

New Phase in Backward Caste Politics in Bihar (1990-2000)

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Introduction

Bihar, economically, educationally and socially one of the most backward states of India, is also politically one of the most important. This is not simply because this state accounts for 54 Lok Sabha seats, but also because the long process of democratisation has inculcated a sense of empowerment among the people. The backward castes started sensing this empowerment as early as in the mid-1970s--a feeling which, in a way, bloomed fully in the early 1990s with the advent of Laloo Yadav as chief minister. When Laloo Yadav, during his tenure as chief minister, implemented welfare programmes for the lower sections of society, especially the Dalits, even they began sensing the change in the mid-1990s.

In a state where traditionally, political power had remained monopolised by the upper castes for a long time, this desire to share power among the middle-caste groups was bound to bring forth a process of social and political change leading to the realignment of newly emerging social forces. This process started in Bihar in the mid-1970s, initially a bit falteringly, but came into its full form in the first half of the 1990s. But very soon, 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.

The Process of Empowerment in Bihar

This process of empowerment of the marginalised sections of society is nothing new; it emerged suddenly in the 1970s and 1990s, but was the culmination of long-drawn social and political

movements which date back to the pre-independence period. With nearly 80 per cent of the population depending upon it for their livelihood, agriculture formed the mainstay of Bihar's economy. But agricultural land remained monopolised by the three upper castes--the Rajputs, the Bhumihars and the Brahmins. The upper layer of the backward castes, namely, the Yadavs, the Kurmis and the Koeris, were left with very little land. But for some exceptions, other lower castes were largely landless. During the pre-independence period, the state witnessed strong movement for land reforms, which continued for a long time. The movement was led by leaders of the Kisan Sabha formed in the year 1920. The movement was led by Swami Bidyanand, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and Karyanand Sharma mainly in the north Bihar region. The leaders of the Kisan Sabha demanded abolition of the *zamindari* system, minimum wages for agricultural labour, licensing of moneylenders' security to the tenant cultivator and other reforms. Since it was mainly the upper castes who owned land and wielded social and political power, such movements inevitably got directed towards them. On the other hand, it was mainly the backward castes owning some land, who formed the backbone of the movement, as they perceived a direct benefit from such reforms. Though it could not be carried to its desired results, some redistribution of land as a result of the Bhoodan movement led to the breaking of the hold of the upper castes over land to a great extent.

With a bit of land and with the diversification of their occupational patterns, these backward castes were able to improve their economic status and emerged as a newly rich rural agrarian class, popularly known as the 'Kulaks', and started to play an important role in the social and political spheres. On the other hand, such struggle also sowed the seeds of a sense of empowerment among the people.

This assertiveness kept on growing in some form or the other with various social and political movements, but took on a particularly intense form in the mid-1970s with the movement led by Jaiprakash Narayan in which, though it was an all-India movement, Bihar played a leading role and provided the backbone. This movement ultimately led to a change of guard at the centre. As a fallout, the newly emerging 'Kulaks', at least in Bihar, played an important role in this change of scenario.

The social struggle in the mid-1980s and 1990s, particularly in central Bihar, certainly inculcated a sense of empowerment among the deprived people actively associated with it though it could not bring about major changes in the social, political and economic spheres. This has been reflected in the various elections held during the period 1990-2000. The increasing number of contestants in the successive Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha elections, and the increasing turnout over the years, bears testimony to it. From 1602 contestants in the 1952 Vidhan Sabha election the number went up to 8463 in 1995. Similarly, from 198 contestants in the 1952 Lok Sabha election, the number went up to 1448 in 1996. However, their numbers declined to 451 in 1998 because of several restrictions imposed for contesting the election. The turnout of voters also increased phenomenally during this period. From 39.7 per cent during the 1952 Vidhan Sabha election, the turnout went up to 61.8 per cent in 1995. The 1998 Lok Sabha election witnessed a 64.6 per cent turnout as compared to 59.5 per cent in the 1996 Lok Sabha election (Table1). The state,s which had witnessed only a 39.7 per cent turnout in the 1952 Lok Sabha election, had certainly moved ahead the process of democratisation. Hence, this struggle by different sections of society led to the alignment, realignment and further de-alignment of various castes in the state.

Table 1: Candidates, Increasing Number and Performance: Assembly Elections, 1952-2000

Year	Total No. of candidates	Average no. of candidates per constituency	Candidates forfeited deposit (%)
1952	1602	5.0	53.3
1957	1394	4.3	46.9
1962	1529	4.8	53.0
1967	2025	6.3	64.5
1969	2154	6.7	63.4
1972	1982	6.2	62.9
1977	2973	9.1	73.7
1980	2959	9.1	74.6
1985	4238	13.0	83.2
1990	6439	19.8	91.5
1995	8410	26.0	91.8
2000	3934	12.1	--

Source: Up to 1985, V.B. Singh and Shankar Bose, *Elections in India*, Sage Publications, 1988; *1990 Statistical Report on the General Elections to the Legislative Assemblies, 1989-90*, vol. I, Election Commission of India, New Delhi, 1995 Provisional Report from State Electoral Office, Patna, 2000 Election Commission of India website.

Though the country started witnessing political change as early as in the mid-1960s, in the form of various non-Congress governments coming to power in different states in 1967 (Bihar being one of them), it was in 1977 that it witnessed a major political change for the first time. Not only was the monopoly of the Congress party broken at the centre and the Janata Party came to power, but in a large number of states, non-Congress governments were installed with thumping majorities. This central government did not last long and the Congress returned to power in 1980. It was only nine years later that once again a new formation in the shape of the Janata Dal came to power at the centre. Bihar played a major role, in the formation of both these non-Congress governments, returning a large number of non-Congress representatives to Parliament in 1977 and 1989 Lok Sabha elections. The Congress drew a blank and its votes went down to 22.9 per cent in the 1977 Lok Sabha election as compared to 39 seats won and 40.1 per cent votes polled in the 1971 election. In the Vidhan Sabha election of 1977, the seats for the Congress were reduced to only 57 as compared to 168 seats won in the 1972 Vidhan Sabha election. The Congress lost nearly 10 per cent votes in these two elections as its votes went down to 23.6 per cent in 1977 as compared to 33.1 per cent in the 1972 Vidhan Sabha election. The Congress regained much of the lost ground in the 1980s but again suffered a major setback in the 1989 Lok Sabha election. As compared to 48 seats and 51.8 per cent votes in 1984, the party managed to win only four Lok Sabha seats and its votes went down to 28.1 per cent in the 1989 election, while the Janata Dal won 31 seats with 36.4 per cent votes and the Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India Marxist (CPM) won four seats and one seat respectively with 7.9 and 1.4 per cent votes.

Table 2: Candidates, Increasing Number and Performance: Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-1999

Year	Total No. of candidates	Average no. of candidates per constituency	Candidates forfeited deposits (%)
1952	198	3.6	33.8
1957	189	3.5	40.2
1962	233	4.3	46.3
1967	315	5.9	61.2
1971	421	7.9	71.0
1977	340	6.2	70.2
1980	594	11.0	76.9
1984	676	12.5	82.9
1989	711	13.1	81.0
1991	1246	23.0	90.3
1996	1448	26.8	91.5
1998	451	8.5	72.2
1999	497	9.2	76.6

Source: Up to 1984, V.B. Singh and Shankar Bose, *Elections in India*, Sage Publications, 1986; 1989-1991, V.B. Singh, *Election in India 1994-1996*; *Statistical Report on General Election to the Eleventh Lok Sabha Election*, 1996, 1998 and 1999, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

Traditionally a Congress stronghold, the success of a large number of non-Congress representatives in the state was primarily on account of the realignment of the backward castes who had generally voted against the Congress in both the 1977 and 1989 Lok Sabha elections. So the process of realignment which started in mid-1970s and took full shape in the early 1990s, is now giving way to a process of dealignment among the forces of backward castes. This is reflected in the form of the consolidated backward castes further breaking apart and a section of them aligning with the upper castes to put up a challenge to the dominance of one section of backward castes represented by the Yadavs.

Bihar Assembly Election, 1995: Assertion of the `Backward Classes`

Though the change in Bihar politics started as early as 1990, the real *shift* in the political sphere was reflected in the outcome of the 1995 Vidhan Sabha polls. It witnessed the assertion of backward caste politics in Bihar and ushered in a scenario which may stay for some time to come. The state went to the polls in a polarised situation of a unique type. The polarisation was not only on the lines

of the upper and backward caste, but even the backward castes were divided. Laloo Yadav after completing his term in office even with a minority government went to polls in midst of an anti-incumbency wave that was sweeping the country. The consolidated backward castes had fragmented into two blocs, one comprising by the Yadavs represented by the Janata Dal and the other comprising by the Kurmis and Koeris represented by the Samata Party. For the first time, the upper castes felt totally marginalised in the state's politics since the support base of their natural ally, the Congress, had been completely eroded, while the BJP was unable to make much inroads among the voters.

The Janata Dal contested the elections with its traditional alliance partners, the CPI, CPM and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) whereas the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Congress and Bihar Peoples Party (BPP) contested alone, leaving only the Samata Party and the Communist Party of India Marxist Leninist (CPIML) to enter into an alliance. The results of the 1995 Vidhan Sabha election came as a surprise to many. Belying expectations, the Janata Dal returned to power with an absolute majority winning 166 of the total of 324 seats with 27.9 per cent votes, with its alliance partner CPI getting 26 seats with 4.8 per cent votes, CPM getting six seats with 1.3 per cent votes and JMM (S) capturing 16 seats with 3.7 per cent votes. Further, the BJP won 41 seats with 12.9 per cent votes and acquired the position of the opposition party relegating the Congress to third position. The Congress could manage to win only 29 seats with 16.4 per cent votes.

The Janata Dal's performance was an all-round success. Except for some poor performance in the south where it could manage to win just 13 seats with 14.8 per cent votes, its performance in north and central Bihar was spectacular. Of the total of 138 seats in north Bihar, the Janata Dal won 97 seats with 34.9 per cent votes. In central Bihar, it won 54 seats with 20.1 per cent votes, out of a total of 92 seats. The BJP did well in south Bihar, winning 21 of the total of 94 seats with 18.3 per cent votes. The performance of the Congress was bad throughout the state.

The success of the Janata Dal and its allies was due to the fact that the alliance drew a large measure of support from the numerically strong, poor and deprived sections of society. A survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), in a representative sample of 16

assembly constituencies spread across all three regions of Bihar, reveals that there was massive support for the Janata Dal and its allies specially among the Dalits, the backwards, the Muslims, the illiterate, agricultural labourers and the landless. Nearly 48.7 per cent of the Dalits, 49.8 per cent of the backwards, and about 57.3 per cent of the Muslims voted for the Janata Dal and its allies. It remained the most popular party among the downtrodden as 47.3 per cent of the illiterate and 43.8 per cent of the landless also voted for it. The support base of the Congress had eroded in general, but it still appeared to be a popular party among the upper castes. Of the upper caste voters, 39.1 per cent voted for the Congress while only 20.9 per cent voted for the Janata Dal. Though the BJP managed to win 41 Vidhan Sabha seats, it lacks a broad support base in Bihar. Except for 19 per cent votes among the tribals, 16.5 per cent votes among the upper castes and 18.3 per cent votes among the people living in *pucca* houses (a denominator of urban habitat), its support base among the other sections still remained very low.

The biggest surprise was that even though Laloo Yadav was constantly being blamed for neglecting developmental work, he still drew large support from the largest sections of society. If one takes a deeper look into the functioning of the Laloo government, during the period 1990-1995, one can understand why the poor and the Dalits, have voted for the Janata Dal. The Dalits in general overwhelmingly supported Laloo Yadav. They too were not satisfied with his performance for, besides constructing some houses under the Indira Awas Yojana for the *Musahars*, the poorest among the poor Dalits, nothing much was done for them. But the very fact of making them feel that they are close to power, probably helped realise a sense of being among them. For many, it was the only occasion in their lifetime when they could vote. They reiterated that for them *azadi* came only during Laloo's regime as they now enjoy a sense of self-pride and the upper caste people do not encroach upon their independence.

The backward castes, particularly the Yadavs, had reason to vote for Laloo, since they did not want to let the power they had gained after a long struggle slip from their hands. Though during this election the two dominant backward castes, the Kurmis and Yadavs, contested the electoral battle against each other, the Samata Party was blamed for fighting a proxy war for the upper castes in the

name of fighting the casteist politics of Laloo Yadav. This feeling consolidated the other backward castes, besides the Kurmis and Koeris, behind the Janata Dal.

The Muslims, except for a few instances where personal affiliation with the candidate or his otherwise very clean image mattered, voted largely for the Janata Dal. The Bhagalpur riots were still fresh in the minds of the Muslims. Further, the arrest of the BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani at Samastipur during his Rath Yatra made Laloo Yadav a great hero among them. Besides, in the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, when the country was reeling under communal violence, and a large number of people were killed in riots which continued unabated for almost five days, it was Laloo Yadav who stood for the protection of Muslims in his state. There were no instances of riots or violence in Bihar. The protection given to Muslims during Laloo's raj was unprecedented, and ever since then the Muslims clearly identify themselves with the Janata Dal.

The result of the 1995 Assembly election in Bihar set the trend for Backward Caste politics. It was the first time the backwards fought against backwards and the Upper-Castes at best remained at the margins of the political struggle. The backwards managed to have a firm control over political power. It was the type of political struggle which Bihar witnessed then that set the trend for Backward Caste politics for the next few years.

One of the major achievements and change this time was that most of the most deprived sections, the Dalits, were allowed to vote for the first time. For the first time, they had a sense that they do matter in the game of political power. Though the Yadavs took the driver's seat in the matter of governing the state, the other backwards and the Dalits remained aligned with the Janata Dal. They felt that, they did have a share in the political power in the state. During the Congress regime, power remained monopolised by the upper-castes and no serious attempt was made to incorporate the aspirations and demands of the Dalits and backwards within the general governance of the state.

The Lok Sabha Election, 1996: BJP on the Rise

As stated earlier, the rapid dealignment of electoral forces, led to a major shift in the politics of the state. The results of the 1996 Lok Sabha election demonstrate that a new beginning was made in the

politics of Bihar. The Janata Dal and its allies suffered a major setback in this election, which provides more than one signal. First and foremost, the election results clearly point the limits of sectional politics in a multicultural society. Further, they demonstrate the constraints of the ruling party in a multiparty democracy, when most of the opposition parties unite against the ruling party while contesting elections. In a multiparty democracy, where a political party captures political power with barely 30 per cent votes, it is exposed to severe limitations once the divided opposition unites against the ruling party.

The results of these elections clearly followed from such a scenario. During the Vidhan Sabha election held in 1995, the Janata Dal and its allies CPI, CPM and JMM (S), fought a badly divided opposition. Though the Samata Party had some understanding with the CPI (ML), it was mainly the BJP, the BPP, the Congress and a few other smaller parties that opposed the Janata Dal and its allies separately. The net result was that with just 27.9 per cent votes, the Janata Dal managed to get an absolute majority with 166 seats, and its allies CPI, CPM and JMM (S) won 26, six and 16 seats respectively with merely 4.8, 1.3 and 3.7 per cent votes. Many people had great faith in the Samata Party, formed on the eve of election and thought that it may provide an alternative to the ruling Janata Dal. A party formed mainly by the defectors of the Janata Dal and with Nitish Kumar as its leader, it was expected to draw large support from the Kurmis and the Koeris. But the party did not performed well, winning only seven seats with merely 6.9 per cent votes. The Congress with the support of just the upper castes, went down to a mere 29 seats with 16.4 per cent votes. The BJP, though it managed to improve its tally, winning 41 seats with 12.9 per cent votes, however, did not come much closer to realising its dream of calling the shots in Bihar.

After the success in the Vidhan Sabha election, it seemed as if the Janata Dal had become an invincible party in Bihar. The political parties opposing the Janata Dal realised their weaknesses and shortly after the Vidhan Sabha election and several rounds of talks, the Samata Party and the BJP entered into an alliance, where BJP contested 32 seats leaving 22 seats for the Samata Party. Leaders of both parties welcomed this alliance. However, the leaders of the Samata Party, particularly George Fernandes and Nitish Kumar who swore by the socialist tradition, came under

severe criticism on account of their alliance with a communal party. These leaders termed it a special arrangement needed for a special time in a special state, 'the need of the hour' to put up a challenge to the casteist politics of Laloo Yadav. Earlier, the Bihar People's Party of Anand Mohan Singh, which had been completely routed in the Vidhan Sabha election, merged with the Samata Party. Since it drew some support from the upper caste Rajputs, it was perceived that this alliance may broaden the base of the Samata Party much beyond the support of only the backward caste. Entering into an alliance with the BJP certainly was a step towards forming a front against the Janata Dal. The other opposition party, the Congress, marginalised to a great extent, contested the election alone, like the splinter groups of the JMM parties. The Janata Dal on the other hand contested along with its traditional partners CPI and CPM. But as compared to earlier elections, the only change was in terms of seat sharing as Laloo completely dominated over his alliance partners, the CPI and CPM. Of the total, Janata Dal contested 44 seats leaving only eight for the CPI and two for the CPM.

Though Laloo Yadav seemed confident of winning most of the seats in Bihar, he was put on the defensive by the opposition parties which launched a virulent campaign against the fodder scam unearthed during the period of the Janata Dal government. On the other hand, the Janata Dal championed the cause of the upliftment of the backward castes and the poor from the platform of social justice. It called upon the people to vote for the Janata Dal and its allies and to save Bihar from the threat of the communal party, namely, the BJP. On the other hand, the BJP and Samata combine attacked Laloo Yadav for perpetuating casteist politics in Bihar in the name of social justice. They blamed the government for the fodder and other scams that occurred during the Laloo regime. Though the *hawala* issue could not make a dent as an election issue among the poor rural masses of Bihar, the fodder scam, popularly termed 'Gawala' scam, got wide publicity. In the beginning it seemed as if this scam would have little bearing on public opinion and may not affect the electoral prospects of the parties. Two rounds of pre-election surveys conducted by CSDS made it amply clear that the Janata Dal still remained the most popular party. Of the total respondents, 32.9 and 40.3 per cent intended voting for the Janata Dal in the first and second rounds respectively, whereas the support base for the BJP was 7.9 and 9.9 per cent only.

But things changed rapidly as the election drew closer. The virulent attack on the Janata Dal and its policies by the BJP and its alliance parties led to a last--minute change in the mood of the people at large. The Kurmis and Koeris had already reposed full faith in the BJP--Samata alliance; but now the Brahmins and other upper castes, which traditionally used to vote for the Congress, shifted their support to the BJP--Samata alliance as well. This shift led to some surprise results.

The party which had won an absolute majority in the Vidhan Sabha election barely a year ago was cut down to size, even though its leaders had been confident it would win all the seats. The Janata Dal managed to win only 22 seats as compared to 33 seats in 1991 Lok Sabha election. Its vote went down by nearly 2.2 per cent as it could manage to get just 31.9 per cent votes as compared to 34.1 per cent in the 1991 Lok Sabha election. Its alliance partners, the CPI and CPM, also suffered major losses. The CPI lost more than half of the seats and won only three Lok Sabha seats as compared to eight seats won during the 1991 Lok Sabha election. Its votes were drastically reduced from 7.6 per cent to 5.1 per cent in 1996. The CPM could not even retain its lone Lok Sabha seat won in the 1991 Lok Sabha election.

The BJP, in alliance with the Samata Party, became the major gainer. It won 18 Lok Sabha seats with 20.5 per cent votes as compared to five seats won in the 1991 Lok Sabha election with 15.9 per cent votes. But actually the increase in the votes of the BJP was much higher than it appeared, for in the 1996 Lok Sabha election it contested only 32 seats as compared to 51 seats in the 1991 Lok Sabha election. The Samata Party won six Lok Sabha seats contesting 22 seats and its vote went up by nearly 7.6 per cent as compared to its votes in the 1995 assembly elections. Though the Congress doubled its tally from one to two, its votes went down from 24.2 per cent in 1991 to 13 per cent in 1996. The JMM which won six seats during the 1991 Lok Sabha election suffered a major loss. The party not only lost much ground in its traditional tribal belt of south Bihar, it also suffered a loss because its various factions fought amongst each other, which resulted in the split of votes. The JMM (S) managed to win only one Lok Sabha seat and that too with a slender margin of 5000 votes.

The Lok Sabha Election, 1998

The premature dissolution of the Lok Sabha pushed the country towards another Lok Sabha election much sooner than expected. Even in this short duration, the political scenario in Bihar had taken a major turn. There was mounting pressure on Laloo Yadav, from the Left parties and even from within his own party, to step down from the post of party president and as chief minister of the state. This resulted in a split in the Janata Dal and the formation of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) by Laloo Yadav before the 1998 Lok Sabha election. The formation of the new party opened up the possibility of a fresh realignment among various competing political parties.

Though there was no major shift in the already existing alliance among the dominant political parties, the BJP maintained its alliance with the Samata Party and the Left-over Janata Dal still retained its alliance with the CPI and CPM. The Congress, which had performed badly in the past few elections, was desperately looking for ways of revival. Though Laloo Yadav showed confidence about achieving big success in the election, he knew that it was not going to be easy in this election. Three major factors seemed to be working against him. First, he feared possible division in the Yadav vote, which may indirectly help BJP in winning more seats; second, he knew it would be not easy to make people familiar with the new symbol of the 'lamp' allotted to the RJD. Third, he realised that the absence of a party organisation at the local level may add to the problems for his new party. In view of these constraints, Laloo Yadav was looking for an alliance to at least minimise the split of vote. He naturally found the desperate Congress, which was also in search of an alliance partner. The JMM, a party that was very strong in south Bihar in the 1991 Lok Sabha election, but performed badly during the 1996 elections because of division in the party, was also searching for an alliance. Laloo Yadav knew his party had very little presence in south Bihar and so he wisely entered into an alliance with the JMM.

With this alliance pattern, Bihar seemed to be heading towards a three--cornered contest. With the split in the party, the Janata Dal was put to a severe test. It was widely believed that the split in the Janata Dal would lead to division votes between the Janata Dal and the RJD resulting in a major loss for the party. It was primarily Laloo Yadav the leader of the RJD, who was to be tested for his

personal charisma. Many believed that the RJD may not be successful as Laloo Yadav after his involvement in the fodder scam had become a spent force in the state's politics and it would be hard for the party to win seats. With the alliance with the Congress and the JMM, Laloo Yadav hoped to put up a contest in north Bihar on account of the shift of the traditional Congress voters still with the party towards the RJD. With 12.2 per cent votes polled by JMM and 16 per cent by the Congress in south Bihar in the 1996 Lok Sabha election, the alliance hoped to put up a formidable contest there. The BJP - Samata combine hoped to hold together and gain most from the three - cornered contest resulting in a split in the anti - BJP vote.

The results came as a major surprise for many political speculators. Expected to be a three - cornered contest, the Bihar election actually turned out to be a direct contest between the RJD and the BJP-Samata combine, with the Janata Dal and its allies putting up no contest at all. The results, however, revealed that the 1998 Lok Sabha election was a more keenly contested election than the past few elections. The previous three Lok Sabha elections in the state had witnessed a narrowing of the victory margin in a large number of constituencies. As compared to only six and 10 constituencies where the victory margin was less than 5 per cent in 1991 and 1996, in the 1998 Lok Sabha election the victory margin was less than 5 per cent in as many as 18 constituencies and between 5 and 10 per cent in another 16. The narrowing of the victory margin in the 1998 Lok Sabha election clearly indicates that the state witnessed more competitive politics as compared to the past few elections.

The 1998 Lok Sabha election virtually saw the end of the Janata Dal in the state. Ram Vilas Paswan was the only Janata Dal candidate who won from the Hajipur Lok Sabha constituency. The party managed to get only 8.3 per cent votes as compared to the 31.9 per cent it polled during the 1996 Lok Sabha election. Its alliance partners the CPI and the CPM, could not win a seat and polled as low as 3.1 and 2.1 per cent votes respectively. Belying popular expectations, the RJD won 17 seats and, polling 25.2 per cent votes still emerged as the largest party in terms of votes. Though the Congress got only 7.2 per cent votes, nearly 6 per cent less than it polled in the 1996 Lok Sabha election, it managed to win five seats and regain some lost ground. The fewer votes for the party is largely attributed to its contesting fewer seats on account of the alliance with RJD. In spite of the

triangular alliance, the JMM could not open its account and polled 3 per cent votes. As an alliance, the BJP -Samata combine turned out to be the major gainer in the 1998 Lok Sabha election. With the BJP getting 19 seats with 23.1 per cent votes and Samata winning 10 seats with 15.8 per cent votes, the alliance won 29 seats, improving its tally of 24 in the 1996 Lok Sabha election.

The Lok Sabha Election, 1999

The joining together of the anti-Laloo forces, a process which began just before the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, went a step forward. The Samata Party merged with the Janata Dal to form the Janata Dal-United (JD-U) which decided to contest the 1999 Lok Sabha election in alliance with the BJP. The BPP also decided to contest the election in alliance with the BJP-Janata Dal (U) combine. So with Congress forming an alliance with the RJD it was going to be a strait bipolar contest.

In this contest the BJP and its ally the Janata Dal (U) won 41 seats and polled 45.5 per cent of the votes, while the RJD-Congress combine won only 11 seats and polled 37.1 per cent votes. One seat each was won by the CPI and the BPP. If winning seats is the only indicator of a party's success, then one can assume that the BJP-Janata Dal (U) registered a massive victory over the RJD-Congress combine, in what seems like a one-sided affair.

But if one looks at the margins of victory, there are indications of a somewhat keener contest. The difference in vote share between the two alliances was 8.4 per cent. Of the 54 seats, the results in 23 Lok Sabha constituencies were decided by less than a 5 per cent margin, while in 1998 there were only 17 constituencies where the victory margin was this small. Of the last three Lok Sabha elections this was certainly the most keenly contested.

Compared to its tally in 1998, the RJD- Congress alliance suffered a major loss, dropping 11 seats. However, it is worth noting that in terms of votes, the RJD remained the single largest party in the state. In fact, the vote-share of the RJD increased by a little over three percentage points in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections.

The success of the BJP-Samata alliance cannot be credited to the rise of the BJP in the state. Although it increased its seat tally by three seats, it lost nearly one percentage point in vote share; this, of course, might be due to it contesting fewer seats. To a greater extent the success of the alliance can be credited to the merger of the Samata Party and the Janata Dal into the Janata Dal (U) and the working out of a formidable alliance between the BJP, the Janata Dal (U) and BPP. This led to a strong consolidation of the anti-Laloo Yadav vote in the state. Though the Janata Dal (U)'s votes share fell by nearly three percentage points (if compared with the combined vote for the Samata Party and Janata Dal in 1998), it managed to increase its joint tally by six seats.

Lok Sabha Elections: Region-wise Analysis

The overall results of the three Lok Sabha elections held in 1996, 1998 and 1999 indicate that the Janata Dal (RJD since the 1998 Lok Sabha election) which had witnessed a decline over the past few elections, was nearly wiped out in the 1999 Lok Sabha election. The BJP-Samata alliance (BJP-Janata Dal (U) in 1999 with the merger of the Janata Dal) became stronger and stronger over during the LoK Sabha elections of 1998 and 1999. In order to access at the strength of these parties it is better to look at the performance of different parties in the three distinct geographical regions of Bihar, that is north, central and south.

The poverty-stricken, flood-prone terrain of north Bihar, accounting for 26 Lok Sabha seats, is politically the most important region of Bihar. It had been a stronghold of the Janata Dal during the past few elections held after 1990. During the 1991 election, the Janata Dal won 22 seats from this region with 48.3 per cent votes, and with CPI winning three seats, the combined tally for the alliance was 25 seats. But in the 1996 election, the Janata Dal suffered a loss of six seats in this region. It won only 16 seats and 40.3 per cent votes. The CPI won two seats, bringing the combined tally to a total of 18 seats. The BJP, which had drawn a blank here in the 1991 election, managed to win six seats and 33.8 per cent votes with its alliance partner the Samata Party. The 1998 Lok Sabha election witnessed further gain for the BJP-Samata combine in the region where it managed to win eight seats and polled 35 per cent votes. The Janata Dal and allies overall performed badly in the state, but

could still manage to save face in the north Bihar region as it polled 18.3 per cent votes and won its lone seat from this region. The RJD virtually swept the polls here winning 14 seats and polling 29.4 per cent votes. (Table 3)

In the 1999 Lok Sabha election, the BJP and its allies registered an impressive victory in north Bihar. The allies won 20 seats and polled 46.2 per cent votes. The RJD suffered a major loss of 10 seats as compared to its tally in the 1998 election. This loss does not indicate that the party was losing support in this region. In terms of votes polled, the RJD increased its votes by nearly 5.4 per cent as compared to the 1998 Lok Sabha election. However, despite the increased support base, the party lost a large number of seats mainly due to the consolidation of the anti-Laloo vote. With the merger of the Janata Dal and the Samata Party a large number of the anti-Laloo votes polled by the Janata Dal in the 1998 election consolidated with the BJP and its allies. (Table 3)

This gives a clear indication that Laloo Yadav remained a major force in the politics of the state. The RJD had a strong presence in north Bihar and a minor division among the anti-Laloo vote in this region may lead to a thumping victory for the party in this region.

Table 3: Electoral Performance in North Bihar: Lok Sabha Elections, 1991-1999

Total Seats 26

Year	Turn-out (%)	Congress			BJP+			Janata Dal+			RJD		
		Conte-sted	Won	Vote (%)	Conte-sted	Won	Vote (%)	Conte-sted	Won	Vote (%)	Conte-sted	Won	Vote (%)
1991	64.4	25	0	22.8	24	0	13.0	25	25	53.9	---	---	---
1996	61.0	26	1	12.1	24	6	33.8	27	18	45.4	---	---	---
1998	66.6	10	2	5.5	25	8	35.0	28	1	18.3	20	14	29.4
1999	66.1	3	0	3.9	26	20	46.2	--	---	---	21	4	34.8

Source: CSDS Data Unit

The BJP had a strong presence in the mineral-rich hilly terrain of south Bihar, accounting for 14 Lok Sabha seats. The BJP had not only remained the most dominant party in south Bihar, but it virtually

swept the polls in the entire region in the three Lok Sabha elections held in 1996, 1998 and 1999. As compared to the five seats it won in 1991 election, the BJP managed to win 12 of the 14 seats from this region both in 1996 and 1998 and 11 seats in 1999. An equal number of seats for the party in the three Lok Sabha elections (1996,1998 and 1999) does not indicate that there was no change for BJP in south Bihar. Though the vote for the party remained more or less the same in the two Lok Sabha elections held in 1998 and 1999, the BJP increased its support base enormously in this region between 1996 and 1998. As compared to 34 per cent votes in the 1996 Lok Sabha election, the party polled 45.5 per cent votes in the 1998 election. (Table 4)

The Janata Dal had registered some success in this region in the early 1990s. The party had won three seats in the 1991 Lok Sabha election. In the 1996 Lok Sabha election, the Janata Dal polled 24.5 per cent votes, though it failed to win a seat. But after the two Lok Sabha elections held in 1991 and 1996, the Janata Dal (read RJD since 1998) has never been a strong party of popular support in this region. Besides BJP, the Congress and the JMM had some presence in this region. Just before the 1998 Lok Sabha election, the RJD entered into an alliance with the Congress and the JMM. Though expected to spring a few surprises in this region, the alliance could hardly make its presence felt. The JMM, which had won the lone Dumka seat in 1996, where the party president Shibu Soren won by a slender margin of about 5000 votes, drew a blank both in the 1998 and 1999 elections and its votes also went down from 12.2 per cent in 1996 to 10.5 per cent in 1998 and further down to 9.2 per cent in 1999. It was the Congress, which registered some gain in this region. The Congress contested for all 14 seats, but won only one seat and polled 16 per cent votes in 1996 Lok Sabha election. The Congress contested for only seven seats in 1998 Lok Sabha election, but managed to win two seats and polled 15.7 per cent votes. Though in 1999 the Congress could not increase its tally of seats, but it polled nearly 8 per cent more votes as compared to the 1998 Lok Sabha election (Table 4).

Table 4: Electoral Performance in South Bihar: Lok Sabha Elections, 1991-1999**Total Seats 14**

Year	Turn out	Congress			BJP+			JD+			JMM		
		Conte- sted	Won	Vote (%)	Conte- sted	Won	Vote (%)	Conte- sted	Won	Vote (%)	Conte- sted	Won	Vote (%)
1991	49.9	14	0	17.9	14	5	32.9	7	3	12.5	8	6	21.4
1996	54.8	14	1	16.0	14	12	34.0	14	0	24.3	14	1	12.2
1998	59.7	7	2	15.7	14	12	45.5	10	0	6.2	8	0	10.5
1999	48.5	11	2	23.8	14	11	45.5	---	---	---	12	0	9.2

Source: CSDS Data Unit

The agriculturally rich central Bihar, accounting for 14 Lok Sabha seats, has witnessed numerous agrarian struggles during the post-independence period. These struggles of the poor and the landless farmers have mainly been led by various factions of the Left parties. The Janata Dal and other Left parties are particularly strong in this region. Though the Janata Dal remained the dominant party in this region, it faced a stiff challenge from the BJP-Samata combine during the 1996 Lok Sabha election. The Janata Dal and its allies had won 13 of the total 14 seats from this region during the 1991 election, but suffered a major loss as the alliance got only seven seats (Janata Dal- six, CPI-one) in 1996 with the Janata Dal getting 25.1 per cent and the Left parties 10.6 per cent votes. In the 1998 election, the Janata Dal and its allies lost heavily even in the traditional stronghold of the Left. The alliance not only drew a blank but even its votes went down to only 8 per cent. The newly formed RJD could not perform well in this region and won only three seats but polled 35.9 per cent votes. The RJD did however, put up a strong contest in this region and polled 32.4 per cent votes in the 1999 election, but could manage to win only two seats from this region. The BJP-Samata alliance remained the biggest gainer even in this region during the last three Lok Sabha elections. The BJP, which had drawn a blank in 1991, in alliance with the Samata Party managed to win six seats with 37.9 per cent votes in 1996. The alliance further improved its tally to nine seats and its votes increased to 42.8 per cent in the 1998 elections. With the merger of the Janata Dal and the

Samata Party in 1999, the BJP and its allies further consolidated their position in this region. The allies won 10 seats and polled 44.2 per cent votes. The Congress won both the seats it contested from this region. (Table 5)

Table 5: Electoral Performance in Central Bihar: Lok Sabha Elections, 1991-1999

Total Seats 14

Year	Turnout	Congress			BJP+			JD+			RJD		
		Conte-sted	Won	Vote (%)	Conte-sted	Won	Vote (%)	Conte-sted	Won	Vote (%)	Conte-sted	Won	Vote (%)
1991	62.9	13	1	31.5	13	0	8.4	14	13	46.5	---	---	---
1996	61.1	14	0	12.1	14	6	37.9	13	7	35.8	----	---	---
1998	68.1	4	1	3.5	13	9	42.8	15	0	8.0	12	3	35.9
1999	63.6	2	2	6.4	15	10	44.2	---	---	---	11	2	32.4

Source: CSDS Data Unit

The Assembly Election, 2000: Re-emergence of the RJD

The assembly election in Bihar was held soon after the ruling RJD was badly defeated in the 1999 Lok Sabha election. The results of the 1999 Lok Sabha election gave an indication that the assembly election was going to be tough for the RJD. The party may face defeat and pave the way for formation of the BJP-Janata Dal (U) government in the state.

The leaders of the Congress party were not very happy about the alliance with the RJD. The state leadership was opposed to it even before the Lok Sabha election, but it was the central leadership which was in favour of contesting the Lok Sabha election in alliance with the RJD. The central leaders of the party expected to gain much from this alliance, but there was very little success for the party in the 1999 Lok Sabha election. As a result, the Congress party decided to contest the assembly election on its own, breaking the alliance with the RJD. The RJD found CPM and the Marxist Coordination Committee (MCOR) as its new allies.

Cracks started appearing in the BJP-Janata Dal (U) alliance on the issue of ticket distribution and leadership as all the alliance partners had a stake in the state. This eventually led to the breaking up of the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (U), but they decided to contest the election with a seat-sharing arrangement. The issue of ticket distribution, however, could not be fully resolved as the three alliance partners put up claims to contest more and more seats. Eventually they contested the election against each other in several constituencies.

The electoral outcome of the assembly election in the state was a setback both for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the RJD. The setback was more apparent for the NDA, for its central and state leadership had built high hopes of a decisive and runaway victory. The NDA had registered an impressive victory in the 1999 Lok Sabha election, winning 41 out of 54 parliamentary seats and leading in 199 of the 324 assembly segments. Throughout the campaign and till a day before counting, NDA leaders were confident about securing 170-180 seats. The final tally of 125 seats (including four unofficial candidates who won elections outside the NDA seat-sharing arrangement) fell way below this expectation. But what was worse, it fell behind the final tally of 126 for the RJD and the CPI (M). With 124 seats and 28.2 per cent of the popular vote, the RJD emerged as the largest party in the state while the BJP finished way behind with 66 seats and 14.5 per cent of votes.

If the election results did not appear as a setback for the RJD it was largely because of the bleak picture painted by the media largely ignorant of the ground-level polarisations in Bihar. Against this background, the RJD's defeat appeared like a victory. Laloo Prasad Yadav presided over a historic shift in the social balance of political power in 1990, a shift that was reaffirmed in the subsequent verdicts of the Lok Sabha election in 1991 and Vidhan Sabha election in 1995. But the 2000 assembly election and the two Lok Sabha elections held in 1999 and 1998 showed his inability to consolidate the social shift into an enduring political regime of the kind the Left Front established in West Bengal. The loss of 43 seats in 2000 assembly elections as compared to the 1995 assembly election is a verdict against his non-governance. In fact, the RJD could have ended up behind the NDA's combined strength but for a strange coincidence. The party won five out of the seven seats, which were decided by less than 500 votes and another four of

12 seats, which were decided by a margin of between 500 and 1000 votes. The NDA alleged that this was no coincidence and that pressure on administrative officials affected the counting.

Region wise analysis

The pattern of the results gives a clearer picture of the relative strength of the different parties in the three regions of Bihar. The BJP and the Samata party had contested the 1995 assembly elections against each other. As compared with the assembly election held in 1995, the NDA made gains in all three regions of the state, in terms of both votes and seats. The gain in terms of seats was more or less proportional to the total number of seats in the region, but in terms of vote share, the alliance performed much better in south Bihar as compared to central and north Bihar. Yet it failed to sweep the Jharkhand region. It is clear now that if a separate legislature were to be carved out for Jharkhand from the present assembly, the new assembly would also be a 'hung' house, like its parent assembly. The RJD, which had practically swept all but the eastern pocket of north Bihar last time, lost the maximum number of seats from this region. But such was its dominance then that despite losing heavily it performed best in the region, winning 74 of its 124 seats here. In central Bihar, though the RJD lost seven seats it increased its vote by nearly 6 per cent. This is largely because the RJD did not had a poll pact with the CPI and contested most of the seats on its own. It came as no surprise that the party had not perform well in south Bihar.

(Table 6)

Table 6: Bihar Assembly election 2000: Region-wise analysis

Region	Seats	Turn-out 2000	Change over 1995	RJD				BJP+Samata Party				INC				Left				Others			
				Won	Gain /loss	Vote share	Swing	Won	Gain/Loss	Vote Share	Swing	Won	Gain/Loss	Vote Share	Swing	Won	Gain/Loss	Vote Share	Swing	Won	Gain/Loss	Vote Share	Swing
North Bihar	156	66.8	+5.3	74	-31	32.8	-2.4	53	+39	29.9	+11.6	10	0	9.6	-7.0	3	-15	4.4	-1.2	16	+7	23.3	-1.0
South Bihar	84	52.5	-10.1	10	-5	12.2	-3.2	41	+18	32.1	+10.3	11	-2	19.1	+1.4	3	-1	4.7	-1.2	19	-10	31.9	-7.3
Central Bihar	84	65.1	+3.7	40	-7	32.5	+5.5	27	+16	27.6	+6.2	3	-3	7.6	-6.8	1	-9	4.1	-3.3	13	+3	28.1	-1.6
Total	324	61.1	+0.8	124	-43	28.2	0.2	121	+73	29.8	+9.8	24	-5	11.1	-5.1	7	-25	4.4	-1.8	48	0	26.5	-3.0

The Congress went to the polls alone in the 2000 assembly elections and was hoping for a recovery like in Uttar Pradesh. The final results were disappointing. It could not stage comeback and won only 24 seats and polled 11.1 per cent votes.

The Congress did not lose seats in the north but its vote went down by 7 per cent despite contesting a much larger number of seats. In the south, however, the party lost two seats as compared to the 1995 assembly election but increased its vote marginally. The Congress remained a force in the south, but clearly no more in the north.(Table 6)

The results were a setback for the Left parties as well. All the Left parties combined (CPI, CPI (M), CPI (ML) and MCOR) had won 40 seats in the 1995 assembly election. In 2000 assembly elections, they managed to win only 13 seats. Both the CPI and CPI (M) faced an overall decline in the 2000 assembly elections. It was a long time since the CPI had contested elections without a mainstream party as its ally. The invisible decline of the party in this period came to the surface, as it finished behind the CPI (ML). The party won only five seats, a loss of 21 seats as compared to the previous assembly election. It lost its position as the dominant Left party in the state with the CPI (ML) one seat ahead of it despite contesting fewer seats. Though the CPI (M) contested the 2000 assembly election in alliance with the RJD, it also suffered a loss of four seats as compared to the 1995 assembly election. But its support base remained intact in terms of percent of votes polled. A.K. Roy's Marxist Coordination Committee, which had won two seats in the 1995 assembly election, could not even open its account.(Table 6)

Comparative Performance of three alliance partners, BJP, Samata and Janata Dal (U)

If we look at the performance of the three alliance partners, we find that the BJP performed much better as compared to its allies in all three regions of the state. It won 39 per cent of the seats contested and polled an average of 29 per cent votes in these seats. The Samata Party won 28 per cent seats and polled an average of 23 per cent votes in the seats it contested. The Janata Dal (U) performed badly, won only 24 per cent of the seats contested and polled an average of only 13 per cent votes in the seats it contested. Both the alliance partners, the BJP and the

Samata Party had a set back in their traditional strongholds, South and central. Though BJP polled the maximum number of votes in south Bihar, it failed to win a sizeable number of seats from the region. Similarly, the Samata Party contested the largest number of seats in its traditional stronghold of central Bihar, but won only one-fourth of these. The Janata Dal (U) had its presence only in north Bihar Table 7)

Table 7: BJP performed better as compared to its allies

Region	BJP			Samata Party			Janata Dal (U)		
	Seats contested	Seats Won	Vote (%)	Seats contested	Seats won	Vote (%)	Seats contested	Seats won	Vote (%)
North	55	23	11.9	48	14	8.2	52	16	9.9
South	73	31	24.5	20	7	5.5	14	3	2.1
Central	39	12	11.4	52	13	12.5	21	2	3.8
Total	167	66	14.5	120	34	8.8	87	21	6.5

Did the multiplicity of NDA candidates in a large number of seats account for the setback to the BJP and its allies in the 2000 assembly elections? The NDA leaders would like us to believe that. But a careful look at the constituency-level results indicates that this factor did not contribute very much. The alliance partners contested against each other in 37 assembly constituencies. In 11 of these constituencies one of the alliance partners won the election; in 15 one was runner; but a united NDA would have made a difference to the electoral outcome only in two assembly constituencies (Mohiuddin Nagar and Kurtha) which were won by RJD by a narrow margin. In other constituencies the victory margin of the winning party was too big to be overcome even if the votes of all the alliance partners were combined.

Change of seats between parties

Looking at the pattern of how seats changed hands between different parties from 1995 assembly elections to 2000 assembly elections, we find a lot of churning of seats from one party to other. Of the total of 324 seats, 182 seats changed hands between the 1995 and 2000 assembly elections. Although in the 2000 assembly elections, the NDA won more than double the number of seats won by its various partners in 1995 assembly elections, it did not retain even half of its own seats. In 2000 assembly elections, the Congress managed to retain only seven of the 29 seats won in the 1995 assembly election and lost 10 seats to the NDA and six to the RJD. The Left parties not only lost a large number of seats, but their retention rate was also very poor. The RJD

retained 94 of the seats won during the 1995 assembly election and lost 57 seats to the NDA.
(Table 8)

Table 8: The majority of seats changed hands across parties between 1995 and 2000

Winner 1995	Winner 2000						
	Congress	RJD	CPI+CPM	BJP+	JMM	Others	Total
Congress	7	6	--	10	1	5	29
RJD	7	94	--	57	--	9	167
CPI+CPM	1	7	4	16	--	4	32
BJP+	5	9	3	23	1	7	48
JMM	3	--	---	4	3	--	10
Others	1	8	---	11	7	11	38
Total	24	124	7	121	12	36	324

Evaluation of the MLA

There seems to be growing dissatisfaction among the people towards their political representatives. The post-poll survey conducted after the 2000 assembly election tried to measure the people's satisfaction with the performance of their MLA who completed their term after being elected in the 1995 assembly elections. Nearly one-third were dissatisfied with their MLA while only 15 per cent were very satisfied with them. This trend was more or less even across all sections of the people. The literate were more dissatisfied than the illiterate. Dissatisfaction with the MLA was higher among the upper caste and the Dalits as well. The majority of the women did not hold any opinion on the issue (Table 9)

Table 9: Level of Satisfaction of people with the MLA

Category	Not satisfied (%)	Somewhat satisfied (%)	Very satisfied (%)	No opinion (%)
All	33	29	15	23
Illiterate	30	22	13	35
Graduate	36	35	21	8
Male	37	34	19	10
Female	28	23	11	38
Upper Caste	40	29	10	21
Dalit	40	26	8	26

Who voted for the RJD

In the 2000 assembly elections, the RJD performed badly in terms of winning seat, but it polled the highest number of votes. The party had seen ups and down in the elections held during the period 1990-2000 in terms of seats, but it had polled more or less the same share of votes. This gives an indication of a solid support base for the party, which had remained static over the past few elections. But does it mean that the same group of people had voted for the party over the years? The survey conducted during the 2000 assembly elections tried to find out the social profile of the RJD vote.

Table 10: Who have always voted for RJD during the past few elections

Caste	Never voted for RJD	Always voted for RJD	Voted for RJD in 1999 Lok Sabha election	Voted for RJD in assembly election 2000
All	28	20	26	27
Upper Caste	45	7	9	11
Yadav	2	32	28	27
Muslim	4	26	21	23
Other OBC	26	21	22	20
Dalit	11	13	19	18
Adivasi	12	1	1	1

There is a sharp contrast between the profile of those who had always voted for RJD and those who had never voted for the party. While more than 50 per cent of RJD votes came from the Yadavs and the Muslims, of those who had never voted for the RJD, only 6 per cent belonged to these two social groups. There was divided loyalty for the RJD among the other backward castes. If on the one hand party's nearly 21 per cent votes came from them, at the same time, of those who never vote for the RJD, as much as 26 per cent constitute the people of other backward castes. There was practically no change in the composition of the RJD vote and the

opposition parties failed to make any inroads among the strong Laloo supporters. The firm opposition for the RJD came from the upper castes as they constituted half of those voters who had never voted for the RJD during the past 10 years. There were sections among Dalits and Adivasis too that had never voted for the party.

Changing Social Base of Political Parties

The elections held in the state during the past decade clearly indicate that the Janata Dal, (read RJD since 1998) which had remained the most dominant party till the 1996 Lok Sabha election, started witnessing a decline after the 1998 Lok Sabha election. The party suffered a humiliating defeat in the 1999 Lok Sabha election. The BJP, which polled 15.9 per cent votes in the 1991 Lok Sabha election, made heavy inroads into Bihar politics during and after the 1996 Lok Sabha election after entering into an alliance with the Samata Party. The party polled 20.5 and 23.1 per cent votes during the 1996 and 1998 elections respectively. In the 1999 Lok Sabha election, the formation of the Janata Dal (U) with the merger of the Samata party and the Janata Dal added to the success of the BJP. With the alliance, the BJP managed to make inroads among the Yadav and Dalit voters in the state who constitute a big section of the electorate. The increase in support in terms of votes polled may not look very impressive, but it should be noted that the votes for the party increased even if it contested fewer seats in subsequent elections on account of the seat-sharing arrangement with its partners. The survey revealed that the Janata Dal (read RJD since 1998) drew greater support from the backward castes, the Dalits and the Muslims, as compared to other sections of society, while the BJP drew greater support from the upper caste voters. The BJP and Samata Party alliance also made the party a popular choice of two backward castes, the Kurmi and the Koeri. The coming together of the Janata Dal and the Samata Party also witnessed a movement of sections of Dalits towards the BJP-Janata Dal (U) alliance in the 1999 Lok Sabha election. During the past few years, the popularity of the Congress has declined among all sections of the society. The CSDS surveys clearly shows that the social groups which formed the solid support of for the Janata Dal (read RJD since 1998) started deserting the party after the 1998 Lok Sabha election, though there are still sections among whom the party seems to be very popular. The majority of RJD's votes come from Yadav

and Muslim voters. The survey also helps us understand the changing social base of different political parties in the state.

The increasing presence of the BJP in Bihar is largely attributed to its growing popularity among upper-caste voters. Traditionally Congress supporters, they have moved in a big way towards the BJP and its alliance partner, the Samata Party, since the 1996 Lok Sabha election. The survey reveals that the BJP which got only 28.7 per cent of the upper-caste votes in 1995, got more than 75 per cent votes in the Lok Sabha elections of 1998 and 1999, though the alliance suffered some setback among the upper-caste voters during the assembly election in the year 2000. The Janata Dal (read RJD since 1998) did manage to get some support from the upper castes till the 1996 Lok Sabha election, but after that the party's popularity among the upper castes has decline enormously.

Table 11: Shift among Upper-Caste Voters, 1995-2000

Party	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000
Congress	39.1	10.1	8.7	8.3	15.0
BJP+	28.7	59.5	77.6	76.7	60.7
JD+	20.9	29.1	11.6	---	---
RJD	----	---	Negligible	Negligible	10.5

Source: Bihar Survey 1995, National Election Study 1996, 1998 and 1999, Assembly Survey 2000

The OBCs have come to play an important role in the politics of the state over the last one decade. The Congress has not been very popular among OBC voters who have traditionally largely supported socialist formations. The formation of the Janata Dal before the 1989 Lok Sabha election saw a large section of OBC voters moving towards the party. Surveys indicate that the OBC voted for the Janata Dal in large numbers in the 1995 Vidhan Sabha and the 1996 Lok Sabha elections. The BJP and Samata Party alliance drew OBC voters. In the 1998 election, 42.5 per cent of OBC

voters voted for the BJP alliance, while support for the Janata Dal alliance went down from 50.3 per cent in 1996 to 17.3 per cent in 1998. The RJD managed to poll 28 per cent of the OBC vote, but in the 1999 Lok Sabha election, with the merger of the Samata Party and the Janata Dal, the OBC support for the RJD went further down to 22 per cent with the parting of the two parties just before the assembly election, a section of the OBC again moved towards the RJD. Support for the Congress among OBC voters, which was just 13.7 per cent in 1995, went down to 7.9 per cent in 1998; however, in alliance with the RJD the Congress managed to get 15 per cent of the OBC vote, which went down to just 5 per cent in the assembly election in February 2000. This gives an indication that the alliance of the Congress with the RJD did help the party get some OBC votes.

Table 12: Shift among OBC Voters, 1995-2000

Party	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000
Congress	13.7	9.9	7.9	14.9	5.0
BJP+	26.2	36.2	42.5	50.3	38.7
JD+	49.8	50.3	17.3	---	---
RJD	---	---	28.0	22.0	40.8

Source: Bihar Survey 1995, National Election Study 1996,1998 and 1999, Assembly election 2000

The past decade has witnessed decline of support for Congress among the Muslims. The alienation of Muslims from the Congress began soon after the Bhagalpur riots and continued after the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Disenchanted with the Congress, the Janata Dal and its allies became the natural choice of Muslim voters in the state. Survey figure indicate enormous support for the alliance in the 1995 Vidhan Sabha and 1996 Lok Sabha elections among Muslim voters. But the split in the Janata Dal has led to the erosion of this support. From 68.9 per cent votes from Muslims in the 1996 Lok Sabha election, the alliance got only 19 per cent with 59.6 per cent Muslims voting

for the RJD. The Samata-BJP alliance barely attracted Muslim voters till the 1998 Lok Sabha election, but with the formation of the Janata Dal (U), the BJP allies did manage to get some Muslim votes in the 1999 election. However, the Samata Party and Janata Dal parted ways just before the recent assembly election and a large number of Muslim voters went back to the RJD.

Table 13: Shift among Muslim Voters, 1995-2000

Party	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000
Congress	21.9	23.3	14.9	33.9	6.6
BJP+	7.5	5.6	4.2	13.4	7.9
JD+	57.3	68.9	19.0	---	---
RJD	---	---	59.6	48.2	61.4

Source: Bihar Survey 1995, National Election Study 1996, 1998 and 1999, Assembly Election 2000

Over the past few elections there has been a shift among the upper-caste voters towards the BJP while the majority of OBC and Muslim voters favour the Janata Dal till 1996 and RJD since the 1998 Lok Sabha election. But does it mean that the various *jatis* within these caste groups vote in a similar pattern?

It is important to note that neither the upper castes nor the OBCs constitute one monolithic group; rather, they are composed of various *jatis*. While the Rajputs, Bhumiards, Brahmins and Kayastha constitute the upper caste, there are a larger number of *jatis* that are categorised as OBC. The Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris constitute the upper OBC while other *jatis* like Kahar, Kumhar, Lohar, Tatwu, Teli and Dhanuk constitute the lower OBC. Even within Muslims, there are upper and lower *jatis*. The question is: does the voting pattern of various *jatis* within these three caste groups, that is the upper caste the OBCs and the Muslims, similar when there is immense social and economic disparity among them?

Table 14: Voting Pattern of Jatis within OBC and Muslim, 1991-2000

Jati	Congress					BJP+					JD+			RJD		
	1991	1996	1998	1999	2000	1991	1996	1998	1999	2000	1991	1996	1998	1998	1999	2000
Yadav	8.2	1.6	7.9	36.3	1.9	4.1	16.1	18.4	21.6	9.2	87.8	80.6	7.9	65.8	39.2	79.6
Kurmi+ Koeri	28.0	5.3	24.0	8.3	5.9	40.0	73.7	56.0	70.8	58.3	28.0	17.5	*	18.0	10.4	24.5
Other OBC	31.6	2.4	*	7.1	9.8	26.3	40.5	23.1	52.4	42.6	31.6	50.0	7.7	23.1	31.0	32.0
Lower OBC	28.6	10.7	8.0	4.2	4.4	20.2	42.0	57.3	62.9	45.0	36.9	35.5	21.3	12.0	11.2	26.5
ST	26.9	24.0	70.2	--	--	*	34.0	8.5	--	--	7.7	28.0	6.4	*	--	--
Lower Muslim	39.1	31.0	31.0	34.0	3.8	---	6.7	6.9	4.3	8.2	47.8	57.8	20.7	37.9	55.3	68.6
Upper Muslim	33.3	16.7	15.7	33.8	13.0	---	3.3	5.9	20.0	7.2	61.1	80.0	17.6	58.8	43.1	44.9

A detailed analysis of the data reveals that unlike the four upper castes, there is great internal variation in the voting pattern across the *jatis* of the OBC. The Janata Dal was very popular among the Yadav till the 1996 Lok Sabha election, but after the party split, it is the RJD that cornered the majority of the Yadav vote. It may be noted that the Yadavs were extremely polarised in favour of the Janta Dal till the 1996 election, but the 1998 election also marked the split of the Yadav vote between the Janata Dal, the RJD and the BJP-Samata alliance. Still the majority of the Yadavs voted for the RJD in that election. Interestingly, the BJP-Samata alliance got more Yadav votes than did the Janata Dal. Their vote was badly split between the BJP allies, the Congress and the RJD. The Congress did manage to get a sizeable proportion of the Yadav vote because of its alliance with the RJD, but with the breaking up of the alliance, the Yadavs consolidated behind the RJD in the 2000 assembly election.

The voting pattern of the Kurmi and Koeri is quite in contrast to that of the Yadavs as they voted in large number for the BJP-Samata alliance which is the traditional rival JD (read RJD since 1998) which draws support from the Yadavs. But the survey data reveal that though the majority of the Kurmi and Koeir voted for the BJP allies, there have been elections in which they voted for other parties. The 1996 and 1999 Lok Sabha elections witnessed extreme polarisation of the Kurmi and Koeri in favour of the BJP allies, but during the recent assembly election, they voted in sizeable numbers for the RJD.

Over the last few elections, the lower OBCs have displayed a divided loyalty towards different parties. There is a clear pattern of movement of the lower OBCs towards the BJP-Samata alliance; however, only a little over 50 per cent of them voted for the alliance in the 1998 Lok Sabha election which went up to nearly 63 per cent during the 1999 Lok Sabha election. There is a clear pattern of movement of the lower OBC away from the JD (read RJD since 1998), but during the assembly election held in 2000, a sizeable number of them voted for the RJD and the support for the BJP allies among these sections declined. There has been a rapid decline in the support for the Congress among the lower OBCs.

The structure of support for political parties is differentiated among upper-caste and lower-caste Muslims. Over the years the Congress has lost support among Muslim voters, but it is important to note that the party is still popular among lower-caste Muslims. Though this support declined only marginally over the past four elections, recent assembly elections saw it being greatly eroded. Some sections of upper-caste Muslims also voted for the Congress in the past few elections. The survey indicates that more Muslims still prefer to vote for the Congress rather than the BJP-Samata alliance.

The Janata Dal and its allies were very popular among Muslim voters till the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, but the split in the Janata Dal led to a split in the Muslim support for it as well. The majority of both upper-caste and lower caste Muslims supported the RJD in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections while the JD and allies lost support among the Muslim voters to a great extent. But it should not be assumed that both the Upper and the Lower Muslims vote in similar directions. The survey reveals that the lower Muslims consolidated behind the RJD during the 1999 Lok Sabha and the 2000 Assembly elections. Though a majority of the Upper caste Muslims voted for the RJD, but a section of them voted for other parties also in these elections. The support for the RJD is more among the Upper Caste Muslim as compared to the Lower Caste Muslims. The data indicate that a sizeable number of Muslim voters for the BJP-JD(U) alliance during the 1999 Lok Sabha election, but there is no clear pattern of a shift among the Muslim voters. The small sample size in this category does not facilitate further analysis on this, but the shift among the Muslims may be attributed to the alliance of the BJP with the Samata Party which merged with the JD(U) during the 1999 Lok Sabha election.

The small sample size of the voters belonging to Other OBC Castes and the STs does not permit a reliable inference about their voting pattern.

There is also considerable shift among the Dalit voters over past few elections. Traditionally Congress voters, nearly half of the Dalits have preferred voting for the Janata Dal and its allies while 23 per cent voted for the Congress during the 1995 Vidhan Sabha election. The BJP has not been the popular choice of the Dalit voters during that election. But things started to change after that

election. The State witnessed a slow but constant movement of Dalit voters from the Congress to other parties. While a large number of them preferred voting for Janata Dal and its allies, a sizeable number of them even shifted their loyalty towards BJP and its allies. The split in the Janata Dal before the 1998 elections resulted in a three-way division of the Dalit vote between the Janata Dal and its allies, the BJP allies and the RJD. But things have changed remarkably since the 1999 Lok Sabha election. The merger of the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (U) led to the movement of the Dalit vote towards the BJP allies. The Ram Vilas factor seems to have made a difference for the BJP allies in terms of Dalit support for the alliance. In the assembly elections held in 2000, they managed to regain some support among the dalits, but still a majority of the dalits voted for the BJP allies in the state.

Table 15: Shift among Dalit Voters, 1995-2000

Party	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000
Congress	23.0	19.0	13.7	17.3	9.4
BJP+	15.0	24.8	24.5	47.1	38.9
JD+	48.7	31.4	28.4	---	---
RJD	---	---	23.5	26.0	33.1

Source: Bihar Survey 1995, National Election Study 1996, 1998 and 1999, Assembly election 2000

The BJP has never been popular among the illiterate voters. Survey data for the 1995 assembly election bear testimony to this. But with the alliance of Samata Party the face of the party started to change slowly and since the 1996 Lok Sabha election there has been a constant shift among the illiterates towards the BJP allies. The merger of the JD(U) with Samata really did the magic for the allies during the 1999 Lok Sabha election, but the support among the illiterates for the alliance went down to some extent with the split among the JD(U) and the Samata Party before the 2000 assembly election.. The profile of the JD allies is in sharp contrast to that of the BJP allies. The JD allies has been very popular among the illiterate voters. The split of the JD before the 1998 Lok Sabha election led to the split among the illiterate voters between the JD and the RJD. Since the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the RJD has started regaining the lost grounds among the illiterate voters, but still the support for the party among the illiterate is low as compared to its popularity among these voters during the early 90's period.

Table 16: Shift among Illiterate Voters, 1995-2000

Party	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000
Congress	19.8	11.6	15.0	21.7	10.4
BJP+	20.1	38.7	33.2	43.8	34.0
JD+	47.3	40.4	17.0	---	---
RJD	---	---	18.6	22.4	36.0

Source: Bihar Survey 1995, National Election Study 1996, 1998 and 1999, Assembly election 2000

The BJP and allies have been a popular party among the educated voters. Over the years the popularity of the alliance among these voters has grown. In all the elections held during the last decade, nearly fifty per cent of the highly educated voters voted for the BJP allies. The increase of support among the educated for the BJP allies has been largely at the expense of the loosing support of the Congress among these voters. The survey figures give clear testimony to it. The JD (read RJD since 1998) and allies have never been popular among the educated voters but manage to get some support from these voters.

Table 17: Shift among Educated (graduate and above) Voters, 1995-2000

Party	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000
Congress	30.1	20.0	Negligible	15.2	9.5
BJP+	34.3	56.0	55.0	45.5	58.3
JD+	20.5	20.0	15.0	---	---
RJD	---	---	20.0	18.2	22.6

Source: Bihar Survey 1995, National Election Study 1996, 1998 and 1999, Assembly election 2000

Changing Social profile of Elected Representatives

The '90s marked a sharp change in the politics of Bihar. Though the Backward Castes, which are numerically strong have occupied an important place in the State's electoral struggle, never before, except in 1977, were they able to guide its politics. At best, they have been able to play a secondary role in Bihar politics.

The implementation of a new reservation policy for the backward classes, based on the recommendations of the Mandal Commission report, witnessed strong opposition nation-wide, by different Upper-Caste sections of society. Whereas in most parts of the country the Backwards

generally supported the policy, they nevertheless remained mute onlookers to the violent opposition of this policy. In Bihar, by contrast, the Backwards mobilised and put-up a stiff challenge to the anti-Mandal agitationists. This led to a prolonged and violent struggle on the streets between the anti-reservationists, mainly Upper-Caste youth, and the pro-reservationists comprising mainly of the Backward-Caste youth. The violent struggle between these two sections led to the externalisation of the under-current of age-old and deep-seated hatred between the Forwards and Backwards. Earlier, apart from a few instances, it was the Forwards who generally dominated the Backwards but this was a rare occasion when the divided Backwards joined together to challenge the opposition of the Forward castes. One may blame the Mandal Commission of sowing the seeds of deep-seated casteism, but it also led to a consolidation of castes along only two axes, the Forwards and the Backwards, erasing for the time being, numerous internal differences between the two. Such social change was bound to find reflection on other aspects as well and its immediate fallout was on the nature of political representation in the State. Political representation in Bihar which had been typically Upper-Caste dominated, started changing and more Backwards came to the fore as people's representatives.

Table 18: Changing Social Composition of Bihar Legislature, 1967-2000

Category	1967	1969	1985	1990	1995	2000
Upper caste	41.8	38.3	36.4	32.5	17.1	29.9
Backward caste	24.2	26.7	24.6	29.7	45.0	36.4
Muslim	5.6	5.9	10.1	6.1	7.1	9.3
Women	3.4	1.2	4.0	4.0	2.8	7.4

If one carefully looks at the composition of the Bihar legislature over the years, one can clearly see that the social composition of political representatives has changed a great deal. There is a slow and steady decline in the representation of Upper-Caste in the state assembly. The representation of the

Upper caste in the house went down to as low as 17 per cent in the year 1995, but it went up to nearly 30 per cent during the last assembly election held in the year 2000.

With some variations, the representation of the Backward Caste remained more or less the same till the 1990 assembly election. This was the pre-Mandal period, when the other Backward Caste were less politicised and fragmented. But the implementation of the Mandal Commission and the opposition to it by one section of the society led to the consolidation of the OBC who are numerically large. Most of the OBC caste supported the JD, which championed the cause of the OBC at that time. The party registered impressive victory during the 1995 assembly election, held during the post Mandal period and the representation of the OBC also went up to 45 per cent in the assembly. IT is important to note that not only the representation of the OBC increased to such an extent, but for the first time the OBC outnumbered the upper caste in terms of representation in the assembly. In the present house, though the proportion of the OBC has declined as compared to the last assembly, but it is still higher than the upper caste representation in the assembly

Though Muslims constitute a sizeable population in the state, but the representation of the Muslims has always remained below ten per cent in the state assembly. The representation of the women has also remained below five per cent in the assembly except for in the present assembly their representation has gone up to a little over seven per cent.

Table 19: Changing Social Profile of the Lok Sabha Representatives form Bihar, 1989-1999

Category	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999
Upper caste	33.3	18.9	27.7	29.6	42.5
OBC	30.6	43.1	38.7	31.4	24.0
Muslim	5.5	4.1	7.4	11.1	5.5
Women	3.7	5.5	5.5	7.4	9.2

The social composition of the representatives to the Lok Sabha from Bihar has also changed during the past few elections. The Lok Sabha election held during the post-Mandal period altered the social composition of the representatives. During the 1989 Lok Sabha election, 33.3 per cent representatives were Upper-Caste--a figure, which came down to 18.9 per cent in 1991, whereas the

representation of Backward Castes went up to 43.1 per cent in 1991 as compared to 30.6 per cent in 1989. It was mainly possible because the Backward Castes were largely consolidated behind the Janata Dal. The 1996 Lok Sabha election was a unique one of its kind, held against the backdrop of an almost wash-out of the Congress from the political scene of Bihar. The Upper-Castes in particular, were looking for a pillar to gather around and found in the BJP a very natural instrument. The Samata Party which draws support largely from the Kurmis and Koeris, and which unsuccessfully contested the 1995 Vidhan Sabha election, entered into an alliance with the BJP. So, in a sense the Upper-Castes under the banner of BJP were putting up a challenge to the Janata Dal with the support of two Backwards Castes, the Kurmis and Koeris. The division among the Backward Castes naturally has an adverse effect on their representation. The representation of the Backward Castes in the 1996 Lok Sabha election went down to 38.7 per cent as compared to 43.1 per cent in 1991. But, it is still higher than 27.7 per cent of the Upper-Castes in the Lok Sabha from Bihar. The Yadavs still have much higher representation as compared to their proportion in the population. The other Backward Castes like the Kurmis and the Koeris still have a "proportionate representation". The Upper-Castes are also adequately represented as compared to their share of population. It is the lower backwards who normally bear the burnt of this intense competitive politics.

The 1998 Lok Sabha results further changed the social composition of the elected representatives. Informed his own regional outfit, the RJD. The division of votes of the Backward Castes had already started with the Kurmis and the Keoris moving towards the Samata in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections. This movement got a further fillip when even some of the other backward castes deserted the Janata Dal and voted for the RJD. This election also marked the beginning of division in the Yadav vote generally between the JD and the RJD. This was bound to be reflected in the number of representatives to be elected from various social groups. The success of the two backward castes - the Kurmis and the Koeries who sided with the Samata party in 1996 Lok Sabha election-led to their further consolidation as a political force. The representation of the Upper Castes also declined marginally from 27.7 per cent in 1996 to 24 per cent in 1998. The clamour for the sizeable Muslim vote, which can make or mar the prospect for a party in various constituencies, resulted in sizeable

increase in the number of Muslim contestants actually resulting in an increase in their representation.

The consolidation of the anti-Laloo forces continued even during the 1999 Lok Sabha election and the Janata Dal merged with the Samata party, which like in earlier elections contested election in alliance with the BJP. The BPP also entered into this alliance. The BJP allies registered a massive victory, which also resulted for the increase in the number of upper caste representation. More than 42 per cent of the representatives to the Lok Sabha were form the upper caste, while the representation of the OBC went down to 24 per cent. The representation of the Muslims went down to just five percent, but the representation of the women went up to more than nine per cent, the highest during last five Lok Sabha elections. The success for the BJP actually meant higher representation for the Upper caste, but this has been possible only in alliance with the Samata-Janata Dal (U) alliance which resulted for more consolidation of the OBC vote in favour of the alliance. The success for the RJD has positive effect on the representation of the OBC.

The changing social composition of political representation is a clear indicator of the fact that backwards have come to play a major role in Bihar politics. Some may argue that the change in social composition of political representatives is largely due to the change in the party at power, but the recent results have demonstrated that parties may change hands in the share of the political power but it is hard to visualise a scenario in the days to come when the backwards would be denied their share in power. Unless the backwards get their share in political representation, no aspiring ruling party is going to get their support in return. The BJP, which is visualised as a party of the Upper-Caste, received great success in the 1996 Lok Sabha Election winning 18 seats. But it was largely possible with the overwhelming support of the two Backward Castes, the Kurmis and Koeris. Even if representation of the Backwards in 1996 Lok Sabha election went down to 37.1 per cent as compared to 43.1 per cent in 1991, it is still higher than the 27.7 per cent of the Upper-Castes. This phenomena is here to stay in Bihar politics in the days to come. The backwards who enjoy the political power today may not remain satisfied only by remaining at the fringes of the political system. They have come to play a decisive role in Bihar politics but "backwardism" may not be the

nature of politic in the future. To make it more stable and acceptable, "backwardism" must take a back seat and assimilation of larger social groups may be attempted.

Notes

1. All the five surveys have been conducted by Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, during the 1995 & 2000 Vidhan Sabha elections and during the 1996, 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha elections. The survey during 1995 Vidhan Sabha election was conducted in 16 assembly constituencies spread across all three regions of the State. Total number of completed interviews are 817. The survey during the 2000 Vidhan Sabha election was conducted in 36 assembly constituencies spread across all three regions of the state. The total number of completed interviews are 2220.
2. The 1996, 1998 and 1999 surveys were conducted during the Lok Sabha election retaining the same set of sample. The survey was spread across 44 polling booths of 22 Vidhan Sabha segments of 11 Lok Sabha constituencies selected through the Stratified Random Sampling adopting the Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) method. Total number of completed interviews are 880 in 1996 and 833 in 1998 and 881 in 1999.
3. During the 1995 Vidhan Sabha election the Janata Dal had an alliance with CPI and the CPM. The BJP and Samata party contested election separately. For a meaningful comparison with the 1996 and 1998 elections both the parties have been looked as an alliance even for the 1995 Vidhan Sabha election.
4. During the 1991 Lok Sabha election The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha had an alliance with the JD, but the alliance broke down during subsequent elections.
5. During the 1998 Lok Sabha election the BJP and the JD maintained their alliance while the RJD entered into a half alliance with the Congress and also with the JMM.