

Evolution of Bihar Legislative Assembly with special reference to caste

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Last two decades have witnessed a lot of change in the functioning as well as the structure of Bihar Legislative Assembly. Therefore a research work on the evolution of Bihar Vidhan Sabha mainly focusing upon the relation between the Assembly and the Council, electoral turmoil from 1990-2005, change in the structure of Bihar Legislative Assembly, following the formation of Jharkhand state, Caste ideology versus development ideology and nature of present government were undertaken. For this purpose, we administered a set of questionnaire from MLA's as well as common people and analyzed their answers for content analysis and generalizing facts. We also visited Vidhan Sabha Library for collection of secondary data.

At present, only five states have a bicameral legislature and Bihar is one of them. Council is often described as White Elephant but during the research it was found that people as well as MLA's recognize it as a vital body. Bihar is famous for caste-politics. During the research it was found that people like to vote for their caste members and even politicians, to some extent, are sure of getting votes from their own caste people. Though caste is losing its social significance with every degree of increase in education and awareness, its political significance is being accelerated at the same rate. Thirdly, study of gradual shift of power from the congress to RJD and then to NDA-coalition headed by Mr. Nitish Kumar was quite interesting. Congress faced defeat in 1990 elections probably due to its inability to give adequate representation to backward castes. Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav (JD now RJD) had come to power by mobilizing caste through the 'backward' identity.

But his party was voted out of power in 2005 when Bihar's economic growth came to be characterized by a bull, because caste as a factor cannot be stretched too far. Sooner or later 'development' issue had to come to the scene. Among the significant changes that followed the formation of Jharkhand were (a) strong increase of RJD's proportion within the Assembly (b) small growth in the strength of JD(U) and Samata party within NDA in Bihar (c) Almost disappearance of ST-member from Bihar Legislative Assembly.

At present, the opposition blames Nitish Kumar's government as a 'rule of bureaucracy' However the research revealed that his attaching more importance to bureaucrats has proved fruitful in the accomplishment of valuable tasks and in checking undesired influence of local politicians upon the public officials. There has been much politicization of caste. But gradually people have started understanding that only 'development' ultimately matters. 3/4th of the people agreed that if the government works efficiently they will cast votes in their favour irrespective of caste, creed or sex. It is important to note that people are ready to vote for the party that works and the party they vote will have to work.

Keyword: MLA – Member of Legislative Assembly.

Introduction : India has a parliamentary form of Democracy and the structure of Government in the states under the constitution is also parliamentary as we have adopted a federal model. The constitution provides a legislature for every state. The state legislature consists of the Governor and in five states including Bihar a bicameral legislature comprising of Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly. Every Legislative Assembly, unless sooner dissolved, has five years term

from the date appointed for its first meeting.

The purpose of this study is to have a close analysis of the working of parliamentary government in Bihar from 1990 to 2005 and to discover the dominance of caste over Bihar politics.

There has been a lot of change in the structure and functioning of Bihar Legislative Assembly since 1990.

Jharkhand was carved out of Bihar in 2000 and was established as a separate State. The RJD rule saw the decline of its hegemony over Bihar Politics after a long term of 15 years, in the elections of 2005. Through this research work, we endeavoured to find out its impact on the Politics of Bihar. On the whole, we tried to Study the evolution of Bihar Vidhan Sabha in the context of change in caste-structure of members of Legislative Assembly. Before looking at the history of Political developments in Bihar an overview of geographical, historical and social life in the territory is desirable, Bihar is as old as civilization itself. It is a glorious, colourful and ancient land. Bihar is a semi feudal society laden with orthodox views. Bordered by Nepal, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh it occupies an area of 99,200 sq. km. It has a Population of 8,28,78796 and stand as the third most populated State. Patna its Capital City today, previously known as Patliputra was home of 'Ashoka the Great'. In the Indian Struggle for independence, Bihar was one of the important centres of the 1857 movements. The hero of the 1857 movements in Bihar was Kunwar Singh who died a warrior's death. Gandhi started his Satyagraha from Champaran After independence also the main opposition to the autocratic rule of Mrs. Indira Gandhi under the leadership of Jaya Prakash Narayan came from Bihar. But however Bihar in its political history revealed dominance of caste over politics.

While talking about its political history, the Bihar Legislative Assembly immediately strikes into our mind. It has passed through several developments till date. It was only in year 1936 that Bihar was made a State under British - India. The elections to the Provincial Legislative Assembly were held between 22nd and 29th January 1937. Congress achieved a sweeping victory with 75 % of votes casted in their favour. As a consequence of various differences between the Indian National Congress and British Government in relation to the Second World War, the Bihar Ministry resigned in October 1939. In the first General elections, after independence, Dr. S.K. Sinha was appointed as the first Chief Minister. A major set-back came to Congress in 1990 when Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav who had emerged as the leader of common man became the Chief Minister of Bihar. This Party ruled for almost 15 years on well thought caste- chemistry. This party claimed to provide empowerment to Backward Castes. In the year 2000, Jharkhand state was created out of Bihar which led to the disappearance of scheduled tribes and suddenly caste chemistry changed in the formation of Bihar Legislative Assembly. Under this government,

however in 2005, dissatisfaction reached its apex and RJD was voted out of Power. At Present an NDA - coalition headed by Mr. Nitish Kumar is in power. But Bihar politics continues to be caste ridden.

Purpose / objectives of Study :

This research was undertaken keeping in mind three important objectives.

1. To find out if any change has actually taken place in the caste structure and functioning of Bihar Legislative Assembly since 1990.
2. To examine changes if any has taken place in its functioning after Jharkhand came into being,
3. To assess the role of Bihar Vidhan Sabha after elections of 1990, 2000 and 2005, in its caste versus development divide.

Methodology :

This work was an empirical study based on both Primary and Secondary methods. Under the Primary method we prepared a set of 10 questions. It contained questions related to caste and development as two parameters in the structure and functioning of Bihar Legislative Assembly in Bihar as well as that of formation of Jharkhand. At the same time through this questionnaire we probed into 1990 elections, its ideology and its impression upon people. Scheduled interview method was used to administer the views of MLAs and Common People. For this purpose, we interviewed 2 MLAs for eliciting their opinion. For content analysis we visited Vidhan Sabha Library and even our college library. We could avail recent data from internet also for table analysis. Our sampling method was **Purposive incidental** and sample size was **50**. Patna was taken as the area of Study and Bihar Legislative Assembly was the universe of our study. Books, journals and contemporary papers were also our vital source of information.

Result and Discussion :

Through this empirical study views of common people comprising people from all strata of social life as well as of MLAs were taken. On the issue of bi-Cameral legislature, 82 % turned affirmative and expressed their opinion to introduce Legislative Council in all the state legislatures.

The Indian Constitution has left it to the will of State to opt for a bicameral legislature. At present only 5 out of 27 states in India have two houses. As Bihar is one of

them, we were inquisitive to know how people analyzed the role of Council. People felt that members of Vidhan Parishad are experts in different fields and mostly educated and therefore their valuable suggestions can help the members of Vidhan Sabha in their performance. True, as it is, but the people need to know that their 'Valuable Advice' would only be of use when backed by some powerful politicians. It was to our utter astonishment to find that even politicians accepted that to keep their party men happy they appoint them in Vidhan Parishad. Though, some people who were aware of this appeasement policy of politicians felt that Legislative Council has no practical utility. Some went to the extent of saying that it is difficult to understand that when 22 States of India can do without Legislative Council, are the leaders of Bihar so inefficient to need another house for reviewing their work?

While analyzing the nature of 1990 elections, it was found that this election to Legislative Assembly was not based on caste ideology. Many recalled and said "No, 1990 elections were not at all based on caste ideology. At that time, we had great expectations from him (Laloo Prasad Yadav)" Poor and illiterate people believed that it was only after the elections of 1990 that adequate check was put over the dominance of upper castes in politics as there was rise in backward caste representation in the Assembly. Almost 35% people agreed that it was based on caste ideology which denotes that none of the elections are totally free from caste – ideology. Caste–manipulations have been there with the varying degrees. Those MLAs who are anti - Laloo blamed him to belong to the category of politicians who think that development has no electoral value and that caste is the sole determining factor in Bihar electoral politics.

Data available showed the increase in share of decision making by Backward Caste MLAs and Upper Caste MLAs in Bihar Legislative Assembly after the creation of Jharkhand state. This was the natural outcome of the disappearance of Schedule Tribes from Bihar. However, 55% of people were not in favour of it. According to MLAs, ST representation has surely declined after the formation of Jharkhand but it had no direct effect on the two caste groups mentioned above. The masses, on the other hand, were ignorant, about the changes that followed by the formation of Jharkhand state. 70% of the common people as well as MLAs denied that formation of Jharkhand has resulted in complete disappearance of ST members from the Bihar Vidhan Sabha. The MLAs were quite eager to point out that there is still one ST member in Bihar Legislative Assembly. People think that since the seats for STs are

reserved there can not be complete disappearance of STs from Bihar Legislature but all are unaware of the fact that only 1% ST population exists now in Bihar. The reality persists that all ST-reserved constituencies of Bihar are now located in Jharkhand. Perhaps due attention was not being paid to their development. This might be one of the reasons for the partition of Bihar.

During the whole research, our main inclination was towards caste, so some space needs to be devoted to it. While comparing Rabri Devi's government of 2000 and Nitish Kumar's government of 2005 we reached at important inferences. Representation of Upper Caste members in legislature was more than double the number under Rabri Devi's in 2000. Secondly, Extremely Backward Castes have a larger share in total representation under the present government. Their numbers in Legislative Assembly are three-times more than their numbers under Rabri Devi's rule. Nitish Kumar's government shows representation of EBCs and UCs which was agreed upon by 54% people. While, most of the people agreed that this government has been highlighting the issue of 'development' of Extremely Backward Castes, only few thought that it also gave increased representation of Upper Castes. Mr. Nitish Kumar is heading an NDA-coalition that is mainly associated with BJP. BJP in turn, is mainly associated with Upper Caste Hindu Community. 54% people said that there has been a decline in the Backward Castes and Scheduled Castes representation in Nitish Kumar's Government. However, MLAs from ruling party claimed that they work for all castes and community. They have been giving increased representation to EBCs because their representation was not adequate. The opposition blames Mr. Nitish Kumar for dividing the Dalits and causing humiliation to them by calling them 'Mahadalits'.

65% of people thought that 'development' is now the agenda of forming Legislative Assembly. The ruling party takes it to their credit, the mobilization of electorate to 'development ideology'. More than half of MLAs do not agree to this concept. These men happen to be from opposition parties. According to them 'shushasan' is not a proper term used by Nitish Kumar or rather a misnomer. Nitish Kumar's government is a 'rule of bureaucracy' and according to them 'worst democracy is better than best bureaucracy'. We then inquired how present government really attached more importance to bureaucracy. Through their answers we reached to the conclusion that people feel that there is a lot of protocols followed rigidly which gives rise to unnecessary delay 'red tapism' in disposal of cases and even gives rise to

corruption in its diversified forms. However, on the other hand we also got to know that it has been useful in accomplishment of valuable tasks of government.

Common people said that 'development' has always been an agenda for getting votes. They also praised the works done by the present government, but they expect much more from them. Masses are striving hard for development. Their basic amenities are their top priorities. No wonder, 77% people feel that development and not caste ideology will affect the next coming 2010 Bihar Legislative Assembly elections.

Conclusion :

Caste is a distinctive category in the Indian Social System. Though it had its beginning in the Hindu Philosophy for four Varnas corresponding to four functional divisions, it has resulted in the perpetuation of several caste groups by birth among the Hindus. It is also important to acknowledge that representative politics has strengthened caste. In Bihar, important political factions are based on caste lines. Bihar stands as an exception in terms of caste arithmetic in the entire range of Hindi belt. The Upper OBC represent 41.12% of the population. In no other state of North India does an OBC caste represent more than 1 percent of the population. But Yadavs in Bihar are 24% of the total population. The lower OBC represents 18.2% of the state population. SCs represent 16.5% of the state population. Bihar will always have strong hold over caste politics. 1% STs exist after formation of Jharkhand.

At present, change in caste structure in the Legislature in Bihar is clearly in terms of M.N. Srinivas's notion. According to him, the dominant status shifts from upper caste which he calls 'dominating' to dominated (Kurmis, Koeris and Yadavs) and from dominated to under privileged class (SCs and Dalits). It is evident from the fact that Nitish Kumar is adding much importance to Extremely Backward Castes, Four members (almost 15%) of cabinet are from Extremely Backward Castes. Caste has become deep rooted in Bihar – Politics be it in nominating candidates for election or in voting behavior. The murky fact of Bihar politics is that it cannot do without caste. Every new government formed, has a new kind of caste strategy. This is however not suggesting, that caste is bad or has negative impact. It simply means that caste has a liberating impact upon politics but politicization of caste is dangerous and as it distracts demagogue and electorate become fragmented. To support this view D.L. Sheth is quoted "By drawing caste into its competitive structure, politics find its bases in the society".

Caste is also seen as an infrastructure of modern democratic society. It is an important factor governing political participation and mobilization. Even uneducated masses can be mobilized in political process using caste channel, but it will not be out of point to say, that politicization of caste for ulterior motive is absolutely wrong. If our leaders are so cunning to use caste for increasing their vote bank, they must be equally wise to use it for the uplift of downtrodden and then only can Bihar Legislative Assembly change and develop in its functioning for making Bihar a state of substance and prosperity.

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