm that in case of power shortage, the farmers would get a priority over the industrialists. It was a blatantly non-economical decision for GEB, but it was nevertheless being followed. It should also be acknowledged that by this time the GEB had started feeling the heat of the financial losses. In fact towards the latter part of 1990s, it was already in a tremendous financial mess as we have noted earlier.

The other ‘insider’ demand where BKS succeeded by the non-confrontationist strategy was the issue of government’s actions to prevent over-exploitation of groundwater in Mehsana and other ‘dark zone’ areas. As shown earlier in this study, tremendous ecological damage was continuously occurring in those areas due to groundwater exploitation. Consequently by mid-1990’s GEB was ordered not to provide any new agricultural connection there; while the commercial banks were prohibited by the apex National Bank of Agricultural Reconstruction and Development (NABARD) from providing any loan for the agricultural well. By 1997, however, BKS by their ‘insider’ strategizing during the Shankersinh Vaghela17 Ministry got the GEB to remove those conditions, while the state government was to provide these loans in lieu of the commercial banks. Since then as per GEB figures, 10678 such wells have been electrified with state government loans.

Another similar issue over which BKS represented and ultimately succeeded, was the issue of transfer of electricity connections from one place to another in a district. Initially it was not allowed by GEB, but its facilitation led to the development of a market for electricity connection. People having electric connections would sell their connections at very high prices in the name of connection transfer18.


This was a phase when the external environment changed substantially for the BKS, despite there being the same political party in power – the Bharatiya Janata Party – and a favorable Chief Minister Sri Keshubhai Patel, who was not only from the Patel

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17 Sri Shankersinh Vaghela was originally a BJP leader who broke away from BJP in 1996 to form government with the outside support of Congress Party Coming from North Gujarat and with erstwhile linkages with BKS leaders, he was highly empathetic to BKS demands.

18 See Prakash, Anjal. 2005. op. cit. p. 133
caste, but also had a well publicized rural agricultural background. This change in the external environment was related to the setting up of the Gujarat Electricity Regulatory Commission (GERC) under the section 17(1) of the Electricity Regulatory Commission Act (ERC Act) of 1998. Whereas earlier it was the state government which fixed the electricity tariff, now under the section 29 of the ERC Act, it was the GERC, which would fix the electricity tariff for all consumer groups, including the agriculture. The Act did not provide for a mere mechanical application of the cost principles on commercial terms, but that the tariff should ‘progressively’ reflect the cost of supply of electricity (section 29(2), implying thereby that commercial costing need not be applied immediately). The Act also left loopholes for the subsidy which could be provided by the State Government [section 29(5)], but the State Government was asked to compensate the concerned ‘person’, (in this case the Gujarat Electricity Board), in case it required to grant any subsidy to any class of consumers. In effect, it meant that if the State Government wanted to subsidize the agriculture sector, it would have to directly pay the Gujarat Electricity Board from its own budgetary resources. To a very large extent, this brought the entire financial issue related to power sector back to the State Government, something which it could not disregard even after the creation of GERC.

The Gujarat Electricity Board filed a cost and revenue data for the purposes of determination of electricity tariff under its letter OM:COM:IPP:6064 dated 15th September, 1999 before the GERC. This issue temporarily shifted the battleground of politics regarding power tariff to the GERC office. The strategy of the BKS became that of a litigant before the GERC and from a complete ‘insider’ during the earlier period, it was now on the boundary of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’. Like all other consumer groups e.g. industries, railways etc. the BKS was also to present its case before the GERC and to its credit, the BKS played the litigants role very constructively and in an orderly fashion.

In its submission before the GERC, the BKS continuously pleaded on the issues it had represented time and again. It talked about the non-remunerative rates of agricultural output vis-à-vis the inputs, the problems associated with meters, the disparity in rates of water supplied by canal irrigation to that from groundwater etc. However the GERC refuted all these submissions and replaced the flat tariff system by metered tariff

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19 The setting up of the GERC was not simply a State Government initiative, but can be seen in the context of setting up similar ERCs in several other states. As the political class felt itself unable to take a harsh discussion affecting different group of consumers – especially the agriculturists – the ERC were created to do this job. The ERCs were a quasi-judicial body, whose orders were expected to be more palatable than that by the government.

20 See the submission by BKS in Case No 19 of 1999 dated 10th October, 2000 before the GERC at Ahmedabad.
while also asking the GEB to submit within three months a time bound plan for installation of agricultural meters on all installations within a period of three years.\(^21\)

In keeping up with its strategy of litigation through quasi-judicial channel, the BKS filed a petition to review the order as per Regulation 105(1) of the GERC’s (conduct and business) Regulation, 1999. It is worth discussing it in detail. The BKS made the following points.\(^22\)

1. As the prices of agricultural output are very low, the input prices should not be increased till proper output prices are decided by the Government.
2. As a result of globalization and free import, agricultural products are being dumped by the developed countries. As all other input prices have also shot up, the farmer will starve if electricity price too goes up.
3. In the main order of the GERC, the agricultural sector is to bear the total price rise of Rs.662.70 crores, while all other sectors would combined bear only Rs.493.86 crores. As the agricultural sector is consuming only 28.41% of the total consumption (as per GERC), its proportionate increase should not be more than Rs.328.57 crores.
4. BKS also asked for the removal of newly introduced fixed charges and 5% duty on the agricultural sector.
5. Finally, as neither GEB nor government have asked for reintroduction of metered tariff supply, the GERC should not give direction to GEB in Para 6.6.

to cover all connections in metered supply in three years.

The BKS again gave a Memorandum stating that the GEB should give fresh proposal to GERC regarding agricultural tariff and that the GERC should wait till such proposals are received. The GERC, however, did not agree to any of the submissions of BKS on grounds that issue of agricultural input–output prices is a matter of the national economic policy and beyond GERC’s purview, while on issues of metered tariff it quoted Section 29(2)(d) of the ERC Act, 1998 that tariff is guided by “the factors which would encourage efficiency, economical use, good performance, optimum investment……”\(^23\).

\(^{21}\) ibid. p. 12 11 of the Order of GERC
\(^{22}\) See Submissions by BKS in Case No 29/2000 and 31/2000 dated 22nd December, 2000 in the matter of Review Application filed by Gujarat Chamber of Commerce & Industry & BKS and others v/s GEB
\(^{23}\) ibid. see section 17.8 and 17.9 of the order 29/2000 and 31/2000 of GERC
Having exhausted the direct legal process in the GERC, the BKS put tremendous pressure on the State Government to continue the status-quo on subsidy regime in the power sector. Though there were several meetings at the level of then Chief Minister Sri Keshubhai Patel and the Energy Minister Sri Kaushikbhai Patel with the BKS leaders, with the aim to make them accept the GERC ruling, the BKS leaders did not budge an inch. The aim of the political executive was to make the BKS leaders implement the metered tariff consensually, but it did not work out. The State Government then approached GERC that they would grant subsidy to the GEB in order to enable them to charge the pre-revised tariff from the agricultural consumers initially for a period from 10.10.2000 to 31.3.2001. This period kept on getting extended by the subsequent petitions filed by the government and GERC agreed to it. This continued well till 30.11.2002.

The result of all this was that the BKS had successfully managed to neutralize the adverse order of GERC and the power tariff regime in the agriculture sector continued as if nothing had changed in between. The BKS strategically fully tested the option of GERC but when it found that the GERC refused to accede to their point both in their main order 19/1999 dated 10.10.2000 or its subsequent Review Application 29/2000 and 31/2000 dated 22.12.2000, it shifted the location of application of pressure from Commission to the political executive in the government. And indeed this pressure was successful as seen from the government conceding defeat and petitioning the GERC for permitting it to extend the status quo.

Apart from the above, BKS fully went along with the GEB not only in making representation, but also accepted its suggestion of joining a Committee consisting of representatives of various consumer groups and other interested parties. GERC expected that this Committee would provide an effective interaction among the consumers and the Gujarat Electricity Board to implement this direction and also to sort out other grievances of the consumers, particularly the agricultural consumers. BKS was very clear that while it would not budge from its stand on flat tariff, it would not be seen as a ‘bad boy’ and would continue in its role as ‘insider’ interest group.

25 GERC Order dated August 3, 2002 on Petition No. 53/2001
During this entire process, while the BKS had fully adopted the legal strategy in GERC, it did not forget to make representations and have meetings over the ‘incremental’ matters with the GEB and the State Government. Thus the full body of the BKS representatives including its National Secretary Sri Jeevanbahi Patel, State General Secretary Sri Maganbhai Patel, Treasurer Sri Babubhai Patel, Sri Kanubhai Patel and Sri Laxman Patodia met the Chairman of GEB Dr. Manjula Subramanyam and other Members on 27.5.2002 and 7.10.2002 in Gandhinagar Thermal Power Station. The issues discussed in those meetings included enhancing the hours of electric supply for agriculture, providing the new agricultural connections quickly, expediting the connections under ‘Tatkal’ scheme, to provide for Temporary Disconnection when there is no requirement of power because of drought conditions, to simplify the process of re-connection in case of permanently disconnected agricultural consumer if he applied within 6 months, to facilitate change of name of the owner of tube well connection etc. These are all administrative matters which often cause rift between the local BKS leaders and the engineers at the transmission and the distribution sub-stations. But while at a macro level, BKS was opposing the government and GEB in the quasi-judicial body of GERC, it was also negotiating with the government and the GEB on several ‘incremental’ issues. Side by side, it was also pressuring the political executive successfully in neutralizing the GERC order of removal of flat non-metered tariff, by getting the government to give grant to GEB for power subsidy for agriculture. Thus BKS had three concurrent strategies dealing with different wings of government during this phase.

(i) Legal approach in the quasi – judicial forum of GERC.
(ii) Representation and meeting with GEB bureaucracy over the ‘incremental’ administrative matters.
(iii) Internal dialogues and pressures on the political executives to continue granting subsidy and effectively bypassing GERC order.

(D) The ‘2003 – to Present’ Phase.

This phase is marked with BKS in sharp confrontation with the government, though towards the end, there were some evidence of rapprochement, if not a full–
fledged conflict resolution. In June 2003, the State Government decided to finally implement the GERC order which had been passed on 20.12.2000, but had been so far bypassed by the earlier government by the stratagem of giving direct subsidy to GEB in lieu of the higher charges to be paid by the agriculturists. This upset the entire ‘insider’ strategy of the BKS. Applying the theoretical perspective of Maloney et al\textsuperscript{26}, since the groups objectives were no more matching those being pursued by the governmental decision-makers, an ‘insider’ strategy was not possible. Naturally, the course left open to the BKS as an interest group was to adopt the strategy of confrontation – something which it had not adopted since 1986. In this strategy of confrontation, BKS adopted all varieties of tactics, including protests, holding ‘\textit{bandhs}’, organizing negative press publicity against the government. These aspects are discussed below.

After June, 2003 when the State Government decided to implement the GERC order of agricultural price hike, the BKS, after some unsuccessful internal discussion with the political wing of the ruling party asked the farmers on July 3, 2003 to boycott the payment of all new bills. In a strongly worded statement the BKS General Secretary Sri Maganbhai Patel said, “The Gujarat Government’s decision to implement the GERC award is being done at a time when government employees are being paid lavishly under the Fifth Pay Commission. How does one justify this?” \ldots \ldots \ldots The tariff hike will ruin the farmers”.

Two state-wide \textit{bandhs} (lock-outs) were held in August and September, 2003 wherein government used force to suppress the agitation and to prevent the farmers from reaching Vadodara, which is the head-quarter of GEB. In September, 2003 itself a 31 year old farmer died in Surat district after police officers beat him up for taking part in a demonstration against the tariff hike. The entire atmosphere in the state got charged up and blistering advertisement campaign was launched by the government, highlighting the fact that the decision to raise the minimum tariff for the agriculture sector to 50 paise per unit was taken when Sri P. V. Narasimha Rao of the Congress Party was the Prime Minister. The BKS reacted by calling the Chief Minister Sri Narendra Modi as a ‘modern day Machiavelli’, one who would adopt all means to try to crush the farmers agitation.

\textsuperscript{26} Maloney et al op. cit p 33
This confrontationist strategy of the BKS and its veiled threat to escalate it further to all villages had its impact and on October 15, 2003, government announced a ‘Diwali’ gift for the agriculture sector in terms of a partial rollback of the tariff. For farmers using pumps upto 7.5 HP, the rate was reduced from Rs.1050 to Rs.750/HP/year, whereas for the higher capacity pumps it was reduced from Rs.1200 to Rs.900/HP/year. The BKS refused to accept this partial rollback and once again asked the farmers not to pay the bills as per the new charges demanded by the GEB. The BKS declared that a mass protest program would be launched throughout the state in consultation with the village and the taluka committees of the BKS. There were sporadic violent activities as well, as in Nandasan in Mehsana district in October, 2003 where a group of farmers attacked the GEB staff as they entered the village for recovery of arrears of electricity bills from the farmers. The situation thus continued to be at a relatively high level of tension.

The tension got further escalated when in early January BKS was asked to vacate the MLA’s quarter in Gandhinagar from where it was operating its office since last several years. After a few days, BKS faced a forceful eviction, an action which its condemned as ‘immature’ and ‘reeking of vindictiveness’.

The BKS retaliated in a rather unprecedented manner by actually demanding on 7th January, 2004, the imposition of Presidents Rule in Gujarat and dismissing the elected government. The BKS stated that the Chief Minister Sri Narendra Modi had systematically tried to bend and break the democratic principles of constitution. The Statement said “We request the Gujarat Governor to use his constitutional power by imposing President’s Rule…… this alone would free the farmers from the government sponsored terror on the farmers”. The BKS gave as many as sixteen reasons why it wanted Presidents Rule, alleging that Modi government had been breaking elected bodies, using police to repress people, misusing public money, dividing the farmer community by giving anonymous advertisements, arbitrarily cutting farmers connections etc. Indeed this was for the first time that an ideologically aligned group had asked such strong constitutional action against a government of having same ideological moorings.
At the same time, to gain the emotional sympathy of public at large, and to
galvanize its own supporters, a very senior BKS member Laljibhai Patel, who was also its
co-founder as also a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Pracharak, went on a hunger strike in
Ahmedabad. Laljibhai, who was attracting sympathetic crowds, compared Modi to the
villains in the Mahabharat epic.

The BKS also carried out some other direct actions. Farmers’ rallies were taken
out at several taluka places in North Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch threatening the overall
law and order situation in those areas. There were also attempts to *gherao* several MLAs
and prevent them from entering villages. The BKS also threatened to hold parallel flag-
hoisting ceremony in Jamnagar on the occasion of 26<sup>th</sup> January 2004, when the official
State Government function was being held.

This constant pressure by the BKS and its strategy of applying multifold tactics
ultimately compelled the BJP Central Party to intervene lest the situation totally slips out
of control. On 23<sup>rd</sup> January, the Central High Command of the BJP dispatched senior
peace brokers – Union Law Minister Arun Jaitley, BJP Central Observer Ramdas
Agrawal, Senior RSS leaders Bal Apte and Madandas Devi, and Swadeshi Jagran Manch
leader S. Gurumurthy to hold emergency consultations with all groups. On its side, the
State Government constituted a Five-Member High Level Ministerial Committee led by
Finance Minister Vajubhai Vala and consisting of Law Minister Ashok Bhatt, Agriculture
Minister Bhupendrasinh Chudasma, Minister of State for Home Amit Shah and Minister
of State for Energy Saurabh Patel. Though the first round of discussion proved
inconclusive, the BKS suspended its agitation during the pendency of the negotiations.

The final round of talk on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2004 proved to be conclusive and a
compromise was reached between the State Government and the BKS in terms of a
reduction in the horse power tariff by Rs. 50/HP/year. There was certainly dissatisfaction
within the BKS camp as the initial position was to seek a reduction of Rs.200/HP/year,
but BKS officially welcomed this compromise. Only a few hardliners like Kanubhai
Patel, the expert on power issues in BKS and a State level Representative, called this
settlement as eyewash. For him, the issue was no longer that of power tariff alone but he
was incensed with Modi’s strong arm tactics as farmers were arrested, their meters sealed and their pumps confiscated. However these voices were in a minority in the BKS and by and large the settlement had been accepted by all.

Though this compromise served to tone down the official ‘confrontationist’ strategy of the BKS, the seething anger remained and it was manifested in the May 2004 elections for the Parliament, in which the BJP lost 7 seats, winning only 14 seats against the 21 it had won in 1999 elections. Kanubhai Patel of BKS was vocal in attributing this defeat to the farmer’s agitation. “Farmers are angry with Modi and they have expressed their anger through ballot” 27. Other political commentators also regarded farmers power—hike issue as a major factor in the BJP defeat 28.

The BKS agitation was officially over by now, but apparently government had also learnt its lessons. As a newspaper columnist commented 29, it was a ‘mellowed down’ Chief Minister Modi, who called, the BKS leaders on June 22, 2004 for an impromptu meeting in his Sachivalaya chamber and promised to solve their pending problems at the earliest. A former State Agriculture Minister Purushottam Rupala was entrusted with the job of liaising with BKS. Apparently, BKS seemed satisfied over these developments. State BKS General Secretary Maganbhai Patel said, “The CM seems to have softened his stand on various farmers’ issues. He told us we should forget the past.......” The chapter of confrontation between state government and BKS was thus over.

27 Indian Express, May 17, 2004
28 see, for example, www.rediff.com, May 14, 2004, Anger at Modi costs BJP 7 seats, Bunsha, Dionne, ‘Gujarat Farmers’ Power, 18th June, 2004
Conclusion

We have thus observed that the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, in the typical fashion of any good interest group, applied all types of strategies and tactics in the fulfillment of its goals, first, in achieving the policies that would lead to huge power subsidy and then, trying to retain and consolidate those gains. During 1986-87, it had to adopt the 'outsider' strategy of confrontation and protest due to two reasons. First, it was not yet recognized by the political establishment, and second, the policy changes it desired in the power sector had the potential of fundamentally changing the then existing agriculture power pricing policy. Yet, its strategy succeeded and the BKS could achieve all its major goals. During the next phase 1987-2000, BKS was co-opted in the decision-making process in the power sector as an 'insider' and it could hence consolidate its gains of the earlier period.

However the situation changed significantly after 2000, when the State Government faced with huge financial burden of its own, was unable to foot the huge agricultural subsidy bill of the GEB. The Government shifted the unpleasant task of raising the agricultural tariff to the GERC, a quasi-judicial body. In this phase the BKS tried the legal strategy of making all types of submission, petitions, and counter-petitions in the GERC like a very disciplined and legally-oriented body. It continued with this insider strategy and pressurized the government internally by negotiations to bear the burden of additional tariff, so that it was not passed on to the farmers.

Another major change in strategy took place in 2003 when the Modi government refused to play soft with the BKS and asked the agriculturists to pay the additional tariff as earlier ordered by the GERC. The BKS once again resorted to the 'outsider' strategy of protests, public meetings, media publicity etc. They even petitioned the Governor of Gujarat to remove the Modi government and impose President's Rule, particularly after the Modi government forcefully evicted them from the government quarters. Still these protests were never violent as in 1986-87, perhaps because the BKS hoped that being ideologically aligned with the ruling party, things can still be solved by some friendly
intervention. This indeed happened and a compromise was reached, but only prior to the
elections to the Parliament. Thus BKS’ strategy was reasonably successful even in the
face of very strong external challenge. How influential BKS was in its overall interaction
with the Gujarat government would be discussed in the next chapter. But certainly like a
successful interest group BKS did not limit itself to a single strategy or to only one
forum. It adopted various tactics and strategy and approached all levels of decision-
makers, depending on the external situation and context.