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Title: The Rise and Fall of a Regional Party in North India: A Case Study of Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD) in Bihar 1997-2012

Abstract

Being the largest functionary democracy in the world, Indian democracy has matured over period of time. It has seen several ups and downs in the National as well as State politics. Post-independent Indian politics was dominated by one party, the Congress. After two decades of independence, the Congress leadership was challenged in the States. For the first time in 1977 the Congress dominance was challenged at National level and Janata Party was formed a non-Congress government. It was opened the door for coalitional politics at Centre, though it was already introduced in State politics. The State, regional parties made path to enter into National politics and the dynamics of Centre-State relation changed. Thus, the end of one party dominance in national politics offered two outstanding features: the coalitional arrangement of parties and the emergence of regional parties primarily based on geography, ideology and social cleavages.

Regional parties in India originated through variety of sources: national parties, religious identities, caste groups, movie star fan club, linguistic identities, and social movements. Its success also measured in terms of geography of regional parties. Ethnic and economic natures also give longevity to regional parties. The ethnic diversity of India holds the success of regional parties.

Regional parties had changed the narrative of electoral politics in India. They have challenged the national parties; they have highlighted national parties' negligence towards economic and

political interests of the region and gathered popular electoral support. These parties are usually controlled and driven by one single leader and his/her confidantes, family members, relatives and friends. There are commonalities in all these parties they are driven by one personality, an individual or family and its survival and future depends upon the transfer of power to their successors. The power would have been transferred successfully if the successors are in small numbers, but if it is in large number, then there is a high probability of disintegration of the party.

The rise of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar was a result of further split in the Janata Dal. It was also an outcome of backward caste politics which was boosted by the recommendations of Mandal Commission report. The social engineering of Lalu Prasad Yadav played a significant role in the formation of the party. His anti-communal stand made him popular among Muslim minority and established the RJD as a secular party. It was also a symbol of empowerment of backward and lower castes and a serious challenge to the rule of upper castes in the form of the Congress. The party emerged as a custodian of the agenda of social justice in Bihar.

This research suggests a party system theory, which emphasizes that, how voters' preference, which are shaped by social cleavages and electoral institutions, shape party systems. The success of regional parties in India only makes sense, when the party system as an outcome of electorate's ideological preferences and their interest, voice their opinions and preferences. The research also analyzes the reason, behind the rise and decline of a regional party in North India in general, and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in particular, in Bihar.

Key Words – Democracy, Representation, Backward Caste, Regional Political Party, Social Justice, Empowerment