

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF FUTURE PROSPECTUS OF STATE PARTIES IN BIHAR

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Abstract

Democracy is largely considered as the best form of the government and political parties are backbone of democratic system. Political parties are supposed to take part not only in government formation and running the government but also in performing serious roles in ensuring political participation of people in various other democratic processes and achieving all constitutional goals of the nation-state. There are different types of political parties globally. State and national parties are two main types of recognised parties in India. Although the national parties played the dominant role in union as well as state level election for many decades in India, the rise of the state parties is also phenomenal. During last one decade, state parties have weakened in several north Indian states and few states do not have a significant presence of state parties at all. However, the state parties are playing key role in government formation at state (assembly) level in Bihar for the last three decades continuously. Bihar has been witnessing state parties in coalition format also. Within this larger background, this paper tries to explore why state parties are popular and continue to exist in the state of Bihar. This is a qualitative study and semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect primary data from the selected districts of the state of Bihar. This study has used thematic analysis for the analysis of the field data. The findings not only help in understanding the larger socio-political scenario of the state of Bihar but also help to understand the future prospects of the state parties in the state of Bihar as well as in India.

Keywords: state party, national party, caste in politics, regional politics.

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Introduction

India has 28 states and all states follow similar election processes. However, not all these states show the presence of same state and national parties. Out of all the national parties, two main national parties, ie. Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) and All India Congress (AIC) popularly known as Congress have almost pan India presence, although in varying degrees. All remaining national parties have a limited presence in most of the states and show their main

presence in only few states. BJP and Congress have a significant presence in the state of Bihar that we have included for this study. State parties, by definition, show presence in one or very few states only. Bihar show the presence of most of the national parties but they vary in their degree of presence and importance in contemporary context. Although the national parties played the dominant role in union as well as state level election for many decades in India, the rise of the state parties is also phenomenal. During last one decade, with the rise of BJP as a major national party, state parties have weakened in several north Indian states and few states do not have a significant presence of state parties at all. However, the state parties are playing key role in government formation at state (assembly) level in Bihar for the last three decades continuously. As of now, several state parties are part of the ruling coalition led by BJP (at Bihar Assembly level) although the Chief Minister is coming from one state party (JDU). Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) is also a state party and it is the main opposition party at the assembly level. Bihar has been witnessing state parties in coalition format since long. Hence, this is very important to know why specific state parties exist in state Bihar. This study is based on qualitative data and semi structured interviews were conducted from the respondents.

Conceptual Framework

Political parties are the main intermediate and intermediary structures between society and government in any democratic society. They are central in the sense that they connect bridges to create a two-way communication process between the society and the government (Ashraf and Sharma, 1995: p. 88). According to Suri, Elliott and Hund (2016) “we cannot ignore the role political parties have played in bringing about a massive democratic political transformation over the past six decades since independence in India (Suri, Elliott, & Hund, 2016: pp. 1-2). Suri as further stated, “the plural and federal character of our polity has been asserting itself in the party domain for quite some time” (Suri, 2005: p. 7). According to Fadia and Fadia (2017), political parties “are the chief mechanism of informing and influencing the electorate. Organisation and mobilisation of the electorate is an important function of these parties (Fadia and Fadia, 2017: p. 606). According to Andrew Heywood, “a political party is a group of people organized for the purpose of winning government power, and usually displays some measures of ideological cohesion” (quoted in Johari, 2011: p. 254).

Many new state level political parties are coming into existence and creating new opportunity for the democratic system.

There are six national parties which show their presence in varying degrees in politics of Bihar and these are: BahujanSamaj Party; BharatiyaJanata Party; Communist Party of India; Communist Party of India (Marxist); Indian National Congress; and, Nationalist Congress Party.

There are many recognised state parties in Bihar. As per the latest information, the names of the state parties showing presence in Bihar are: Janata Dal (United); RashtriyaJanata Dal; Hindustan AwamMorcha; All India Majlis-e-IttehadulMuslimeen; RashtriyaLokSamta Party; SamajwadiJanata Dal Democratic; Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist) Liberation; VikassheelInsaan Party; All India Forward Bloc; LokJanshakti Party; Jan Adhikar Party; Bharatiya Jan Congress; Bihar People's Party; Bihar Vikas Party; KisanVikas Party; KrantikariSamyavadi Party; RashtrawadiKisanSanghatan; SamajwadiKrantikariSena; SampurnaVikas Dal; Rashtriya Jan Jan Party.

State and National Political Parties in India :- An overview

The definitions and necessary conditions required for recognition as ‘State’ and ‘National’ level political parties are provided by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in its official website(as updated on April 3, 2018), under the heading- FAQ: Q.4. What are the criteria for recognition of a party?We are presenting the following paragraphs given as answer to the above FAQ and we are quoting from the website of the ECI to avoid any kind of ambiguity on definitions:

- “A political party shall be treated as a recognised political party in a State, if and only if either the conditions specified in Clause (A) are, or the condition specified in Clause (B) is, fulfilled by that party and not otherwise, that is to say-
- (A) that such party –
- has been engaged in political activity for a continuous period of five years; and has, at the last general election in that State to the House of the People, or, as the case may be, to the Legislative Assembly of the State, returned-either (i) at least one member to the House of the People for every twenty-five members of that House or any fraction of that number from that State;

- or (ii) at least one member to the Legislative Assembly of that State for every thirty members of that Assembly or any fraction of that number;
- (B) that the total number of valid votes polled by all the contesting candidates set up by such party at the last general election in the State to the House of the People, or as the case may be, to the Legislative Assembly of the State, is not less than six per cent of the total number of valid votes polled by all the contesting candidates at such general election in the State.
- 2. The conditions in Clause (A) or Clause (B) above shall not be deemed to have been fulfilled by a political party, if a member of the House of the People or the Legislative Assembly of the State becomes a member of that political party after his election to that House or, as the case may be, that Assembly.
- 3. 'State' includes the National Capital Territory of Delhi and the Union Territory of Pondicherry.
- 4. If a political party is treated as a recognised political party in four or more States, it shall be known as a 'National Party' throughout the whole of India, but only so long as that political party continues to fulfill thereafter the conditions for recognition in four or more States on the results of any subsequent general election either to the House of the People or to the Legislative Assembly of any State.
- 5. If a political party is treated as a recognised political party in less than four States, it should be known as a 'State Party' in the State or States in which it is so recognised, but only so long as that political party continues to fulfill thereafter the conditions for recognition on the results of any subsequent general election to the House of the People or, as the case may be, to the Legislative Assembly of the State, in the said State or States.”
- (ECI, official website: <https://eci.gov.in/faqs/registration-of-political-parties/faqs-registration-of-political-parties-r5/>)

Caste and Politics in Bihar

Rajkishor (2016) has tried to analyse role of caste in Bihar's politics. According to Rajkishor, "The birth of caste politics in Bihar, is linked to the issue of separation of Bihar from Bengal. In other words, role of castes in Bihar politics is not only a post-

colonial affair but as early as in 1894 a local branch of the 'All India Kayastha Mahasabha' was established in Bihar. On account of their education and high connections Kayasthas had occupied high posts in Governments of Bihar. They were treated as the most forward caste in Bihar and like the enlightened Muslim house of Bihar they had easy access to the British rulers in pre-independent days.

Post implementation of Mandal Commission Report in 1989, almost every party especially regional parties evolved and got created based on their caste identities. Rise of Lalu Prasad Yadav as Chief Minister of Bihar in the post Mandal era is a case in point of how caste politics started playing a major role in northern states like UP and Bihar which were traditionally feudal and had high caste domination in politics. During the era of the mid-1990s the process of 'de-alignment' of these social and political forces begun and the middle caste no more remained as one political group (Kumari, 2011: p. 1527).

Research Methodology

A semi structured Interview Schedule was used to collect information from the respondents. Data was collected from one hundred respondents selected from two parliamentary constituencies of Bihar situated in two districts which are: Begusarai and Khagaria. Respondents were selected from rural as well as urban constituencies and efforts were made to collect responses from multiple assembly constituencies within each parliamentary constituency. Further, responses were collected from both male and female respondents and efforts were made to collect responses from diverse socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. The respondents were further classified in three categories: political representatives and politically active people; educated and moderate to high level income groups and lower income groups. Further, efforts were made to include respondents from multiple caste and religious backgrounds in each of the above-mentioned categories so that heterogeneity of respondents could be achieved. Within the larger framework of qualitative study, we have followed a thematic analysis approach for the analysis of the data. Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data. According to Caulfield(2021), thematic analysis is usually applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts.

FINDINGS

Responses from Urban Bihar

I. Educated representatives and politically active people:

The respondents were asked specific questions on their understanding related to state and national parties in terms of their existence, functioning and overall roles. We are presenting the responses given by selected number of respondents, classified according to their background characteristics. A specific question was asked to all the respondents: Why do state parties exist in Bihar? There were other supportive questions also. We have analysed the responses in the succeeding section.

Case A was a 32 years old male and the resident of Begusarai. He was born in a Hindu Bhumihar family. He is highly educated. He is a politician and is associated with a national political party. He had also contested the Lok Sabha election (Member of Parliament) in 2019. He had also remained very active at university level politics. He stated: *The regional parties exist in Bihar because Bihar has a historical reason. When you look at the political evolution of India, the main four political streams were the Congress stream, the Samajwadi Party stream, the Communist political stream and the right-wing political stream. Basically these 4 political streams are here since the beginning, and there has been the ups and downs of political parties like when the Congress started to break down as the stream, then the space was filled by Samajwadi Party and Communist Party and later when the Samajwadi also broke up, it started working in the form of a regional party.*

Case B was a 62 years old male and resident of SimriBakhtiyarpur. He was born in a Muslim family and his caste was Sheikh. He had completed education upto Graduation. He is a farmer and also a politician. At the time of interview, he was an elected representative in SimriBakhtiyarpur, Bihar from a state party. He added: *The year 1989 witnessed intense communal riots causing many deaths in Bihar. Consequently, Janta Dal was formed as a new party which got disintegrated revolving around Babari Masjid matter. Lalu Prasad Yadav ji emerged as the new Chief Minister who controlled the communal riots and maintained peace. But then again, due to some shortcomings of Laluji government, Nitish Kumar, Sharad Yadav and Paswan ji formed a new political party which is existing from last 15 years but is not doing well. This is attracting people's attention again to national party.*

Case C was a 55 years old female and the resident of Bakhri. She was born in a Hindu Saini family. She has completed education upto Graduation. She is a politician and is associated with a national political party. In her words: *Regional parties exist in Bihar on the basis of caste.* Case D was a 36 years old female and the resident of Pokhariya, Begusarai. She was born in a Hindu Kayastha family. She did Graduation. She is a house wife and also a politician. She is associated with a state party. She is a district President of that party. In her words: *The regional party exists in Bihar because the regional parties work for the region.* Case E was a 37 years old female and the resident of Nagar Panchayat, SimriBakhtiyarpur. She was born in a Muslim family and her caste was Sheikh. She was also well educated. She is a politician. At the time of interview she held a district level elected political position in SimriBakhtiyarpur. According to her: *State parties exist in Bihar due to casteism.*

The responses given by the political well exposed and educated respondents provided great insight about the existence of state parties in Bihar. Two politically active respondents coming from urban areas of Bihar gave very comprehensive answers to the question that why state parties are existing in Bihar. Case A categorically identified the history of existence of the various state parties in the state of Bihar. He said there is a presence of different types of political ideologies in the state of Bihar. The Communists and the Samajwadis (Socialists) came into existence due to their differences with the Congress ideology and practices. Different state parties came into existence because of the ideological differences of the various political leaders and discontentment with some of the national parties. Bihar witnesses considerable presence of many national parties also. Case B has further explained how differences emerged within the Samajwadi parties because of the political leadership and these differences caused the emergence of further new state parties. Thus, Bihar has a presence of multiple national and state level parties and these parties are existing because of combination of various factors like ideological basis, differences of political leaders and factionalism within the political parties. However, other female respondents had rather simplistic views and stated the caste differences as the main cause of the existence of the state parties in Bihar.

II. Educated, high to moderate income but politically not active

Case F was a 29 years old male and living in Khagaria. He was born in a Hindu Bhumihar family. He completed Post-Graduation. He is a teacher and his monthly salary is Rs. 25,000 per month. In his word: *State parties exist in Bihar due to regional issues and casteism.* Case G was a 48 years old male and resident of Khagaria. He was born in a Hindu Marwari family. He completed education upto 12th class and was running a garments business. His monthly income was Rs. 40,000 per month. In his word: *State parties exist in Bihar due to casteism.* Further, case H was a 40 years old male and the resident of Simri Bakhtiyarpur. He was born in a Hindu Yadav family. He completed his Post-Graduation. He is a road contractor and his monthly income is Rs. 70,000 pm. According to him: *State party exist in Bihar as it works according to the needs of the region.*

Case I was a 62 years old male and the resident of Begusarai. He was born in a Hindu Bhumihar family. He did Ph.D. He is an educationist in a university and his monthly salary is more than Rs.1,50,000/- pm. In his words: *India is a country which has diversified culture and demography and this is the reason that state parties exist here. Bihar is like rest of India.* Case J was a 42 years old male and the resident of Bakhri. He is born in a Hindu Paswan family. He did B.A. He is a teacher and his monthly salary is Rs.60,000 pm. According to him: *State parties exist due to casteism in Bihar.* Many female respondents (Cases K, L, M) coming from this category stated that state parties exist because of issues related to casteism. One female respondent (Case M) also emphasized that state parties understand the politics and issues of regional level better than the national parties and so these exist in Bihar.

Thus, educated and moderate-income level respondents representing urban Bihar have rather simplistic views on the question related to causes of existence of different state parties in the state of Bihar. Most respondents said that these parties exist because of caste based politics and caste diversities existing in the state of Bihar. Some respondents have also stated that state parties represent the local and state level issues and so they continue to exist.

III. Low income and politically not active

Case N was a 23 years old male and the resident of Khagaria. He was born in a Hindu Talwar family. He did Graduation and was running a garments business. His monthly income is Rs. 15,000 pm. In his words: *State parties exist in Bihar due to casteism.* Case O was a 35 years

old male and the resident of SimriBakhtiyarpur. He is born in a Hindu Yadav family. He did graduation. He is a journalist and his monthly salary is Rs. 10,000 pm. In his words: *The regional party exists in Bihar because the national party cannot raise regional issues.*

Case P was a 28 years old male and the resident of Lohiyanagar, Begusarai. He is born in a Hindu Mallah family. He did Post-Graduation and is running a shop (filling online forms). His monthly income is Rs.6,000 pm. According to him: *The regional party is present in Bihar as its cadres work at the grassroots.* Case Q was a 49 years old female and a resident of Khagaria. She is born in a Hindu Talwar family. She did Graduation. She is a house wife. According to her: *The regional party is doing a good job, due to which it is exist in Bihar.* Case R was a 31 years old female and a resident of Khagaria. She is born in a Muslim family and her caste is Khan. She did Graduation. She is a house wife. According to her: *State parties exist in Bihar due to their work.*

Thus, one respondent coming from urban Bihar who belongs to lower income group stated that state parties maintain their cadres and because of their cadres, they continue to exist. Few other respondents admire the good works conducted by the state parties here in the state of Bihar. One other respondent stated that the national parties are unable to perform the specific governance related work in the state and so the state parties are existing. Further, few respondents have also talked about the issues related to caste and religion. On the basis of the responses, we can say that this category of respondents has given multiple and diversified reasons for the existence of the state parties in the state. Although these respondents come from the lower income category, but they appeared to be more informed on these politically important issues. One important fact is also related to the dominant presence of the state parties in the politics of Bihar for many decades.

Responses from Rural Bihar

I.Elected representatives and politically active people

One male respondent stated: *Disappointment came from the national party, as a result a reaction took place and regional parties started growing and established foothold in the region. The public thought that our decision making body should be of the state so that it could solve regional issues.* Another male respondent stated: *Bihar has its different local*

issues and local politics. People are divided on different local issues. This is the main reason. One female respondent stated: *The regional party exists due to coalition in Bihar.*

Elected representative and politically active people coming from rural areas of Bihar said that people in Bihar got disenchanted with the national parties for several reasons like lack of concern for the state, poor representation of the state leaders in the national level politics and also division of people on local issues, and hence the state parties developed and became important in the politics of Bihar. These responses show that people in rural Bihar are generally supporters of state parties and they do not support the national parties. Some respondents also said that national parties do not have good relations with the local people whereas the state parties maintain good relation with the local people. One female respondent also said that state parties exist in Bihar because of the coalition politics. It is important to mention here that Bihar is witnessing coalition politics since many assembly and parliamentary elections. Even presently, the ruling coalition has the partnership of a national party (BJP) and many state parties. Because of the support of the national party, the state parties do find some favourable position in the state politics as well as the national politics.

II. Educated, high to moderate income but politically not active

The educated and moderate to high level income category coming from rural Bihar generally agree that state parties in Bihar exist because of caste and religion based political equations. Many respondent categorically said that state parties exist because of caste equations. Few respondents also said that state parties reach to every region of Bihar and hence they get better support from the smaller regions. Further, state parties maintain better relations with their supporters and who cast votes in their favour. It may be concluded from these responses that state parties exist in Bihar in multiple numbers and each party enjoy some support basis due to their engagement with specific castes and such support helps in continuation of the state parties. It is important to mention here that RJD, which is a state state party, has ruled for almost 15 years in the state (as pointed out by a respondent) because of the caste and other local level level equations and JDU, again a state party, is now ruling in Bihar with the support of BJP.

III. Low income and politically not active

Most of the respondents coming from low income group and belongs to rural areas of Bihar categorically stated that regional or state parties exist in Bihar because of the caste based politics. Bihar is very heterogeneous in terms of castes. Every caste group wants to have some kind of political representation of their own. Consequently, many state parties are established in Bihar and these parties, with their different types of combinations, provide little space to the national parties. One of the respondents also talked about the prevalence of different regional languages in the state of Bihar and state parties use these local languages to remain connected with the people. However, a general perspective of even this category of the respondents is indicating that people associate the caste identities as the main cause of existence of multiple state parties in the state.

Conclusion

Thus, Bihar has the presence of multiple national and state-level parties, and these parties are existing because of the combination of factors like ideological basis, caste combinations, differences of political leaders and factionalism within the political parties. There are many respondents who consider caste differences as the main cause of the existence of the state parties in Bihar. There is also a general narrative that every caste or caste-combination need to have specific political parties for the representation of that caste at political level and multiple new state parties are coming into existence in Bihar because of such popular narratives. Elected representative and politically active people coming from rural areas of Bihar said that people in Bihar got disenchanted with the national parties for several reasons like lack of concern for the state, poor representation of the state leaders in the national level politics and also the division of people on local issues and so the state parties developed and became important in the politics of Bihar. These responses show that people in rural Bihar are generally supporters of state parties and they do not support the national parties. Some respondents also said that national parties do not have good relations with the local people whereas the state parties maintain good relation with the local people.

These findings coming from the state of Bihar help us to identify why state parties are popular in this state. However, there is another side of the coin also and the fact is this that Bihar state is ruled by a coalition government and this coalition is dominated by BJP which is a national party and this party is also having its government at the level of the union

government. Very often critics and political experts raise this question that why BJP, a national party and ruling party at all India level is not having its own Chief Minister and why does it support JD(U), a state level party having lesser number of elected representatives at the assembly level? This paper has helped to find the answer: because people in Bihar appreciate state parties and their functioning also. Thus, we can project the future prospects of politics in Bihar also. The state parties will continue to remain important in this state despite of the fact that there is increasing presence of the BJP there because before BJP, there was larger presence of Congress also but state parties played important role despite that. These findings also help to understand the prospects of state parties in other states of north India. It would be too early to assume that the national parties will eliminate the state parties in north India. Contrary to this, state parties will continue to exist in these state and will play active role in the governance, sometimes as the main opposition and other times as the main partner of the ruling alliances.

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