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**JANATA REGIONALIZED:  
CONTRASTING BASES OF ELECTORAL SUPPORT IN BIHAR AND ORISSA**

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## Introduction

The reordering of India's electoral landscape during the 1990s has thrown up an array of analytical puzzles for psephologists and other observers of Indian politics. One subset of issues stems from the regionalization of party politics – or, more precisely, from the need to explain inter-state variations between the numerous state-level 'descendant' parties that broke away from national 'parent' organisations to form autonomous regional parties.

The centre-left Janata Party, which emerged following Indira Gandhi's declaration of National Emergency in the mid-70s, and ultimately succeeded Mrs Gandhi as part of a short-lived coalition government, has been in a state of perpetual disintegration from its very inception. But Janata's successor national party, the Janata Dal, began to fragment even more heavily than usual in the early 1990s: in addition to the usual ideological and factional disputes, the party was also becoming regionalised – composed of distinct state-level units. Ironically, this disintegration followed immediately upon the party's high point of historical significance: the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations on enhanced affirmative action for lower castes in central government employment (see chapter by Jaffrelot and Zerini-Brotel in this volume).

To be sure, many of the state-level 'mini-Janatas' – such as the Janata Dal (D), a Rajput-dominated faction of the early 1990s that, almost by coincidence, adopted the Janata franchise in Rajasthan at that moment – died out quickly. The JD-D was in coalition with the BJP when it took office in the state in 1990; by 1993 the JD-D (and most other subspecies of the Janata genus) had all but vanished from Rajasthan's electoral map.

But a number of other regional Janata offspring were more durable, emerging as autonomous regional parties, each operating primarily in one state though sometimes with small over-the-border bases in neighbouring jurisdictions.<sup>2</sup> Two of the more successful electoral battlegrounds for Janata's regional descendants have been Bihar and Orissa. Bihar's Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), under the leadership of Laloo Prasad Yadav (and the more recent remote-control chief ministership of his wife, Rabri Devi), has been more successful electorally than its sibling in Orissa. In Bihar, the Janata Dal (and regional successor) won the assembly elections in 1990, 1995 and 2000 – an outstanding achievement among India's recent chief ministers, for whom even completing a full term in office has become something of a challenge.

The Janata Dal (and successor) in Orissa, on the other hand, won the assembly elections in 1990, and again in 2000, but lost in 1995. This is still a much-better-than-average performance, and moreover, unlike its counterpart in Bihar (which has been mainly out of power at the national level), Orissa's Biju Janata Dal has,

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<sup>2</sup> The Congress party experienced a similar fate during the mid- to late-1990s, with offshoots cropping up in places like Maharashtra (where the local Congress already had a history of this kind of thing) and Tamil Nadu (where it did not).

thanks to strong electoral performances in *parliamentary* elections (as opposed to merely state *assembly* elections), managed to have itself included in both left-led and right-led national coalition governments following the electoral demise of PV Narasimha Rao's Congress government in 1996. In short, these are regionalised versions of Janata that both fall into the category of having enjoyed very high levels of electoral success, though in slightly different ways.

What *does* distinguish these two Janata descendants is the social profile of the electoral constituencies upon which each relies. Bihar's RJD is far more oriented towards OBC groups than is its counterpart in Orissa. This would not be surprising if the population-share of the OBC bloc, or the distribution among groups within the OBC category, were not so similar in these two states. And yet, despite these similarities, the pattern of OBC political mobilisation in Bihar and Orissa diverges so strongly. In Bihar, the OBCs, and especially the three dominant OBC castes (the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris) are politically mobilised and function as a power bloc in the state (backing not only the RJD, but other OBC-oriented parties like Samata as well). In Orissa, the OBCs, despite their numerical strength, have not been able to play as significant a role in electoral politics. While in Bihar, the RJD draws significant support from the OBCs in general, and the Yadavs in particular, the BJD in Orissa has its base largely among upper-caste voters, though with some notable exceptions, including support from the backward Khandayat community.

In the light of the foregoing set of factors, the objectives of this paper are to:

- (a) establish empirically the existence of these contrasting electoral support bases across these two states.

There is no official data from the Election Commission about the support base for political parties. The paper analyses data – collected through sample surveys in these two states during the last few Lok Sabha and Assembly elections<sup>3</sup> – that reveals the support base of different political parties, including the RJD (Bihar) and BJD (Orissa).

- (b) explain why, in the case of Orissa, the Janata-descended party found the non-OBC route so much more attractive (and effectual) than did its counterpart in Bihar.

The answer, the paper argues, lay in the contrasting pattern of social and political dominance in these two states. While caste has been (and remains) the most important politicised social cleavage in Bihar, the Orissa case finds people are more divided on regional lines than along

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<sup>3</sup> The National Election Study was coordinated from Delhi's Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.

any other large-scale cleavage. This helps to explain the divergent social bases in these two states at least as well as any claim of ideological differences between their leaders.

## **The State Context**

Bihar and Orissa, both geographically located in the Eastern part of India, share similar characteristics as measured by several indicators. If we compare these states in terms of their geographical areas, while Bihar ranked 8<sup>th</sup>, Orissa occupies the 9<sup>th</sup> position among all the Indian states<sup>4</sup>. (There is of course a great difference between these two states in terms of the size of population, and therefore population density as well.) While Bihar ranks second, next only to Uttar Pradesh, in terms of population, Orissa, with a lower growth rate of population occupies 10<sup>th</sup> position among 28 Indian states<sup>5</sup>. Further, in both Orissa and Bihar a large share of the population still lives in rural areas<sup>6</sup> and, again in both states, and the proportion people reliant on agriculture for their livelihoods is higher than the national average.<sup>7</sup>

In spite of agriculture being the mainstay of the economic life of large number of people, both in Bihar and Orissa, food grain production had been very low compared to the national average<sup>8</sup>. The same holds for industry: while the national per capita gross industrial out put during the period 1998-99 had been Rs.8037, the per capita gross industrial out put during that period in Bihar had been Rs.1,111 and in Orissa Rs.3063.

Literacy figures show large numbers of illiterates compared to the national average. As per the estimates of the 2001 census, the literacy rate in India has increased to 65.4 per cent in 2001 from 52.2 per cent in 1991. Orissa does not lag far behind the national average, with about 63.6 percent literacy. Bihar, with only 47.5 per cent literacy<sup>9</sup>, remains the most illiterate state in India.

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<sup>4</sup> The figures are from the Census of India 1991. The rank for Bihar refers to the undivided Bihar, which includes the present Jharkhand state as well.

<sup>5</sup> The lower population growth rate in Orissa (compared to Bihar) is to some extent the result of the higher infant mortality rate in Orissa compared to Bihar. As per the 1991 census, the infant mortality rate in India was 80 per 1000 infant compared to 69 per 1000 in Bihar and 124 per 1000 in Orissa.

<sup>6</sup> As per the 1991 Census, the percentage of India's population that was urban was 25.7 percent, compared to 11.1% in Bihar and 13.4 per cent in Orissa.

<sup>7</sup> As per the 1991 census estimates, 38.7 per cent of India's population is engaged in agricultural cultivation and nearly 26.1 percent work as agricultural labourers. In Bihar the comparable figures were 43.6 percent (for cultivation) and 31.6 percent work (agricultural labour). Similarly in Orissa, 44.3 percent of the population is engaged in cultivation and 28.7 percent work as agricultural labourers.

<sup>8</sup> As per the 1998-99 estimates, the national average of per capita food grain production was 205.5 kg. But in Bihar the per capita food grain production during that period had been only 130.2 kg. At 162.5 kg per capita, Orissa is doing slightly better on this score.

<sup>9</sup> Figures based on the estimates of the Census of India 2001.

In terms of economic development there is very little difference between these two states. While the national estimates for people living Below the Poverty Line (BPL) had been 36 percent, in Bihar the figure was 55 per cent, the worst performance among India's states. Orissa is next on the league table, with 48.6 per cent of its people living in poverty.<sup>10</sup>

In Bihar, traditional upper caste groups – Brahmins, Bhumihars, and Rajputs –were numerically very small. As per the 1931 census estimates, the Brahmins constitute 4.7 percent of the population, with the Rajputs at 4.2 percent and the Bhumihars at 2.9 percent. With 1.2 per cent of the population represented by the Kayasthas, the traditionally literate caste of local officialdom, these four upper castes together account for 13 percent of Bihar's population. On this small social base, had been built a coalition, that long dominated the social and political life of the state, creating and controlling its institutions.

A large numbers of communities in Bihar are categorised as Other Backward Castes (OBCs), but dominant among them are the Yadavs, the Koeris and the Kurmis. These are not only numerically larger caste groups, but also upwardly mobile, socially and economically. The census estimates of 1931 put the Yadavs at 11 percent of the population, the largest single caste in terms of numerical strength. The Koeris constituted 4.1 percent, and the Kurmis 3.6 percent, of Bihar's population. While people belonging to these three OBC castes have traditionally been agriculturists, there has in recent decades been some diversification in their occupational pattern. Some of them moved upward in the economic ladder. Some, with the help of modern education, entered the service sector. Besides these three OBC communities there are large numbers of other OBCs. In total the OBCs constitute nearly 32 percent of the state's population, but have been subjected to social, educational and economical deprivation.

Dalits constitute 14.6 percent of Bihar's population and the adivasis/tribals 7.7 percent.<sup>11</sup>

In Orissa, the upper-caste category comprises mainly Brahmins, Karnas and Kshayatriyas. A large number of castes belong to the OBC category. Among the most prominent, numerically large and socially and educationally upwardly mobile are the Khandayats. Dalits account for 16.2 per cent of the population. Prominent among Dalit castes are the Pano, Dhoba and Chamar. As per the 1991 census estimates, adivasis, including the Gond, the Santhal, the Munda and the Kandha, are 22.2 per cent of the state's population.

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<sup>10</sup> Estimates for the poverty ratio are based on the sample survey data on consumption expenditure conducted by the National Sample Survey (NSS).

<sup>11</sup> Figures based on the 1991 Census estimates.

Though the Brahmins and the Karnas are numerically not very large<sup>12</sup>, they had been politically dominant in Orissa. This was mentioned by F.G. Bailey during the mid-1950's, but still holds true. They are not only superior to all other castes, but also dominate the power structure and bureaucracy of the state. Most of Orissa's influential politicians have been from either the Brahmin or Karna caste. The political dominance of the Brahmins and the Karnas in Orissa is perpetuated through the use of the state bureaucracy, as large portion of which is composed of members from these castes.

The Khandayats constitute numerically the largest caste group in Orissa<sup>13</sup>, but has not traditionally held a dominant position in the politics of Orissa. It is precisely because Khandayats are not a homogeneous or even well-integrated group, and because they had lagged far behind the upper castes socio economically.

Khandayats are divided among themselves in terms of culture and land disputes. Those Khandayats who move up the social ladder by educational attainment or occupational diversification get themselves assimilated with the Karnas while those who for some reason move down the social ladder identify themselves with the Chasa, an OBC caste somewhat lower down the social hierarchy.

### **The Political Context**

If we look at the elections held in the states of Bihar and Orissa since independence, we find some strange similarities. In both states twelve assembly elections have been held and, in more or less the same years. Since the assembly elections held in the year 1980, all the subsequent assembly elections have been held at regular intervals, and that too only after the assembly had completed its full term<sup>14</sup>. Most of the assembly elections have been held only when the assembly has completed its full term of five years. There have been very little period when these states have been placed under President's rule. These are possibly the only two major Indian states of which these statements would be true. They furnish an indication of the uncommon stability of politics in Bihar and Orissa. At the same time there has been a rise in the political graph of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in both these states.

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<sup>12</sup> As per the estimates of the Census of India, 1931, Brahmins constitute 5.74 per cent and Karnas nearly 1.48 per cent of Orissa's population. The Rajputs constitute a very small proportion (0.39 percent) of the state's population. All three upper castes combined constitute nearly 7.61 percent Orissa's people.

<sup>13</sup> As per the 1931 census estimates, the Khandayats constitutes nearly 10.29 per cent of Orissa's population, the single largest caste. There are 7.96 per cent Chasa who are also considered Khandayats, but are socially and educationally backward compared to the Khandayats. Kultas constitute nearly 1.67 per cent of population in Orissa. These three OBC castes are the cultivating castes, and are socially, educationally and economically more upwardly mobile compared to other OBCs such as the Bania (0.39 percent), Barahi (0.57 percent), Bhandari (1.22 percent), Darji (0.02 percent), Gaur (9.11 percent), Gudia (1.57 percent), Kewat (2.72 percent), Kamar (1.00 percent), Kumbhar (1.40 percent), Kurmi (0.97 percent), Mali (0.96 percent), Teli (3.16 percent), Tanti (1.68 percent).

<sup>14</sup> As per the constitutional provisions the term of the assembly is five years. Politics in Bihar and Orissa in the recent past had been stable. In contrast, there had been a very high degree of instability in UP, where assembly elections were held in 1989, 1991, 1993 and 1996, in each case well before the assembly completed its full term of five years.

## **Historical Perspective**

This section of the paper focuses on the electoral performance of different political parties in Bihar and Orissa during last fifty years. The purpose is to give an overview of the electoral history of the state. The material is broken into two main parts – one analysing party performance in Lok Sabha (parliamentary) elections; the other, party performance in various state-assembly elections.

If we look at the overall performance of political parties in the Lok Sabha elections and the assembly elections held in the two states, one could reasonably conclude that the elections held before 1985 were dominated by the Congress except for the 1977 Lok Sabha and assembly elections, when the Janata party swept the polls not only in these two states, but in most of the other states of North India. This particular year could be an exception, but the dominance of Congress did prevail till the year 1985 in Bihar but not in Orissa.

### ***The Lok Sabha Elections***

In Lok Sabha elections in Bihar, the dominance of the Congress was more or less absolute prior to the 1984 elections (with, again, the exception of the 1977 Lok Sabha election). Before then, Congress always managed a majority of the seats, and secured no less than (and usually substantially more than) 35 per cent of the popular vote. Since the 1989 elections, when the Congress won only 4 Lok Sabha seats from the state and polled 28.1 per cent of the vote, the Congress in Bihar has witnessed even further decline. The Congress contested the next two Lok Sabha elections (in 1991 and 1996) in Bihar without electoral allies and its vote shrank to only 13 per cent in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections. It was during the 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha elections that the Congress entered into an alliance with the RJD. Though the Congress managed to win 5 and 4 seats respectively in these elections, its vote share went down to as low as 7.3 and 8.8 per cent, respectively. The political vacuum created by the Congress was filled largely by the RJD, the BJP and the Samata party, which in 1995 broke away from the Laloo-dominated Bihar-unit of the Janata Dal. The Congress had difficulty maintaining its traditional base among the upper castes, the Dalits and the Muslims. While the upper-caste voters moved towards the BJP, an increasing proportion of Dalits and the Muslims were lending their support to the RJD. The Samata party drew support from the two dominant backward castes the Kurmis and the Koeris. (Further details of this pattern will be discussed with the aid of survey data in a subsequent section.)

The Lok Sabha elections held in Orissa contrast sharply with those in Bihar. The decline of the Congress could be noticed in Bihar since the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, but the Congress party had never been a

dominant party in Orissa. The Gantantra Parishad (GP) had a very strong presence in Orissa until 1962, and during the two subsequent Lok Sabha elections (1967 and 1971) the Swatantra Party (SWA) had put up a strong challenge to the Congress party. It was during the 1967 Lok Sabha elections that the SWA won eight Lok Sabha seats, two seats more than Congress, and polled 30.9 percent of the vote. The emergence of the Congress as a dominant political force in Orissa was late by the standards of most Indian states. It was only in 1980 that the Congress began to take charge. In the 1980 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress won all 21 of the state's parliamentary seats and polled 56.1 per cent of the vote. Though it suffered a setback during the 1989 Lok Sabha elections, when the Janata Dal won 16 Lok Sabha seats from the state, the Congress in Orissa has remained a major political force in the state, which is more than can be said for its counterpart in Bihar. While the Congress did not win large numbers of seats during the 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha elections, it obtained 41 per cent and 36.9 percent vote shares during these two Lok Sabha elections, respectively. This was a period during which the BJP, leading the coalition government in New Delhi, experienced a sudden surge in its standing within Orissa politics. During the 1998 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP polled 21.2 per cent of the vote and won seven Lok Sabha seats. In 1999, it improved its tally further to nine Lok Sabha seats backed by 24.6 percent of the popular vote.

In terms of the structural features of their respective state-level party system, we can observe a significant point of variation. In Orissa the Congress still remains a dominant political force, and is opposed by the BJD in alliance with the BJP. In Bihar, the Congress is no longer looked upon as a party that could conceivably capture political power. It is the RJD, which is the central factor in state politics in Bihar, opposed by the BJP-Samata alliance.



**Table 1: Bihar: Summary of Lok Sabha Election Results (1952-99)**

Year	Total Seats	Turn out	INC		RJD(1998-99) JD (1989-96) JNP (1977-84) PSP (1952-71)		BJP BJS (1952-71)		State Party		
			Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Party	Seats	Vote
1952	55	40.5	45	45.8	-	3.4	-	0.4	SOC	3	21.3
1957	53	42.9	41	44.5	2	21.6	-	0.1	JKD	6	7.5
1962	53	47.0	39	43.9	2	12.7	-	2.3	SWA	7	18.2
1967	53	51.5	34	34.8	1	7.4	1	11.1	SSP	7	17.8
1971	53	49.0	39	40.1	-	1.1	2	12.1	CPI	5	9.9
1977	54	60.8	-	22.9	52	65.0	-	-	CPI	-	5.6
1980	54	51.9	30	36.4	8	23.9	-	-	JNPS	5	16.6
1984	54	58.8	48	51.8	1	6.7	-	6.9	CPI	2	8.2
1989	54	60.7	4	28.1	31	36.4	9	13.0	CPI	4	7.9
1991	54	60.4	1	24.2	33	34.1	5	15.9	CPI	8	7.6
1996	54	59.5	2	13.0	22	31.9	18	20.5	SMP	6	14.5
1998	54	64.6	5	7.3	17	26.6	20	24.0	SMP	10	15.7
1999	54	61.5	4	8.8	7	28.3	23	23.0	JD (U)	18	20.8

*Note:* Remaining seats and vote have gone to either other minor parties or the independents.

*Source:* CSDS Data Unit

**Table 2: Orissa: Summary of Lok Sabha Election Results (1952-99)**

Year	Total Seats	Turnout	INC		BJD (1998-99) JD (1989-96) JNP (1977-84) PSP (1957-71) KMPP (1952)		CPI (1989-99) SSP (1967-84) SOC (1952-62)		State Party		
			Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Party	Seats	Vote
1952	20	35.4	11	42.5	-	1.4	1	15.4	GP	5	26.2
1957	20	36.1	7	40.0	2	15.4	-	-	GP	7	29.1
1962	20	23.6	14	55.5	1	15.5	1	2.7	GP	4	17.4
1967	20	43.7	6	33.3	4	16.0	1	4.5	SWA	8	30.9
1971	20	43.2	15	38.5	-	6.9	-	1.8	SWA	3	15.9
1977	21	44.3	4	38.2	15	51.8	-	-	CPM	1	2.0
1980	21	46.3	20	56.1	-	14.1	-	-	JNPS	1	19.6
1984	21	56.3	20	57.5	1	32.0	-	-	CPM	-	1.8
1989	21	59.3	3	38.4	16	49.5	1	3.6	CPM	1	3.0
1991	21	53.8	13	44.1	6	34.6	1	3.1	CPM	1	2.1
1996	21	59.2	16	44.9	4	30.1	--	0.3	SMP	1	1.6
1998	21	58.0	5	41.0	9	27.5	--	1.0	BJP	7	21.2
1999	21	55.6	2	36.9	10	33.0	--	1.1	BJP	9	24.6

*Note:* Remaining seats and vote have gone to either other minor parties or the independents.

*Source:* CSDS Data Unit

### *The Vidhan Sabha Elections*

The Vidhan Sabha elections held in Bihar and Orissa show several dissimilarities between the two states.

In Bihar, the Congress party had been a dominant force in most of the Vidhan Sabha elections held prior to 1985, with the exception of the 1977 Vidhan Sabha election when Congress won only 57 Vidhan Sabha seats and polled just 23.6 percent vote. The Congress's decline in Bihar's state politics begun with the 1990 Vidhan Sabha elections, when it managed to win only 71 Vidhan Sabha seats. The Vidhan Sabha elections of 1995 and 2000 witnessed further decline of the Congress party as the vote share for the party plummeted to only 11.1 per cent.

**Table 3: Bihar: Summary of Vidhan Sabha Elections (1952-2000)**

Year	Total Seats	Turn Out	INC		JNP (1977-85) SWA (1962-72)		BJP BJS (1952-72)		State Party I			State Party II		
			Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Party	Seats	Vote	Party	Seats	Vote
1952	330	39.7	240	41.4	-	-	-	1.2	JKD	33	8.0	SOC	23	18.1
1957	318	40.6	210	42.1	-	-	-	1.2	JKD	30	6.9	PSP	31	16.0
1962	318	47.0	185	41.4	50	17.3	3	2.8	PSP	29	14.2	JKD	20	4.4
1967	318	51.5	128	33.1	3	2.3	26	10.4	SSP	68	17.6	CPI	24	6.9
1969	318	52.8	118	30.5	3	0.9	34	15.6	SSP	52	13.7	CPI	25	10.1
1972	318	52.8	168	33.1	1	0.7	25	11.7	CPI	35	6.9	SOC	33	16.4
1977	324	50.5	57	23.6	214	42.7	-	-	CPI	21	7.0	CPM	4	0.9
1980	324	57.3	169	34.2	13	7.4	21	8.4	JNP SC	42	15.5	CPI	23	9.1
1985	324	56.3	196	39.3	13	7.2	16	7.5	LKD	46	14.7	CPI	12	8.9
1990	324	62.0	71	24.7	122	25.7	39	11.6	CPI	23	6.6	JMM	19	3.1
1995	324	61.8	29	16.4	166	27.9	41	12.9	CPI	26	4.8	JMM	10	2.3
2000	324	62.6	24	11.1	124	28.2	66	14.5	SMP	34	8.8	JD(U )	21	6.4

*Note:* Remaining seats and vote have gone to either other minor parties or the independents.

*Source:* CSDS Data Unit

**Table 4: Orissa: Summary of Vidhan Sabha Election Results (1952-2000)**

Year	Total Seats	Turn Out	INC		BJD (2000) JD (1990-95) JNP (1977-85) SWA (1967-74)		CPI		State party I		State Party II			
			Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Party	Seats	Vote	Party	Seats	Vote
1952	140	33.7	67	37.9	-	-	7	5.6	GP	31	20.5	SOC	10	11.8
1957	140	34.3	56	38.3	-	-	9	8.4	GP	51	28.7	PSP	11	10.4
1961	140	36.6	82	43.3	-	-	4	8.0	GP	37	22.0	PSP	10	11.0
1967	140	44.0	31	30.6	49	22.6	7	5.3	JAC	26	13.5	PSP	21	12.3
1971	140	43.3	51	28.2	36	17.4	4	4.8	UTC	33	24.0	PSP	4	6.1
1974	147	51.7	69	37.4	21	12.1	7	4.9	UTC	35	26.4	CPM	3	1.2
1977	147	41.7	26	31.0	110	49.2	1	3.6	CPM	1	0.9	-	-	-
1980	147	47.1	118	47.8	3	4.1	4	5.1	JNP SC	13	19.5	INCUB	2	7.0
1985	147	52.3	117	51.1	21	30.6	1	3.3	BJP	1	2.6	-	-	-
1990	147	56.6	10	29.8	123	53.7	5	3.0	BJP	2	3.6	CPM	1	0.8
1995	147	73.6	82	39.4	46	35.2	--	1.7	BJP	9	7.9	JMM	4	2.0
2000	147	59.1	26	33.8	68	29.4	1	1.2	BJP	38	18.2	JMM	3	2.1

*Note:* Remaining seats and vote have gone to either other minor parties or the independents.

*Source:* CSDS Data Unit

The results of the Vidhan Sabha elections in Orissa present a rather different picture. With the exception of the 1961 Vidhan Sabha election, when the Congress won a majority of 82 seats and polled 43.3 percent of the vote, the party has not dominated Vidhan Sabha elections. In all other Vidhan Sabha elections held prior to 1980, the Congress could not get a majority. The 1980 Vidhan Sabha election, held concurrently with the parliamentary elections that swept Mrs Gandhi back to power, marked the emergence of the Congress as an important political force in the state. During the 1980 Vidhan Sabha elections, the Congress party won 118

seats and polled 47.8 percent of the vote. Though during the 1985 Vidhan Sabha elections, the Congress party dropped one seat from its 1980s tally, the party's vote share increased to 51.1 per cent. The 1990 Vidhan Sabha election saw the Congress displaced by the Janata Dal, but it re-emerged as a political force during the 1995 Vidhan Sabha election when it won 82 seats and polled 39.4 per cent of the vote.

### **Contrasting support bases of political parties**

Ideally, we could analyse, over two or three decades, the changing support profiles of different political parties in Bihar and Orissa. Unfortunately, there is no authentic survey data for elections held in the late 1980s to help us analyse the support base of political parties. In the discussion that follows, I have tried to analyse the changing support bases of political parties during the 1990s. In order to analyse the voting behaviour (party choice) of various social groups in Bihar, I have used the survey data for the Lok Sabha elections held in 1996, 1998 and 1999 and also the data for the assembly election survey held in 2000. The data for 1991, supplied based on the recollections of those surveyed subsequently, broadens the time horizon considerably.

Similarly, for Orissa I have analysed the survey data for the Lok Sabha elections held in 1996, 1998 and 1999 and also the data from a special survey conducted in Orissa after the state assembly elections held in 2000. The figures for 1995 are, like the 1991 figures for the parliamentary elections, based on the survey respondents' recollections.

The survey data for elections held in different states after the year 1990 have been very useful in indicating the changes taking place in Indian politics after the implementation of the Mandal Commission report, which recommended reservations in central government jobs for the people belonging to the other backward castes (OBC). This was to complement existing provisions in several states that 'reserved' a proportion of state government jobs for people belonging to groups officially classified as deserving the OBC label. It was the reservation in central government jobs for OBCs that was introduced by the implementation of the Mandal Commission report. The long-term consequence of this political act has been a change in the nature of politics, especially in the states of north India. In this context it would be useful to analyse the changes underway in Bihar and Orissa.

Soon after the Central Government announced the implementation of the Mandal Commission report recommending reservations for OBCs in central government jobs, there were large-scale protests, including those led by upper-caste student associations, whose members' employment prospects appeared likely to deteriorate due to the projected reduction of the general ('merit') pool of open recruitment for government

posts. To counter the anti Mandal agitations, the castes likely to benefit from the new reservation policy mobilised in support of implementing the Mandal Commission report. This process of mobilisation and counter-mobilisation continued for more than a year and subsided only when the Supreme Court ruled that reserved posts for OBCs, based on the recommendations of the Mandal Commission report (with some modifications), could proceed.

While no political party openly opposed the policy of reservations, it was widely believed that the pro-reservation movement was supported by the Janata Dal, the ruling party, and the anti-Mandal movement was backed by the BJP. The implementation of the Mandal Commission report, and its fallout, led to the polarisation of society, for or against Mandal. It is widely believed that this sharp polarisation – into these multi-caste categories of ‘forward’ and ‘backward’ – subsequently narrowed (though perhaps consolidated as well) the support bases of political parties. While over the years the BJP has become a very popular choice of upper caste voters, the Janata Dal and its splinters receive extensive support from voters belonging to the OBC group. The decline of the Congress in Bihar, then, stems from its abandonment by the full spectrum of society – upper castes, OBCs, Dalits, and even Muslims. In Orissa the Congress has been able to retain its support base among the voters belonging to the OBC group (despite being up against a Janata Dal-descended regional party, the BJD), as well as support among Dalits and Adivasis. The upper castes have been dividing their votes between the BJD and the BJP in Orissa. In this section, I would like to analyse the changing pattern of political parties’ support bases.

### ***Bihar***

If we look at the voting pattern of people belonging to different castes during the 1990s, we find that in Bihar there is a sharp polarisation of the voters belonging to different castes. This is particularly true of people belonging to the OBCs.

Though there are hundreds of castes in Bihar, for the purposes of this analysis we have classified them into eight broad groups. All four of the main upper castes (Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumihars and Kayasthas) have been clubbed together as there is no sharp differentiation among their individual voting patterns. All OBC groups have been classified into either Upper OBC or Lower OBC, in addition to keeping the numerically strong Yadavs (the single largest caste in terms of population share) as a separate category. Two other backward castes from the OBC category, the Kurmis and the Koeris, have been clubbed together as preliminary findings suggested very little differentiation in the voting pattern of these two castes. Finally, all the scheduled castes and tribes have been clubbed into broad categories of Dalits and adivasis.

The results of the elections held in the 1980s suggests that the Congress had a very strong presence in the state till the end of the 1980s, and that it was only during the beginning of the 1990s the Congress began seriously to decline. There is no survey data for the elections held before the 1990s, but the data from table suggests that there have been large-scale movements of the upper caste voters away from the Congress, with a good number of these contributing to the BJP's increased popularity (it has also been helped by its alliance with Samata, which attracts the other end of the spectrum).

The Yadavs comprise nearly 11-12 percent of the state population and belong to the upper layer of the OBCs (though they are given their own category in this analysis). It was obvious that the Yadavs would be the biggest gainer from the new reservation policy; and it was nearly as likely that the Janata Dal/RJD would receive thunderous support from Yadav voters. If we look at the voting pattern of the people belonging to the caste, we would notice that the Yadavs in Bihar are sharply polarised in favour of the Janata Dal during the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, and for the RJD since the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. During the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the RJD contested the election in alliance with the Congress and so in constituencies where Congress was contesting the elections, large numbers of Yadavs voted for the Congress since there was no candidate from the RJD. The polarisation of the Yadavs in favour of the RJD is to some extent higher than the support for the BJP-Samata alliance among the upper castes.

Though the Kurmis and the Koeris are numerically not very large, compared to other OBCs, they are educationally and economically much better off. As such they constitute the upper layer of the OBC group. Since these two OBC castes have much better access to higher education compared to other OBC castes, they were looked upon to be the major beneficiaries of the new policy of reservation. Though the Janata Dal did get support from among the Kurmis and the Koeris during the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, soon after the formation of the Samata party in 1995 a majority of Kurmis and the Koeris voted for the BJP-Samata alliance. Though these two castes were the main beneficiaries of the new reservation policy, the rivalry of these two castes with the Yadavs had been so deep-rooted that they voted for the party, which put up a challenge to the Yadav-dominated RJD. The Koeris and Kurmis support the BJP-Samata alliance have played an important role in the electoral victory of the alliance during the last few elections.

The category of Other OBCs comprises of those backward caste, which are educationally and economically not as well off as the Yadavs and the Kurmis, but still have some education and are economically slightly better off than the rest of the OBCs. They do not seem to be polarised in favour of any party. Their support is divided between the BJP-Samata and the RJD. If we look at the voting pattern of the people belonging to the



lower OBC sections, we find that there is a slight tilt in favour of the BJP-Samata alliance, though the polarisation is not to the extent of the Yadavs' favouring of the RJD.

While the Muslim vote is sharply tilted towards the RJD, there is a three-way division of the Dalit vote between the RJD, the BJP-Samata alliance and the Congress. Yet, because the Congress contested the last two Lok Sabha elections in alliance with the RJD, some proportion of the Dalit vote must also be assigned to the RJD.

The OBCs constitute a big section of the Bihar population. Though obviously not all OBCs have seen such spectacular rise in their political fortunes, the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris have come to play a very important role in state politics. The BJP-Samata alliance and the RJD have been the two main contenders for political power in Bihar, and these two parties/alliances have pushed back the Congress and Left parties into political oblivion in the state. The downfall of the political graph of the Congress first began with its desertion by the three main OBC castes, and then finally by the upper castes. The absolute dominance of Janata Dal in the early 1990 is credited to all these three OBC castes voting in favour of the Janata Dal. The resentful Kurmis and the Koeris deserted the Janata Dal and have supported the Samata Party since 1995, resulting in the emergence of the BJP-Samata alliance as a serious force in Bihar since then.

**Table 7: Bihar: Voting pattern of Different castes (1991-2000)**

Caste Category	Congress					BJP+Samata					Janata Dal/ RJD				
	1991	1996	1998	1999	2000	1991	1996	1998	1999	2000	1991	1996	1998	1999	2000
<b>Upper caste</b>	32	10	9	8	15	25	60	78	77	61	14	29	12	2	11
<b>Yadav</b>	8	2	8	36	2	4	16	18	22	9	88	81	66	39	80
<b>Kurmi+ Koeri</b>	28	5	24	8	6	40	74	56	71	58	28	18	18	10	25
<b>Other Back ward Castes</b>	32	3	--	7	10	26	41	23	52	43	32	50	23	31	32
<b>Lower OBC</b>	29	11	8	4	4	20	42	57	63	45	37	36	12	11	27
<b>Dalit</b>	19	19	14	17	9	2	25	25	47	39	32	31	24	26	33
<b>Adivasi</b>	27	24	70	--	--	--	34	8	--	--	8	28	--	--	--
<b>Muslims</b>	29	23	15	34	7	--	6	4	13	8	40	69	60	48	61

*Source: National Election Study 1996 (NES'96), sample size 880, National Election Study 1998 (NES'98), sample size 833, National Election Study 1999 (NES'99), sample size 881. Bihar Assembly Election 2000, sample size 2225. Figures for the 1991 election are based on recall.*

## *Orissa*

This analysis classifies people groups together a large set of caste/communities into six broad categories. The three most important upper castes (the Brahmins, Karnas and Kshatriyas) have been clubbed together into the upper caste group. The Khandayats are numerically the biggest group among all OBCs in Orissa. With access to modern education and government jobs, they have become economically well off and are the most upwardly mobile among all other OBC castes. The Khandayats have been treated as a separate category in recognition of the important role they have been playing in the politics of the state in recent years. All other castes belonging to the OBCs have been clubbed into one broad group, other OBC. There is very little differentiation among the people belonging to various lower castes and so they have been grouped as the Dalits. Similarly all the people belonging to different tribal communities have been clubbed as one political group, Adivasi. Muslims constitute a very tiny section of the population in Orissa, but for analysis, they have been treated as a separate social category.

If we look at the voting pattern of different sections of people in Orissa, we find that the upper castes begin seriously departing the Congress following the 1996 Lok Sabha elections. A large number of upper castes moved to the Janata Dal even during the 1995 Vidhan Sabha elections, a trend which continued in the polls the following year. Then the Janata Dal split, both in Bihar and in Orissa. While in Bihar the newly formed RJD inherited a strong support base among the OBCs, mainly because it was the successor to the Janata Dal, in Orissa the newly formed BJD drew huge support from the upper castes and could not get backing from OBC voters. During the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, nearly 65 percent of the upper caste voters voted for the BJD and another 15 percent voted for the BJP. Only 10 percent of the upper castes voted in favour of the Congress during that election. While in Bihar the shift among the upper caste voters was from Congress to the BJP, or its alliance partner the Samata Party, in Orissa the shift among upper caste voters has been from the Congress to the BJD.

The Khandayats constitute the upper section of Orissa's OBCs. They are numerically the largest and also the most upwardly mobile caste – socially, politically and economically. Because of their numerical strength and upward mobility, they constitute an important political factor in the state. Until the 1996 Lok Sabha elections Khandayats had voted for the Congress in large numbers, but a shift occurred in the 1998 Lok Sabha election – bringing some of them into the BJD camp. This shift is also uneven, and volatile. Nearly 58 percent of the Khandayats voted for the BJD during the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, but during the assembly elections held in

2000, only 35 percent voted for the BJD. During this assembly election, nearly 27 percent of the Khandayats voted for the Congress. The BJP has not been a popular choice among the Khandayats during the last decade of elections in Orissa. The nub of the contrast between the states of Bihar and Orissa, then, is that in the post-Mandal era the Yadavs of Bihar voted en block for the RJD, their closest equivalents, the Khandayats in Orissa, are not so sharply polarised in favour of any particular political party, or against any other.

During the last decade in Bihar, the Yadavs have mobilised to put up a challenge to the political dominance of the numerically small, but traditionally dominant, upper castes. In Orissa, by contrast, the Khandayats have not mobilised to oppose the political dominance of the upper castes. They have aligned with one or the other upper caste for their share in political power.

Apart from Khandayats, a large number of backward castes in Orissa have been clubbed together as the OBCs. These are groups that, compared to the Khandayats, are educationally and economically backward. Voter surveys indicate that OBCs do not overwhelmingly prefer one political party; that different subgroups among them have been voting for different political parties from one election to the next.

Throughout the 1990s, the popularity of the Janata Dal in Orissa was very low among OBC voters, but there has been a shift towards the BJD since the 1999 Lok Sabha elections. The data suggest that, except for the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP has never been a popular choice of the OBC voters in Orissa. The contrast, which could be drawn between Bihar and Orissa in terms of the OBC voters is as follows. In Bihar OBCs voted for the Janata Dal in large numbers until the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, though after the initial formation of the RJD there has been a declining support for the RJD among the OBC voters. In Orissa, some of the OBC voters voted for the Janata Dal until the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, but after the formation of the BJD in 1998, the popularity of the BJD among the OBC voters has increased somewhat.

If we look at the voting pattern of the Dalits in Orissa, we find that the Congress had been the party of choice through the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. Nearly 80 percent of the Dalits had voted for the Congress up until then. Since the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, however, there is a shift in the Dalit voters towards the BJD. Nearly 35 percent of the Dalit voters voted for the BJD during the 2000 assembly elections in Orissa. The popularity of the BJP has been very low among the Dalits in Orissa. The contrast which could be drawn between the Dalit voter of Bihar and Orissa is that while the Dalits in Orissa had voted for the Congress in large numbers through the 1998 Lok Sabha elections (and even during the 2000 assembly election a majority of them voted for the Congress), in Bihar there is almost no support for the Congress among Dalits. The Dalit vote in Bihar is severely divided between the RJD, the Janata Dal and the BJP-Samata alliance; in Orissa, there is some shift among the Dalit voters towards the BJD.

The data from the survey suggest that the adivasis had constituted a vote bank for the Congress party in most of elections held in Orissa during the 1990s. Over the years there has been a movement of Adivasi voters away from the Congress and towards the BJP, though not exclusively. The BJD has no popularity among Adivasi voters in Orissa. One similarity which could be drawn between Bihar and Orissa is that in both these states, neither the RJD nor the BJD has been the choice of Adivasi voters: in Bihar the JMM has been the choice of Adivasi voters, while in Orissa Congress remains top choice.

Muslims do not constitute a sizeable population in Orissa and so have very little influence in the politics of the state. The results of the survey do, however, indicate that during the last decade of Lok Sabha and Assembly elections they have largely supported the Congress.

**Table 8:Orissa: Voting pattern of Different Castes (1995-2000)**

Caste Category	Congress					BJP					Janata Dal/ BJD				
	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000
<b>Upper caste</b>	48	43	22	10	17	9	27	15	15	20	31	30	47	65	54
<b>Khandayat</b>	46	42	38	16	27	7	25	13	16	17	32	33	38	58	35
<b>Other Back ward Castes</b>	59	37	43	31	24	11	44	5	3	20	22	15	21	60	45
<b>Dalit</b>	76	79	81	44	39	6	10	4	5	15	11	10	6	21	35
<b>Adivasi</b>	69	34	57	42	37	12	2	17	28	31	6	15	2	3	15
<b>Muslims</b>	72	99	99	99	44	5	--	--	--	7	23	--	--	--	38

*Source: National Election Study 1996 (NES'96), sample size 373, National Election Study 1998 (NES'98), sample size 833, National Election Study 1999 (NES'99), sample size 365. Orissa Assembly Election 2000, sample size 3660. Figures for the 1995 election are based on recall.*

## **The Mobilisation Pattern: Divergent Trends**

From the analysis of the survey data with regard to the voting patterns of different castes in Bihar and Orissa, it is clear that the two most dominant political parties, the RJD in Bihar and the BJD in Orissa, though offspring of the same parent political party, the Janata Dal, have entirely different support bases in their respective states. While the RJD in Bihar has a very strong presence among the dominant OBC, the Yadavs, the BJD does not seem to be that popular among the Khandayats, the dominant OBC in Orissa. This section of the paper explores why the RJD and BJD differ so markedly in this respect. It is believed that the Yadavs have mobilised in favour of the RJD after the implementation of the new reservation policy. The question is, why Khandayats or the OBC in general could not mobilise in support of the BJD in Orissa? The answer lies in the pattern of social and political mobilisation of different castes in Bihar and Orissa, a major focus of the paper's explanatory framework.

### ***Pattern of social dominance:***

The process of political mobilisation and empowerment of the OBCs, which manifested itself so vividly after the adoption of the Mandal Commission report, had not of course sprung from nowhere. Though it came to political fruition in the 1990s, movements among politicised subaltern identities date back to the pre-independence period. With nearly 80 per cent of the population depending upon agriculture for its livelihood, agriculture has remained the key element in Bihar's economy.

But agricultural land remained largely monopolised by the three most elite upper castes – the Rajputs, Bhumihars and Brahmins. The upper layer of the backward castes – namely, the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris – possessed very little agricultural land. With few exceptions, other lower castes were also overwhelmingly landless. During the pre-independence period, the state witnessed strong movements for land reform, which continued in post-independence politics. The movement was led by leaders of the Kisan Sabha (formed in 1920), like Swami Bidyanand, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati and Karyanand Sharma. The movement was strong mainly in the north and central regions of Bihar. 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 upper castes, who owned land and wielded social and political power, the agrarian reform movements inevitably got directed against them. Caste labels became unavoidable.

On the other hand, the backbone of the movement was formed mainly by those backward castes that, uncharacteristically, did own some land. They could see a direct benefit from such reforms. Though land reform failed to take off, some redistribution of land did take place as a result of the

Bhoodan movement led by Acharya Vinoba Bhave, which resulted in breaking the hold of the upper castes over agricultural land to at least some extent.

Now with the possession of agricultural land and diversification of their occupational patterns, these backward castes were able to improve their economic status and emerged as a reasonably prosperous new agrarian class, sometimes derisively known as Kulaks. These bullock capitalists, to employ the Rudolphs' phrase,<sup>15</sup> started to play an important role in Bihar's social and political spheres.

This assertiveness kept on growing in some form or other with various social and political movements, but took on a particularly intense form in the mid-1970s during the democratic peoples' movement led by Jaiprakash Narayan. The JP Movement fought against the national Emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975 under the pretext of internal disturbances. The effects on the Congress's popularity varied from state to state. But because the Congress generally had an upper-caste profile, the anti-Emergency movement, which had become an anti-Congress electoral 'wave' in some areas, transformed once more, from an anti-Congress wave to something, which drew in OBCs disenchanted with upper-caste rule.

Though the JP Movement was ostensibly an all-India movement, Bihar played a leading role and provided the backbone to this movement. There were strong protests, agitations and rallies led by non-Congress political parties. More and more people joined the anti emergency movement and even leader of Congress party left the Congress party to support the movement. The movement continued for more than two years, and when the Lok Sabha elections were held in 1977 Congress suffered a massive defeat in the elections and the Janata Party came to power at the centre, in coalition with several other formations. The new leadership was drawn largely from among those who had taken active part in the anti-emergency movement. Large numbers of these leaders were from OBC groups. This sowed the seeds of empowerment among leaders from OBC communities.

The Mandal report inaugurated the second phase of intense mobilisation of the OBCs. When the policy of reservation was announced, people belonging to the upper castes mobilised to oppose the new reservation policy. The movement gained momentum day after day and within couple of weeks it swept almost all the states of North India. There were large numbers of rallies, gheraos, demonstrations, and so on, to oppose the policy of reservation. The frenzy of the anti-reservation movement reached its peak when students began publicly immolating themselves in protest against the policy of OBC job reservations.

Because the Janata Dal had implemented the reservation policy, the anti-reservation movement was backed, naturally enough, by the *non*-Janata Dal parties, mainly the BJP. In Bihar this served mainly to reinforce the trend of OBCs consolidating behind the Janata Dal. No political party openly

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<sup>15</sup> Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987)



opposed the policy of reservation, but those social groups that resented the policy – mainly the upper castes – extended their support to whichever political parties that most vociferously opposed the Janata Dal. The result was an electorate polarised on caste lines that corresponded more or less to party lines. The OBCs in general, and the upper OBCs (Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris) in particular, mobilised in favour of the Janata Dal, while upper castes voted for the Congress or the BJP. Later, after the first split in the Janata Dal in 1995 and after the formation of the Samata Party, the Kurmis and the Koeris extended their support to the newly formed Samata Party.

Thus, to recapitulate, the economic struggle between the upper castes and the OBCs, which began in the form of disputes over inequities in land distribution (and movements for land reform), resulted ultimately in a political struggle structured around conflict between groups composed of large numbers of castes – in which the OBCs in general, and Yadavs in particular, managed to assume the reins of government in Bihar.

In Orissa, on the other hand, land distribution at the time of independence was marked by far fewer disparities. Though the three upper castes (the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Karans) possessed more than the average-sized agricultural land holding, the Khandayats also possessed comparable quantities of land. Historically, these castes are numerically large in the coastal region of Orissa, where agriculture has been the backbone of the economy. With the abolition of the Zamindari system, a fair degree of redistribution took place in this region, though clearly landless people continued to exist there as well. The net result was that, the agricultural land was more or less evenly distributed between the upper caste and the Khandayats, an OBC caste. Nearly one-fourth of all land holdings were less than 0.5 hectares in size. Nearly 87.7 per cent of all holdings were three hectares or less. This gives some idea of how small was the average land holding in Orissa. There was far less potential for political conflict to centre on the issue of agricultural land. This meant that party conflict was less likely to polarise along caste lines – between upper castes and Khandayats (or other OBCs).

The western districts of Orissa offer a stark contrast. Once comprised of princely states, where rulers possessed large tracts of agricultural land, western Orissa's farmers were given larger land-holding exemptions within the state's land reform legislation. The abolition of the Zamindari system had very little effect in the western parts of Orissa. Consequently, the adivasis, who constitute a large proportion of the population in the region, remained largely landless in this region.

In Bihar the social conflicts between upper and lower castes mirrored economic conflicts in a way that they simply did not in Orissa. There was of course a status hierarchy between Karans and Brahmins, on the one hand, and the Khandayats and their fellow OBCs on the other. But the economic disparities between the two castes were less substantial than similar pairings in Bihar,

which made political mobilisation of the backward castes in general, and the Khandayats in particular, very difficult in Orissa.

This points to the very different pattern of political mobilisation prevailing in Orissa – a factor, which helps to explain the divergent social bases of electoral support for the Janata-descended parties in Bihar and Orissa.

### *Patterns of political dominance*

The findings of the survey from both the states, does indicate the contrast in the voting pattern. While in Bihar, the upper OBC, the Yadav, the Kurmi and the Koeri do vote for parties of their choice in large number, in Orissa the Khandayat does not seem to be sharply polarised in favour of any political party. Why is it so?

The extreme caste tensions that predominate in Bihar, and result in perpetual conflict, do not exist in Orissa as there is very little overlap between economic status and caste status. Caste tension is deeply rooted in the social life of people living in Bihar. In Orissa it is not caste, but region, which has provided the dominant cleavage driving political mobilisation and counter-mobilisation.

Orissa has a high percentage of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. As per the 1991 census Scheduled castes were 16.2 per cent, and Scheduled Tribes 22.2 per cent, of the state's population. Indications from the 2001 census indicates that their proportion of the population must have increased, suggesting that nearly 40 per cent of Orissa's people are either Dalit or Adivasi. There is a unique settlement pattern of the people belonging to different castes in Orissa. While Dalits are generally spread in almost all the districts of the state, the upper castes are generally concentrated in the coastal districts and the Adivasis are concentrated in western districts of the state.

As per the constitution's provisions, as updated every ten years, the political representation of Dalits and adivasis has been ensured through reservation of certain geographic constituencies in the state Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. Out of 21 Lok Sabha seats five are reserved for Adivasi and three for Dalits. Similarly, of 147 Assembly seats, 22 are reserved for Dalits and 34 seats are reserved for Adivasis. The number of political representative belonging to these two reserved categories is so big that they can put adequate pressure on the policy making. But until very recently, in the absence of socio-economic resources, they have not been able to emerge as independent political representatives and have been guided by other politicians, mostly belonging to the upper castes.

Most of the Adivasis' representatives come from the western region, while the upper caste politicians come from the coastal regions. Politicians from the coastal regions had dominated the politics in the state. Most of the chief ministers and other senior politicians have been from the coastal region.

These politicians have catered to the development of the coastal region above all else. Most state

intervention has taken place in the coastal districts while the western region was neglected despite being rich in mineral resources. Because of the hilly terrain, the western region had also lagged behind in terms of the communication facilities.

Thus, the pattern of political mobilisation has revolved around the issue of the western region's neglect at the hands coastal region's politicians. The regional disparities within Orissa are indeed glaring, and are so deep rooted that they have remained the most important political issue in the state. This has stalled the full force of caste politics, of the sort, which has taken hold in Bihar.

***Why the OBC category could not be mobilised politically in Orissa?***

In Bihar, the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris took the lead in mobilising the OBC as an electoral bloc. In Orissa, no such force emerged. This is largely the result of the bypassing of Orissa during two of the great phases of OBC mobilisation – one in 1960s under the leadership of Ram Manohar Lohia, and the other during the post-Mandal 1990s period.

During the 1960s the impact of Lohia's formula of reservation for the OBC in all political organisations was confined to a few districts such as Puri and Sambalpur. The leadership of the socialist party at the district level was mainly in the hands of representatives of the Chasa community, a lower OBC caste in most of the districts. Upper castes strongly disapproved their leadership. This 1960s OBC mobilisation, unable to overcome this censure, stalled.

As in other states, Orissa's post-Mandal period provided another opportunity for OBC mobilisation. While the last decade of the Twentieth Century witnessed intense political mobilisation of the OBCs in Bihar (and UP, and Tamil Nadu, etc.), Orissa's OBCs failed in their efforts towards political mobilisation. There are several reasons for this, but one of the most important is that the numerically strong (and socially and educationally upwardly mobile) OBC caste, the Khandayats, were excluded from the Mandal list. This placed them in a similar situation to the Jats of U.P. and Rajasthan. Politicians such as Srikant Jena tried to mobilise the OBCs in Orissa during the post-Mandal period, but since the Khandayats were excluded from the Mandal list, the entire focus was shifted towards the inclusion of the Khandayats in the OBC list. Thus, during the years when parties in other states were experiencing a phase of intensive mobilisation of OBCs, the OBC leadership in Orissa was focused merely on getting the Khandayats included in the list of eligible beneficiaries.

Since the Khandayats were excluded from the official OBC list caste, they sought to trade favours with parties: promises of electoral support in exchange for a party, one in power, taking action to get Khandayats included on the OBC list. But the Khandayats were more than once betrayed by parties that won, and they backed the wrong (that is losing) horse in the electoral race on more than one occasion. Thus their strategy of shifting allegiance from one political party to another from one election to the next proved less than effectual. The main political parties in Orissa see them solely as

a vote bank. The Khandayats, especially those, with better economic status, had tried to align with the upper caste Brahmins and Karnas, and had as a result shifted their political allegiance to the political party to which a majority of Orissa's upper castes had voted. Those Khandayats of lower economic status are excluded from the benefits of alliance with the upper castes, and they try to associate with OBCs of more modest economic status. As a result, the Khandayats remain a badly divided social group in Orissa, which has hampered their development as a distinct, effectual political entity.

It should also be noted that while the OBC mobilisation in Orissa reflected mainly the aspirations of one caste, the Khandayats, little effort was expended to awaken other OBCs politically. These constitute a large section of Orissa's population. The Gauda, which resemble the Yadavs of UP or Bihar comprise roughly 9 per cent of the state's population, and has the advantage of geographical spread. Had the Gaudas been mobilised, the core of an OBC identity could have been forged

There was, however, no trained and responsive leadership within the Gauda community, and also there was little impetus from among leaders of other castes for them to take action. The Brahmins and Karnas have long exploited the Gaudas. The Gaudas have served these upper castes and had been reduced to a service caste. While the males have worked in the agricultural land owned by the upper castes, the Gauda women have worked as domestic servants. In the absence of any leadership, they could not be mobilised to become a political force in the state.

The other factor, which contributed to the continued dominance of the Brahmins and the Karnas in Orissa politics, is, the large population of the Adivasis in the state – 22.2 per cent. Concentrated in the western districts of the state, the adivasis have remained substantially cut off from contemporary social, political and economic developments. Except for their reserved posts, adivasis are hardly represented in any other sphere of public life. Even these lucky few are subjected to exploitation at the hands of people belonging to either the Brahmin or Karna caste. The benefits due to Adivasi communities rarely reach them; they are cornered primarily by upper caste officials and their upper caste accomplices. Unless, there is a strong leadership among the adivasis, this disproportionate distribution of benefits will help to preserve the status quo, where the upper would remain powerful enough to neutralize efforts at mobilisation among Orissa's OBCs.