



## Rise of Regional Parties in Bihar

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Janta Dal which emerged in 1990s in Bihar as an alternative to the Congress party also lost its holds from the politics of Bihar making room for the regional parties to spread its tentacles over here. The Janta Dal which had once overthrown the national party like congress finally lost its luster in the role of national party due to ideological split in the party which finally paved the path for upsurge of regional parties capturing political power in Bihar. In India, there are two kinds of political parties i.e. National and Regional According to the election commission if a party succeeded in securing in its earlier election either 4% of votes or 3.3% of seats in at least four state legislature assembly or 4% of votes or 4% of seats at least from four states, then it is recognized as an all India or a National Party .1 All other recognized political parties are regional parties. According to Dawn Brancati-“Regional Parties are traditionally believed to originate from regionally based social cleavages, that is, regional parties are thought to exist because certain regions within a state have unique interests and concerns that cannot or are not, addressed adequately by existing parties.”The political decentralization encourages the rise of regional parties, it provides opportunities to the local leaders to form party and voters the opportunity to vote for the local leaders.2

By the end of 1980s and 1990s major national parties like Indian National congress and Janta Dal began to face decline and the parties like BJP and left wing could not continue their rise beyond a plateau. This not only gave rise to regional parties on a wide scale but make them a decline factor in formation of federal coalition governments after 1989 Lok Sabha election.3 According to M P Singh-“It was not only the inability of national parties to give adequate representation to newly emergent socio economic forces in the major states and regions of India that provided unprecedented space to regional parties in state and national politics. But the rise of capitalist forming and the regional bourgeoisie also contributed to the growing political count to the regional political forces old and new”. In a deep analysis of the role of regional capitalist and political parties Sanjay Baru provided evidence to the above said facts. He has presented some facts on how the agrarian modernization and growth led to the gradual entry of the agricultural capitalist section into agro based industries ,small medium & large industries in some states like :Punjab, Haryana, Western U.P ,Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamilnadu ,Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.4 Although ,Baru is right but it is also true that in some states, without any rise of the regional bourgeoisie ,regional parties have emerged and here the main thrust of their rise is factors like caste and regional identities. Some examples can be analyzed in this way, BSP in U.P,RJD and Samta Party in Bihar ,SP in U.P, Biju Janta Dal in Orissa(all splinters of Janta Dal) .

In India, two kinds of political parties can be analyzed .In first place came those regional parties whose origins lie in the deep cultural divisions of the Indian Society ,e.g. Tamil Parties whose origins go back to the first world war, the Akali Dal and the National Conference. These old regional parties are feature areas with strong religions or linguistic regional identities, even going to the excellent of being ambivalent to separatism.5 In the second place came those regional parties in the states where previously the congress or Janta Party /Dal had their strong presence. These regional parties came into existence in 1980s or 1990s as a result of growing mass mobilization incapability of congress to satisfy the regional demands and also as splinters of Janta Dal/Party. The Telgu Desam, Assom Gan Parishad, Rashtriy Janta Dal, Samta Party ,Samajwadi Party are the example in this point. Also the growing importance of caste, community and local factors in politics, regionalized support base to the personalities who is recognisable in terms of caste/tribe factor have contributed to their growth. The proliferation of regional parties particularly in Bihar is associated with the decline of the Congress with respect to its internal accommodative capability and a sharp sweep in its electoral base, on one hand and incapability of Janta Dal to remain consolidated as an umbrella party.6 The ideological background of regionalist parties revolve around the regionalist issues which include demand relating to religion, caste and community, language and economic backwardness etc.

Suhas Palshikar, very minutely observes; “Many time regional parties cover non-regionalist ideological ground. Which the Akalis tend to define regional identity in terms of religion, the Shiv Sena uses the two ideologies of regionalism and religious communalism according to the exigencies of electoral politics. Regional parties also rely on caste for their ideological formulations .Thus, the DMK originally combined Dravidian identity with non-Brahmanism ,by employing anti-caste ideological resources ,the DMK strengthened its claims pertaining to a separate Dravidian identity vis-à-vis the Aryans .More recently ,the PMK in Tamil Nadu has also combined the regional rhetoric with an anti-caste. Social position on behalf of the OBCs .Such ideological formulations should not be seen cynically only as marriages of convenience”.7

The growth of regional parties upset the established pattern of vote preferences .Now; the votes are not concentrated to one particular party. The mood of voters in the light of emergence of regional parties take a shift according to change in political situation, time, place, anti incumbency factors and a lot more .Now a days not only new voters ushered into electoral arena but traditional loyalties’ too were put under strain. The regional parties succeeded in mobilizing greater share of votes. When we try to understand the phenomenon of rise of regional parties, a clear indication came out i.e. it is a sign of strengthening of democracy .Eminent scholars discover some points for understanding the phenomenon of rise of regional parties:



**Federalization process :** It is believed that regional /state parties represent the federalization<sup>8</sup> of polity. In a diverse society like India, it is necessary that political forces represented on regional level, so that the interests of various segments represented adequately and came into effect in the form of public policy. According to some eminent scholars, the emergence of state parties is a indication of strengthening of federal politics .The changes since the 1990s mainly seen as the growing federalization of the political system which had earlier functioned predominantly in the parliamentary mode due to dominance of the congress party under Nehru and Indira Gandhi.The federal structure of Indian constitution largely based on the Canada constitution act 1867, and the federal structure has been incorporated in Indian constitution after independence.

But after independence, the pattern of centralization was strengthened by the dominance of a national “umbrella party” ,the Indian national congress, that rule in New Delhi and in almost all states of India till 1967.By the end of the 1980s, the pattern of centralization transformed and regionalized. The congress party dominance was replaced by a multi party system mostly giving rise to strong regional parties. This change in pattern of centralization transformed federal pattern into political regionalization and coalition governments.

According to M.P .Singh –“The political chess board diversified and regionally segmented .The Indian parliament the offices and the president and Vice-president of the republics, various state assemblies and governments came to be controlled by different parties or coalition parties. This chequered political matrix put a premium on consociational and federal consensus and coalition building on executive, legislative and electoral levels. Political diversities and compulsions at different levels often conflicted and demanded cooperative response among same as well as different steps of parties at one plane and adversarial response on another.”<sup>9</sup> Federal coalition governments transformed Prime ministerial or chief ministerial cabinets into collegial cabinets. The collective responsibility of the union executive to the parliament was diluted. The cabinet became compartmentalized and ministries were parceled out to parties. Powerful straps of regional parties instate preferred to stay in states as chief ministers and remote controlled them. This process of federalization has diffused the condensed power of the national state in India and considerably democratized the executive-driven political system.

**Democratization process :**The growing democratization of the Indian states by the deepening of the electoral democracy is yet another factor for the upsurge of regional parties .With the decline of Congress party ,the social churning that took place in post 1989 phase and rise of political consciousness among OBCs plotted the way for the upsurge of regional parties .Yogendra yadav, regards “the election in the 1990s as the third democratic upsurge after the earlier phase of democratization in the Nehru and Indira Gandhi eras”.

**Normalization approach:** Considering the regional diversity of India, it came under the category of normalization approach. The historical saga, immediately after independence reflects the dominance of one party system .It can be considered as an excess which could hamper the democratic nature of Indian polity where multiparty system exists. This exaggeration overtime compel the competitive democratic polity to reach equilibrium by moving away from the dominant party system model, “so the formation of the 1990s was only part of this shift towards a natural equilibrium, involving a multiparty system and regionalization of political competition”(Pai 1996,1998 Nigam ; Rangarajan 1999)

The regionalization of political competition appears in the major states of India including Bihar where Janta Dal came as an alternative, diminishing the hold of the dominant party system model (Congress). Though Janta Dal appearance on political scene of Bihar reflects democratization, process but the party could not remain consolidated as an organized group .The split in Janta Dal first appeared in 1994 which resulted into the formation of Samta Party which was regional in nature. Latter on in 1997,RJD was formed following separation from parental party Janta Dal and again LJP was formed .Thus, the possible reason for the emergence of regional parties in Bihar can be; First ,the Unpopularity of Congress ;The Congress lost its hold to such an extent in Bihar in 1990 that it could not manage to revive its glory of past .As a result when Janta Dal got fragmented from time to time ,due to ideological confrontation or political aspiration of the political party leaders ,the new parties upsurged with local leadership and contemporary issues instead of giving room to national leadership. Second, the political aspiration of the leaders ;In Bihar, political aspiration of political leaders to enjoy the political chair or internal conflict among the leader of Janta Dal led to the organization of regional parties on political scene. Soon ,after the success of Mandal politics in Bihar, the internal squabbles started among the ambitious champions of backward castes which finally led to division of Janta Dal .In 1994,some prominent leader of Janta Dal including Nitish Kumar, defected from Janta Dal and together with George Fernandese formed Samta party. Again in 1997,Laloo Prasad Yadav,the then Chief minister of Bihar separated himself from Janta Dal and formed Rashtriy Janta Dal in 1997 following internal disputes in the party on issue of charges that were framed against him in fodder scam. Third, the left parties whose hegemony in Bengal<sup>10</sup>. remained unchallenged could not consolidate itself in Bihar .The popularity which they incurred in Bengal had no magic spell on the politics of Bihar. The absence of popular leadership abstained the left party performing that particular role which was carried by Congress and Janta Dal in Bihar. Simultaneously, the left have been wiped out from Bihar, because of the unstoppable practice of caste based politics. Fourth, Bihar saw the emergence of powerful peasant caste group mainly represented by OBCs who latter created their own caste based political formation .These leaders later deserted Janta Dal ,which was considered as a pro-supporter of Backward castes. Later, social contradiction among leaders of OBCs led to the emergence of separate parties some times of Yadavas, kurmis, EBCs and of Dalits.Major political parties of Bihar, like RJD,Samta Party,LJP all constitute of support base of particular communities .RJD is considered as party of Yadavas,while Nitish Kumar succeeded in mobilizing EBCs of Bihar whose interest were in conflict with that of Yadavas<sup>11</sup>.Whereas LJP claimed itself as the party of dalits.Fifth, Local leadership- These regional parties provided local leadership, these local leaders were more able to understand the problem of the people more easily. At local levels it became easy to communicate with leaders the local problems of the region. Sixth, Personality cult factor- This factor along with the concept of son of soil largely helped regional



parties in Bihar to emerge as a dominant force. All political parties of Bihar like RJD, Samta party which merged into JD(U) ,LJP are associated with strong leadership .The absence of these leadership may cause these parties to decay.

The analysis makes it clear that the advent of these regional parties assisted in framing a identity of the state at national level. These regional parties dragged the state like Bihar on the national stage. The regional parties, formed alliance with national parties and able to enjoy cabinet ministry.Like Samta Party formed alliance with BJP in 1996 and enjoyed power at the centre. similarly ,Rashtriy Janta Dal performed the role of king maker at national level in 2004 Lok sabha elections. Rashtriy Janta Dal and Lok Janshakti Party formed alliance with congress in UPA-I government and hence, carried maximum benefits for Bihar which the national parties could hardly provided. Thus, regional parties has regionalized India's political landscape, decentralized power which deepened the country's democracy.

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4. Sanjay Baru",Economic policy and the development of capitalism in India:The role of regional capitalist and political parties " inFrancine Frankel et.al.eds,Transforming India :social and political dynamics of democracy, New Delhi, oxford university press,2000,pg,207-230
5. M P Singh, Indian politics; constitutional foundations and institutional function, pg301,PHI Learning pvt.Ltd. New Delhi
6. After decline of Congress ,Janta Dal was unable to remain united as a single strong entity both at centre and in state .In Orissa ,Bihar and other states, it splitted into several regional parties like Biju janta dal,samta party ,RJD.
7. Suhas paleshkar,"The Regional parties and democracy: Romantic Rendezvous or localized legitimation?
8. .The term federalization is derived from the term Federalism which is used to describe a system of government in which sovereignty is constitutionally divided between a central governing authority constituent political units(such as states or provinces) .
9. M.P.Singh, Indian Poltics: constitutional foundations and institutional function pg-57,PHI Learning Pvt .Ltd. New Delhi
10. Bengal is one of the neighbour of Bihar .The political vacuum created by decline of Congress in Bengal was filled by class based communist parties, Which made effort to mobilize the urban and the agrarian labour classes who were neglected by congress.
11. Bhambhri, coalition politics in India, Page -73, Sipra publication, New Delhi
12. Sanjay Baru, "Economic Policy and the development of capitalism in India.
13. Regional Parties to the fore, Frontline volume 17, March 4-17-2000.