

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES IN INDIA: CONTEXTUALIZING 2019 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Social Justice Programmes make democratic processes vibrant and vice versa. If democratic process is understood to be political mobilization for participation in electoral exercise to choose representatives and effective functioning of public institutions, then influence of social justice programmes is largely positive for the government and target population, both programmes targeting the social sector reforms motivate the target population to participate in democratic processes. Conversely, effective social sector programmes may even help the ruling dispensation to return to power. A study of some of the social sector programme between 2014 and 2019 at the union level and since 2005 in the state of Bihar is an indication. Social sector programmes like Aushman Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, among others were introduced and implemented under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the union level. Policies like free cycle and school dress for school going children, reservation for women in local representative institutions and state government jobs, hostels for the students from the socially and economic backward classes in Bihar since 2005 have targeted at social sector reforms. The paper argues that the high success rate in the state of Bihar of the NDA in the 2019 general elections was largely due to the social sector reforms at the union level. The coalition partners gained in the state, even as the leader in the coalition, BJP chose to support its coalition partners like Janata Dal United (JDU) and Lok Janashakti Party (LJP). A caveat, however, may be added that the role of leadership may prove to be the catalyst in the whole process.

KEY WORDS: Justice, Social Justice, Democracy, Pradhanmantri Jan Dhan Yojna, Ujjwala Yojna, Beti bachao-Beti Padhao

INTRODUCTION

The democratic processes are intricately related to the social sector reforms. However, if social sector reforms are undertaken in democracies even with partially effective results, then the ruling dispensation is likely to harness its benefits in the form of electoral gains. The electoral gains in the form of percent of total votes polled or number of seats won may prove to be crucial for the political party/coalition in power to maintain its ruling position in the aftermath of the post-policy/programme elections. This is not an absolute condition which would ensure a party or coalition complete victory, but it certainly is a necessary condition for the success of ruling party. Meaning, if drastic events like corruption cases against the ruling dispensation members or steps that may be adversely linked to national sentiments do not happen then the party may have smooth continuation in power.

The focus on social policies or social sector reforms has been made in this paper with an understanding that these are means through which the state ensures social justice to its people. The Social Justice refers to that part of socially constructed or designed justice in which people in a state would be treated equally in terms of the laws and policies of the society and they would enjoy some basic equality of life conditions and opportunities. This indicates that social justice is rooted in

collective endeavors of the society represented by the state that aims to correct the serious economic or social inequalities. In order to achieve this end it might become necessary to redistribute some of the important resources of the society to provide a level playing field for citizens. This is ensured by the state through its social policies. The idea is governed by an underlying philosophy that such actions are necessary to create an environment where each person may be able to pursue his/her objectives and express himself/herself. Such instances are found in the Constitution of India since its inception in the form of social provisions like abolition of the practice of untouchability and to promote social equality and ensure that people belonging to 'lower' castes have access to temples, jobs and basic necessities like water.

Thus understood, social justice concerns public life in society and the way in which public life are ordered. It is also concerned with the principles according to which social goods and social duties are distributed among different members of society. The democratic state, thus, needs to ensure not justice alone, but social justice. The state needs to treat 'equals equally and unequals unequally'. In India, while the Constitution ensures protection of individual rights and dignity in part III, aspects of social justice were included in Part IV. However, the constitutional provisions need to be given effect to through the

means of social policies and the legislation may be required to that effect.

Introduction or implementation of social policies is not new at the union or state levels. While this has happened since India gained Independence in 1947 under various governments at all-India level and in various states, the shift that has happened during the period under study in Bihar or the union level is the choice of the sectors in which reforms or policies were introduced, the mechanism that was put in place to achieve the objectives and target population which were the potential beneficiaries of these policies. The government's focus on women and marginalized sections and sectors such as education, energy and healthcare for the social sector reforms are cases in point. Return of BJP-led NDA coalition at the national level and JDU-led coalition since 2010 in Bihar support the thesis that there is a direct connection between social policies of the government and electoral performance of the ruling parties. Also, the coalition partners get the benefits of the government's performance. In the 2019 elections BJP supported its coalition partners and the latter reaped significant electoral gains as the BJP had chosen to contest on lesser number of seats compared to its partners like JDU and LJP. This is not to deny completely the social and political support-base of the latter parties, but being part of a coalition which had gained popular appreciation for its social policies was of crucial significance. Even the marginal success of RJD in Bihar in 2015 elections was primarily due to the fact that it managed to strike an alliance with JDU, again a political party in Bihar which in the perception of the general public had successfully implemented some important social policies in the state.

CONTEXTUALIZING SOCIAL JUSTICE: WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

Justice understood in its social context may rightly form the understanding of social justice. Different cultures and traditions have answered the questions of justice although the concept may have been interpreted in different ways and on different grounds. In ancient Indian society, justice was associated with dharma. The function of maintaining dharma or a just social order was considered to be a primary duty of the state/kings. While the Indian view on social justice would be dealt with separately in the following section, but it can be underlined here that the aspect of social justice that was the feature of ancient Indian society was determined with respect to collective social values of the time. In ancient Greece, philosophers like Plato and Aristotle have understood justice applying different criteria. In the case of former justice is to be sought in persons as well as the state and there has to be same criteria, which would define justice in an individual and the state. For Aristotle, distribution of offices and position as per one's ability would constitute justice. While these are representative ideas from the ancient western society, the most

forceful argument that has shaped the discourse in the present times and in the 20th century perhaps comes from John Rawls. An endeavor has been made in the following paragraphs to bring out the ideas these thinkers/philosophers.

Plato defined justice in terms of functional division of classes in the state and their inter-dependence to produce a harmonious relationship among the classes. According to Plato, the 'good' which can be achieved only in the state consists of each of the three classes performing their own functions and not meddling with in the job of others. The members of the classes are best suited for doing their job, and this suitability is by virtue of their nature. Thus, Plato writes, "...I believe justice is the requirement we laid down at the beginning as of universal application when we founded our state, or else some particular form of it. We laid down, if you remember, and have often repeated that in our state one man was to one job, the job he was naturally most suited for".(Plato, 1987) Plato further adds, "...justice consists in minding your own business and not interfering with other people. ...justice is minding one's own business."(Ibid) Eventually, for Plato, justice would be achieved if each class would make contribution to the excellence of the city state.

For Aristotle maintaining justice would be the primary duty in the state and "Aristotle regarded equality as crucial to social justice..."(Mukharjee and Ramaswami, 1999, p120). According to Aristotle, "...man when perfected is the best of animals, but when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all; since armed injustice is the more dangerous, and he is equipped at birth with arms, meant to be used by intelligence and virtue, which he may use for the worst ends."(Aristotle, 1999:6) However, justice could be distributive or corrective. Distributive justice would consist of proportionate equality. This could be understood in terms of just rewards or equal shares according to the merit of its recipients. So, according to Aristotle, responsibilities and financial responsibilities should be awarded in proportion to one's just deserts. Against this, remedial or corrective justice would be meted out in cases where merit of a person was not a consideration and justice would be awarded by a judge. This may pertain to matters like criminal law or contracts. Aristotle considered that justice is the bond of men in the states. According to him, administration of justice requires the determination of what is just and this is "the principle of order in the political society".(Ibid)

While discussions in above paragraphs give some idea of social justice in the western literature, but, as stated above, the most influential argument has come from John Rawls (Rawls, 2000). Rawls theory constructs an idea of justice, which would be different from the conception of justice rooted in religious values of the western society during the medieval period or that of the modern period when individual sovereignty was the most important factor in the state's justice delivery system.¹ Rawls

theory may be considered to be based on the principle of taking into account of the special needs of people. Rawls believed that this principle does not necessarily contradict the principle of equal treatment as the principle of treating equals equally could imply that people who are not equal in certain respects could be treated differently. Thus, individuals or groups with special needs or disabilities may be considered unequal in some particular respect and deserving of special help. Rawls has argued that we can arrive at a fair and just rule if we imagine ourselves to be in a situation in which we have to make decisions about how society should be organised ignorant of the position we ourselves may occupy in that society. Describing this as thinking under a 'veil of ignorance', he thinks that, thus placed, each person would decide in the way as if he could be the worst-off. Rawls has argued that rational thinking, not morality, could be the basis of fair treatment and justice.

Thus, Rawls' concept of social justice forwards two fundamental principles as follows:

"First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others. Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all."(Ibid.,:60)

Rawls aim is "to present a conception of justice which generalizes and carries to a higher level of abstraction the familiar theory of the social contract as found, say, in Locke, Rousseau, and Kant."(Ibid:11)

To conclude the discussions on the western perspectives of social justice, it can be stated that the understanding of what is just is closely linked to the understanding of what is due to each person as a human being. To explain this, a number of different principles have been put forward. The principles that have been used include the principle of treating equals equally and giving the individuals equal rights and equal treatment. Thus, justice would mean ensuring equal civil rights like rights of life, liberty and property and political rights like the right to vote and participate in political processes, and certain social rights which would include the right to enjoy equal opportunities with other members of the society. In addition, people should not be discriminated against on grounds of class, caste, race or gender. Justice, on other account would mean rewarding people in proportion to the scale and quality of their effort. A third principle of justice, discussed with reference to the ideas of Rawls, requires that special needs of people should be recognised while distributing rewards or duties, which would be likened to promoting social justice.

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN INDIAN LITERATURE

As mentioned above, justice in Indian context is always considered to be rooted in social values. The conception of justice in ancient India would mean upholding of Dharma by the

King and each member of the society performing his or her duties as *Dharma* required from him or her. In matters of addressing the wrong that may have happened to a person, justice was administered by the King. However, according to Altekar, "administration of justice did not form part of state's duties."(Altekar, 1958:245) This was because each person knew his or her role that was required to be performed for the "good" of the community. Despite this, King did have a role in the administration of justice as the highest authority in the state. For instance, during the Vedic period the king held and used authority as the head of the state and the upholder of Dharma of law. Later, the judicial and administrative powers of Kings were balanced with those of *Sabha* and *Samiti*. King used to administer justice through ministers and legal experts (*possibly Purohit*). There was a royal officer to supervise the punishment that would be awarded as per the state law.(Majumdar, 1970:494)

Justice has remained a cardinal principle of Indian social life during the ancient period. According to Manusmriti, King's court as *Sabha* looked after the judicial matters. The *Sabha* was presided over by the King himself.(Manusmriti, Cha VII) As mentioned in the text: "A king, desirous of investigating law cases, must enter his court of justice, preserving a dignified demeanor, together with Brahmanas and with experienced councilors."

Manusmriti directs the king to decide law in accordance with the rules of the Shastras (Manusmriti, Ch II,12) and usages of the country (*customs*). Manu wanted the King and Judges to inquire very diligently into cases. Manu also made a provision of very heavy fine (1000 Panas) on those who improperly settle cases.(Manusmriti , Ch VIII 3) The law court helped to maintain social order as between individual and individual, and between individuals and owners of associations like corporations in a village or a district, or herdsmen.(Ibid, 219,232) Thus, the emphasis in Manusmriti, in addition to upholding of Dharma was to maintain social cohesion. This was a collective responsibility as everyone would be contributing in maintaining Dharma, but it would be the responsibility of the King and his council to ensure that this happens and order is maintained in the society.

The various names for polity that was used during ancient India included, among others, *Rajyadharm*, *Dandaniti* and *Nitishashtra*.(Singh 2005:7) This is an indication that justice was an integral part of ancient Indian polity, and hence a social virtue. Literature on ancient Indian polity further supports this view. For instance, Mahabharata refers to Bhisma-Yudhishtira dialogue in which the former states that there was no *Danda* (law) or *Dandakarta* (law enforcer) in the past. The people followed rule of *Dharma* themselves and people used to protect each-other.(Ibid:33) However, later degeneration of morality occurred in the society and to address that Brahmadeva prepared

a comprehensive code of law (*Nitishashtra*) consisting of one lakh chapters.(Ibid:34)

Protection of society and the individual through coercive enforcement of the standards of justice was undertaken by the state as its duty of based on the concept of 'Dharma'. During the Vedic period justice and righteousness formed the core values of Indian culture. Justice was a universal principle based on the idea that if men were true to nature, their actions would be spontaneously just. The meaning of justice was holistic that included distributive equity, moral justice, social justice and legal justice. Justice was always regarded as one of the main duties of the King and he was considered to be the fountain of justice. With the growth of society and culture in India, the core values did not change, but the manner in which different entities would be related to the just social order do appear to have undergone some transformation. For instance, during Gupta period Justice was administered by the sovereign (the King) himself. Alternatively, the King may appoint a high official at the centre of the provinces to carry out this responsibility. The official in charge of administration of justice would be assisted by prominent personalities at the local level including representatives of the commercial and official classes. Justice was also administered by royal officials with the help of the members of village assemblies. There may have existed jury system in South India. (Majumdar et al, 1970:187)

The concept of justice in the subsequent stages of the evolution of Indian polity is a long debate and scope of the paper would not permit to go into every phase of its evolution. However, some significant aspects can be discussed here, especially with respect to the development of the concept in the writings of some of Indian thinkers during modern period like M K Gandhi, B R Ambedkar and Amartya Sen. Choice of the thinkers may be random, but they represent different streams of ideologies that has left significant impact on the Indian politics, especially on the connection between democracy and social justice. Before going into these details, it is pertinent to look at the significant features of the judicial system in India during the Medieval period and under the British. The administration of justice during the early and later medieval period was largely guided by the theocratic nature of the Muslim rule. The existence of the Muslim rule in India was "theoretically justified by the needs of religion".(Ibid,:384) The authority of Sultan was limited by the Holy Law of the Quran, but in practice, the "Muslim ruler in India was an autocrat and his words were law".(Ibid) Even the Mughal Judicial system followed only "Quranic injunctions or precepts, the *fatawas* or previous interpretations of the Holy Law by the eminent jurists, and the *qanuns* or ordinances of the Emperors."(Ibid:552) The British had devised their legal system primarily to support their colonial structure. The Supreme Court of Judicature was established in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1774 following the promulgation of Regulating Act of 1773. Later Supreme Courts were established

in Bombay (now Mumbai) and Madras (now Chennai). These courts were abolished following High Courts Act of 1861, under which provisions were made for the creation of High Courts at various provinces. Finally, the Federal Court of India was established under Government of India Act, 1935. Following Independence and inauguration of Constitution of India, the present Supreme Court was established in 1950. The modern legal system, since the days of British rule has been based on codification of laws and the justice delivery system, including the judicial structures in India follows the directions of the Constitution.

IEWS OF GANDHI, AMBEDKAR AND AMARTYA SEN

The idea of social justice during the modern times has been forwarded in India by various thinkers. The Constitution of India is an outcome of detailed deliberations of the Constituent Assembly. There are other aspects of Indian polity that capture the idea of social justice and they include the socialist tinge that was given to the public policies since Independence, the predominant role of the public sector till 1990 and social programmes of various political parties that swore in by the principles of socialism. However, the different streams of thought that would give an understanding of the concept of social justice in India in contemporary times would be captured most effectively in the ideas of M K Gandhi, B R Ambedkar and Amartya Sen. An attempt would be made in the paragraphs below to bring forth some of their ideas.

Gandhi's writings touch upon various aspects of social justice, which included upliftment of the lower castes, women and other marginalised sections of the society. In fact Gandhi's constructive programme (Gandhi, 1945) was a comprehensive approach to do away the social evils and his idea of *swaraj* was connected to the idea of the dignified life for the individuals. Gandhi had experienced discrimination himself under the colonial rule and the idea that there should be just treatment to everyone in the society was drawn from his own experiences and observations of injustice. Gandhi looked at the issue of social justice through the prism of Indian concept Dharma. In contrast to the 'rights-based approach', Gandhi's vision of a just world is based on 'duties'. Among other things Gandhi attached significance to 'Varnashrama dharma' or 'Discipline of the Castes' in his idea of social justice. As has been noted by one of the authors on Gandhi:

"Gandhi's conception of the caste system does not base it on pride or vain notions of social superiority, but on duties assigned to them specifically. Gandhi believed that the praxis of social justice aims at a utopia- a religious utopia, very much in the context of Indian (Hindu) thinking and tradition. He terms it ramarajya (Reign of Rama or Kingdom of Rama), where justice would prevail as it used to during the reign of the legendary King Rama. In Gandhi's view, there is just one primary method to attain a just society where everyone's wellbeing is ensured—

that is, ‘holding on to truth’ (Satyagraha). Based on satyagraha, the next principle, non-violence (ahimsa), will be followed.”(Pallakkapillil,2014:40)

While Gandhi’s concept of social justice was rooted in the Indian concept of Dharma and upholding the *varna* structure that would insure dignity and equality to the individual, Dr. B R Ambedkar held that social justice may be governed by a divine element, but social justice is also governed at the level of individual who has purity of mind. The latter has more significance in the social life as it concerns morality or human values understood in terms of liberty, fraternity and equality. Ambedkar had based the first idea on the Indian values of early Vedic period characterised by the conception of God and the principle of *Karma*, whereas the second idea followed from the ideas of Charvaka, Buddhism and Jainism .(Jammanna,2017:8737) However, when it comes to just treatment to the disadvantaged or marginalised sections of the society, Ambedkar believed that social justice should be based on human values such as liberty, equality and fraternity, as stated above. Ambedkar also understood that a society where liberty may prevail, but if there is no equality then the society would be devoid of any social bonds. Equality, to him, “binds men together through reciprocities, co-operation and social sympathy”. Ambedkar’s emphasis, however, was on ‘moral equality’, which rejects any idea of superiority based on physical strength or talents and wealth. Thus, a society which is characterised by such qualities of liberty, equality and fraternity would be social democracy, according to Ambedkar.(Narke, 2014:98)

In contrast, Amartya Sen has looked at the level of progress made especially in the social sector by the Indian state and has forcefully argued that development and growth needs to be understood in its social aspects. The idea of social justice has been forcefully forwarded by him and his is an idea that is in contrast to the arguments given by Rawls. As discussed above, Rawls treats ‘justice as fairness’. However, for Sen, “...any theory of justice, has to choose an informational focus, that is, it has to decide which features of the world we should concentrate on in judging a society and in assessing justice and injustice.(Sen,2009:231) To him, it is important to have a view as to how an individual’s overall advantage is to be assessed. After an examination of various approaches which provide some criteria to assess individual’s overall advantage, like utilitarianism (utility-based approach) and other theories in economics (resource-based approach), he argues for freedom-based capability approach. On this argument, individual advantage is judged by a person’s capability to do things he or she has reason to value. As Sen writes, “A person’s advantage in terms of opportunities is judged to be lower than that of another if she has less capability–less real opportunity–to achieve those things that she has reason to value.”(Ibid) This approach focuses on the freedom that a person actually has to do something that he

or she may value doing or being. According to him, freedom would mean “our being free to determine what we want, what we value and ultimately what we decide to choose”. Capability, thus, would be linked with the opportunity aspect of freedom.

Based on the discussions in the foregoing paragraphs, it can be stated that the idea of social justice has to factor in the socio-economic context in which the debate is being situated. The objective of equal treatment to the citizens in all its aspects has social and cultural consequences and any idea of social justice needs to factor in these consequences, which politics of the day may decide. This means, the idea of social justice would be directly linked to the democratic processes.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES IN INDIA

Democratic processes and social justice programmes reinforce and enrich each other. If vibrant democracy is understood as responsive and responsible public institutions, then the public institutions should be oriented towards the needs and demands of the public. Thus, democratic method may refer to “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for the people’s vote”,(Schumpeter,2011:269) but the decisions must reflect the larger aspirations of the public and potentially directed towards achievement of those aspirations. Thus, participation of the public may be confined to the selection of representatives directly or indirectly, but democratic mobilisation depends on the way political leadership of the day appears oriented towards the public aspirations. Thus, social justice programmes that a government introduces creates environment in which political mobilisation of the masses becomes possible, which, in turn, pushes them towards democratic participation, which, in the present case is participation in elections to choose their representatives. Thus the process could be cyclical as shown in *Figure 1* below:

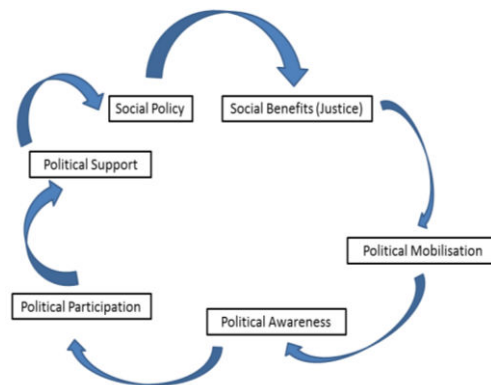


Figure 1: Social Justice-Social Policies-Political Support Cycle

As depicted in *figure 1*, once in power, the government brings social policies aimed at benefitting the target population, which may be construed as social justice. The people are mobilised or get mobilised as a result of those policies understanding that the government of the day has put in place some mechanism for their welfare. This, in turn, would create political mobilisation among the sections the population that has benefitted from the policy, leading to greater political awareness among the larger population. Thus, people tend to participate in democratic processes, especially in elections with a belief that the policies of the government are oriented towards their welfare. As a result, the government or the parties in power get the support of the people that would help them in retaining their position or return to power when elections happen. While this can serve as a theoretical model, the discussions below provide an evidence with the help of electoral data from the past elections and the details of the social policies initiated at the union level and in the state of Bihar that social justice programmes and electoral performances of the parties have positive linkages. The outcome of elections would be negative for the ruling dispensation only if the latter is caught in the quagmire of corruption or other such scandals or is seen to be going against national sentiments in the popular perception, as mentioned above.

SOCIAL POLICIES AND ELECTORAL PERFORMANCES

The general elections in the past, particularly the 2019 general elections and assembly elections in the state of Bihar since 2005 clearly establish the positive linkage between an effective social policy and favourable electoral outcomes for the ruling party or coalition. To explain this scientifically, analysis of 2019 elections needs to be done in the light of data from the previous elections. This is why the data from previous elections and state assembly elections have been included. The data on Bihar assembly elections would be all the more significant for this purpose as BJP and the ruling JDU in Bihar were coalition partners in the 2005 and 2010 elections, but the alliance faced a temporary break before the completion of the term. The 2015 election was contested by BJP-led NDA on the one side and JDU-Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) combine on the other. However, JDU and RJD parted ways and JDU is back as a member of NDA coalition and had harbored significant gains in the 2019 general elections, which was not the case in 2014 general elections.

Table 1 (below) shows the performance of BJP and other political parties with focus on votes polled and seats won in Bihar. While there are clear gains for the BJP and its alliance partners (JDU and LJP), but performance of RJD has declined both in terms of number of seats won and percentage of valid votes polled. RJD in fact could not win one seat in 2019 elections. The data in *Table 1* is significant in another aspect. As

stated above, JDU did not contest the 2014 election as alliance partner of BJP. The percentage of total votes polled (16%) and seats won (two) by JDU was much lower in 2014 compared to 2019 when the party had polled approximately 22 per cent of total valid votes polled and won 16 seats. While there was a kind of Modi wave in 2014 elections, but the dismal performance of JDU can also be attributed to the fact that in popular perceptions Bihar had started moving on the path of development because BJP and JDU had worked collectively towards that end since 2005. BJP, on the other hand had lower percentage of votes and seats in 2019, but this was also due to the fact that the party had given more space to its alliance partners, primarily to JDU and LJP. The latter owe their success, most significantly, to the alliance with BJP. BJP had managed to send an image of itself to the public as a party that has worked for the development of the nation and stood for the cause of the disadvantaged sections of the society, including the Muslim Women (on the issue of triple talaq) and economically backward among the upper castes (10 per cent reservation in government jobs and educational institutions). However, as can be seen in the *Table 1* the BJP improved its performance in 2019 elections from the 2014 elections at all-India level. In 2014, the party had polled 31.34 per cent of the total valid votes and had won 282 seats, whereas in 2019 its vote share was 37.38 per cent and won 303 seats. This is an indication that BJP was a major factor in 2019 elections and BJP's success in 2019 elections was largely due to (if not solely) the social sector reforms that the party/NDA had initiated and executed during the five years of its tenure between 2014 and early 2019. At this stage, it is pertinent to look at some of the social policies that NDA had introduced and the beneficiaries of those policies.

Table 1: Performance of various political parties in 2014 and 2019 general election ((www.eci.gov.in)

Sl. No	Political Party	% Vote polled		No of seats	
		2014	2019	2014	2019
1.	BJP (In India)	31.34	37.38	282	303
	BJP (In Bihar)	29.86	23.58	21	17
2.	JDU	16.04	21.8	2	16
3.	RJD	20.46	15.04	4	0
4.	LJP	6.50	7.88	6	6

That good governance was the driving force of the electoral success of the BJP-led coalition has been established in some of the early analysis of the polls. In a study by Dr Rituparna Bhattacharyya and Dr Venkat Pulla it was stated that “The 2019 Election mandate was undoubtedly a mandate bestowed by the poor for ‘good governance’. The country’s poor, who make up the majority of the population clearly realised the three positive Ns (Niyat-intention, Niti-policy and Neta-Leader).”(Bhattacharyya and Pulla, 2019:11) This was manifested in some of the social schemes of the NDA government at the union level after coming into power in 2014. Under *Ujjwala Yojana*, for instance, Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) connections were given in large numbers to the poor

households free of cost. This was a form of cleaner fuel energy and was largely meant for the poor women. It is estimated that nine out of 10 homes have LPG connection now, against five out of 10 homes in 2014 and 7, 23, 25, 948 LPG connections have been made covering 714 districts under the scheme.(Ibid)

While the scheme above was to provide clean energy to the poor household and women were concerned primarily the beneficiaries, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna was introduced as a scheme of financial inclusion of the poor. The official website claims that Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) is one of the biggest financial inclusion initiatives in the world. The scheme was announced by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 15th August 2014 and launched on 28 Aug 2014. Prime Minister described “the occasion as a festival to celebrate the liberation of the poor from a vicious cycleThe official website states “the most bank accounts opened in one week as a part of the financial inclusion campaign is 18,096,130 and was achieved by the Government of India from August 23 to 29, 2014”.(Ibid) Available statistics indicate that over 318 million bank accounts were opened under this scheme with deposit of Rs. 792 billion.(Bhattacharya et al. 2019) Thus, the nature of the schemes launched by the government makes it clear that the targeted beneficiaries of the scheme were the women and the poor. This was obvious that such schemes if properly publicised would lead to political mobilisation and awareness among the sections of the population that has reaped the benefits of the scheme and would also constitute the support base for the ruling dispensation. While the list of social policies would be long, but mention may here be made about the health scheme under the Ayushman Bharat Yojana. The scheme was launched on 23 September 2018. According the data available, 29,16,040 beneficiaries have been admitted in over 15,623 empanelled hospitals. This initiative has been appreciated by the Director General of the World Health Organisation. (For details see [https://www.pmjay.gov.in/.](https://www.pmjay.gov.in/))

As stated above, the list of social policies may be long, but such policies as mentioned above and others like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, among others, touched upon the basic needs and requirements of the target population, which constitutes the vast majority-the women, the poor, the old, the sick and the homeless. Also, the schemes were meant to help the beneficiaries to overcome their day to day problems related to hygiene, health-care, shelter and clean fuel energy, among others. Thus, it is understood that through these schemes the BJP could create support base that was broader than its earlier support base and this was due to the social sector reforms that was launched by the BJP-led NDA.

Similarly, if one looks at the electoral data of assembly elections in Bihar, the government’s focus on development seems to the major reason for the continuation of JDU-led

coalition/alliance in the state. And success on development front was seen to be the collective effort of BJP and JDU, as RJD carries a dismal image among the public on that front. As has been shown in the Table 2 below the performance of BJP and JDU both has remained near consistent over the past three (four) elections. However, in 2015, RJD managed to ride on the piggyback of JDU and won significant number of seats, after the latter broke up with the BJP briefly. Later, as the old alliance partners reunited, performance of RJD was back to dismal in terms of number of seats won. As has already been discussed in the sentences above, RJD could not manage to win one seat in the parliamentary elections of 2019.

Table 2: Performance of political parties in the assembly elections in Bihar

Political Parties	2005 Feb		2005 Oct		2010		2015	
	% Votes*	Seats	% Votes*	Seats	% Votes*	Seats	% Votes*	Seats
BJP	10.97 (24.91)	37 (103)	15.65 (35.64)	55 (102)	16.49 (39.56)	91 (102)	24.42 (37.48)	53 (157)
RJD	25.07 (28.35)	75 (215)	23.45 (32.63)	54 (175)	18.84 (27.31)	22 (168)	18.35 (44.35)	80 (101)
JDU	14.44 (26.41)	55 (138)	20.46 (37.14)	88 (139)	22.58 (38.77)	115 (141)	16.83 (40.65)	71 (101)

(Compilation based on data collected from Election Commission of India at <https://eci.gov.in/>)

*Numbers in brackets show the per cent votes polled for the seats contested #Numbers in bracket show the total number of seats contested by the party

This is clear that the public chose to support the party/coalition that had a better image and an image of carrying out development works and implementing schemes resulting in social sector reforms. Infrastructure development and improved conditions of law and order apart, the schemes such as Mukhya Mantri Cycle Yojana have made a difference. The scheme was launched in 2008 by the Bihar government to provide bicycles to all students studying in class nine, subject to the student having at least 75% attendance by the month of sept of the year. The scheme was launched as the sub-programme of Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA). Under the scheme an allocation of Rs. 2000 per student (now Rs. 2500) was made and the amount was directly transferred by the government to the beneficiary in the presence of panchayat members, villagers, guardians and students now ([http://www.educationbihar.gov.in/PSchemesPdf/08Jan20144344_2.pdf.](http://www.educationbihar.gov.in/PSchemesPdf/08Jan20144344_2.pdf)) Similarly, under the Mukhyamantri Poshak Yojna since 2009-10, the Government is providing Rs. 500 rupees for school uniform to all students who would be given admission in class III to V. The programme is for students taking admission in fully government, government aided and minority (govt. aided) schools. In addition, girl students of IX to XII are also getting Rs. 1000 for their uniform since financial year 2013-14.(Ibid.)

There are other schemes like provision for 35 % reservation for women in state government jobs in each category (SC/ST/EBCs/OBCs) and 50% reservation for women in their respective categories in local bodies.(See https://www.panchayatportals.gov.in/documents/4753624/22413246/RULE_Bihar%20Panchayat%20Election%20Rules%202006%20-%20Hindi.pdf) Other social welfare schemes of the government include hostels for OBC and EBC students (Karpoori Thakur Hostels for EBC students) (See <http://ekalyan.bih.nic.in/>) and Bihar Mahadalit Vikas Mission (BMVM) for the most deprived among the Dalits. The mission has been initiated in order to prioritise the all-round development of the castes under the Mahadalit category and their inclusion in mainstream society.

Thus, in the case of Bihar government too, it can be seen that social welfare schemes aim to reach out to the disadvantaged and the marginalised sections of the society, which constitute the majority and its support may be crucial to register an electoral victory. In addition, better law and order and infrastructure can appeal to the population and potential investors in general.

CONCLUSION

The analysis in the above paragraphs indicate that effective social policies are crucial for creating a support base that can actually vote for the party which is seen to be spearheading the policies. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) that was in power for two consecutive terms between 2004 and 2014 could not succeed in creating such support base because the alliance was caught amidst allegations of corruption, even as the then PM Manmohan Singh might have carried a clean image for himself. In addition, there certainly were issues linked to the leadership within the congress. In contrast, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi was seen as a strong and charismatic leader who could provide a clean administration in the interest of the people of India. In addition, the people also believed in the capability of the BJP-led NDA to provide a corruption-free and transparent administration. This combined with the effective social policies of the NDA during 2014-early 2019 created a support base which voted for the BJP and its alliance. This largely explains the return to power of the NDA-led ruling coalition.

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