

## Contextualizing the 2019 Parliamentary Elections Social Justice and Democratic Processes in India

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### Abstract

Democratic processes are lively as a result of social justice initiatives, and vice versa. The influence of social justice programmes is largely positive for the government and target population if democratic process is defined as political mobilisation for participation in electoral exercise to choose representatives and effective functioning of public institutions. Both programmes focusing on social sector reforms encourage the target population to participate in democratic processes. On the other hand, successful social sector initiatives could even aid in the reelection of the current administration. A review of a few social sector programmes at the union level between 2014 and 2019 and from the state of Bihar from 2005 provides some insight. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) created and carried out social sector programmes including Aushman Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, among others, at the union level. Since 2005, Bihar has focused on social sector reforms with policies like providing free bicycles and school uniforms for enrolled students, reserving positions in local representative institutions and state government for women, and building hostels for students from socially and economically disadvantaged classes. The article makes the case that the NDA's strong performance in the state of Bihar during the 2019 general elections was primarily a result of union-level social sector reforms. Even though BJP, the alliance's leader, opted to support parties like Janata Dal United (JDU) and Lok Janashakti Party, the coalition partners gained ground in the state (LJP). However, it should be noted that the function of leadership may end up acting as the process's trigger.

**KEY WORDS:** Pradhanmantri, social justice, Ujjwala Yojna, Beti bachao-Beti Padhao, and Jan Dhan Yojna

### INTRODUCTION

The improvements in the social sector are closely tied to democratic processes. The governing administration is likely to reap the advantages in the form of political wins if social sector changes are implemented in democracies, even if they only have a marginally positive impact. The political party or coalition in power may need to rely heavily on electoral gains in the form of seats gained or a percentage of the total votes cast in order to keep its position as the government after the post-

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policy/program elections. This is unquestionably a prerequisite for the success of the governing party, albeit it is not an absolute need that would guarantee a party or coalition total victory. Meaning that the party may have a peaceful transition to another term in office if draconian events like corruption prosecutions against members of the current administration or actions that might be negatively related to national mood do not occur.

In this essay, the emphasis has been placed on social policies or social sector reforms with the premise that they are tools the state uses to guarantee social justice to its citizens. The word "social justice" refers to the aspect of justice that is socially created or planned, in which citizens of a state would be given fundamental equality of opportunity and treatment under the society's laws and regulations. This shows that efforts made by society as a whole, as represented by the state, to address grave economic or social inequities are the foundation of social justice. To ensure that all residents have an equal opportunity to succeed, it could be essential to redistribute some of the crucial societal resources. The government guarantees this via its social programmes. The guiding theory behind the concept is that such acts are required to create a setting where each individual may follow their goals and express themselves. Such examples can be found in the Indian Constitution, which has been in place since its inception, in the form of social provisions like the elimination of the untouchability practise, the promotion of social equality, and the guarantee that members of the so-called "lower castes" have access to temples, jobs, and necessities like water.

In this sense, social justice is concerned with the organisation of society's public life. The principles by which social obligations and benefits are allocated among the many members of society are likewise a concern. Therefore, the democratic state must provide social justice as well as justice. Equals must be treated fairly and unequals unfairly by the state. While Part III of the Indian Constitution guarantees the preservation of each person's rights and dignity, Part IV of the Constitution also includes provisions for social justice. The constitutional requirements must, however, be implemented by social policies, and it may be necessary to enact laws to that end.

Social policy introduction or execution at the union or state levels is nothing new. The shift that occurred during the period under study in Bihar or at 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 the target population that was the potential beneficiaries of these policies. This has been the case since India gained independence in 1947 under various governments at the all-India level and in various states. For example, the government's emphasis on women and disadvantaged groups and areas like education, energy, and healthcare for social sector reforms. The assertion that there is a clear correlation between social programmes of the government and electoral success of the governing parties is supported by the reemergence of the BJP-led NDA coalition at the federal level and the JDU-led alliance in Bihar since 2010.

Additionally, the coalition allies profit from the actions of the government. Because the BJP opted to run on fewer seats than its coalition allies like the JDU and LJP, who backed it in the 2019 elections, the latter saw major electoral gains. Being a member of a coalition that had garnered public support

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for its social objectives was of utmost importance. This is not to fully discount the social and political support-base of the later parties. Even the RJD's meagre electoral success in Bihar in 2015 was largely attributable to its ability to form an alliance with JDU, another political party in the state that the people believed had effectively carried out some significant social measures.

### **SOCIAL JUSTICE IN CONTEXTUALIZATION: WESTERN PERSPECTIVES**

Social justice may be properly understood when seen in the perspective of justice. Even if the notion of justice may have been understood in many ways and for various reasons, several cultures and traditions have provided answers to this subject. Justice and dharma were correlated in pre-modern Indian civilization. The upkeep of dharma, or a fair social order, was seen to be the state's/kings' primary responsibility. While the Indian perspective on social justice will be discussed individually in the part that follows, it should be noted right now that the ancient Indian society's emphasis on social justice was based on the prevailing social values of the day. Justice was defined by ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle using various standards. In the case of the former, justice must be sought for both individuals and the state, and both must be defined according to the same standards. According to Aristotle, fairness would be the allocation of positions and offices according to each person's aptitude. These concepts are typical of old western civilisation, although John Rawls may have made the strongest case that has influenced modern discourse in the 20th century.

The following sentences aim to highlight the thoughts of these philosophers and intellectuals.

In order to create a harmonious connection between the classes, Plato defined justice as the partition of the state's classes into functional groups and their interdependence. According to Plato, the "good" that can only be accomplished in the state entails each of the three classes carrying out their respective roles without interfering with those of others. Because of their nature, the members of the classes are best qualified to carry out their duties. As a result, fairness, or some specific version of it, is the necessity we established at the outset as having universal applicability when we built our state, according to Plato. If you recall, we established and have emphasised several times that in our state, one man was to one job, the one he was most naturally suited for. (Plato, 1987) Plato continues, "Justice is minding one's own business; it consists in minding one's own business and not meddling with others." (Ibid) Plato believed that if each class contributed to the quality of the city state, justice would eventually be served.

According to Aristotle, upholding justice would be the major responsibility of the state, and he "considered equality as vital to social justice"

Since armed injustice is the most deadly, and since he is born with weapons intended to be utilised by intellect and virtue, which he may employ for the worst purposes, Aristotle claims that although man is the finest animal when completed, he is the worst animal when cut off from law and justice.

But justice could also be corrective or distributive. Proportionate equality would be part of distributive justice. This might be interpreted in terms of fair distribution of awards or shares based

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on the merit of the beneficiaries. Therefore, according to Aristotle, one should receive obligations and financial obligations in accordance to their right merits. In contrast to this, judges would award justice in circumstances when a person's worth was not a factor, and remedial or corrective justice would be meted out. This could apply to topics like contracts or criminal law. According to Aristotle, the state of men's bond is fairness. He claims that the assessment of what is reasonable is necessary for administering justice and that this is "the basis of order in the political society."

While the examination of social justice in the preceding paragraphs provides some insight into western literature, the most significant argument has come from John Rawls (Rawls, 2000). In contrast to the conception of justice that was based on religious principles in western society during the mediaeval era or that prevailed during the modern era, when individual sovereignty was the primary consideration in the state's system of delivering justice, Rawls theory constructs an idea of justice.

It is possible to see Rawls theory as being founded on the idea of taking particular needs of individuals into consideration. Since the idea of treating equals equally might mean that persons who are not equal in all aspects could be treated differently, according to Rawls, this concept does not necessarily conflict with the idea of equal treatment. As a result, people or groups with special needs or impairments may be seen as being less equal in certain ways and worthy of special assistance. According to Rawls, we may come at a fair and just rule if we put ourselves in a scenario where we must decide how society should be organised without knowing the position we may have within such society. According to him, this is reasoning while hiding behind a "veil of ignorance," and in this situation, everyone would make decisions based on the possibility that they would suffer the most. According to Rawls, justice and fair treatment may be founded on logic rather than morality.

#### **INDIAN LITERATURE ON SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Justice in India is usually seen to be anchored in societal ideals, as was already noted. In ancient India, the idea of justice would have included the King supporting the Dharma and each member of society carrying out their obligations in accordance with what the Dharma demanded of them. The King was in charge of dispensing justice when it came to resolving potential wrongs that had been done to a person. Altekar asserts that the administration of justice was not one of the state's responsibilities. Altekar This was possible because each member was aware of the tasks that needed to be completed for the "benefit" of the community. Despite this, King served as the supreme authority in the state and had a part in the administration of justice. As the ruler of the kingdom and the defender of Dharma of law, the monarch possessed and exercised power throughout the Vedic era. Later, the roles of Sabha and Samiti were balanced against the judicial and executive authority of Kings. Previously, the King utilised ministers and legal professionals (perhaps Purohit) to administer justice. A royal officer was assigned to oversee the imposition of the appropriate penalty in accordance with state law. (Majumdar, \s1970:494)

The discussion over justice in the latter stages of Indian polity's growth is lengthy, and the paper's

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focus does not allow for an examination of every step.

However, several important points may be raised here, particularly in relation to how the idea developed in the works of prominent contemporary Indian philosophers, such as M. K. Gandhi, B. R. Ambedkar, and Amartya Sen. Though the selection of the intellectuals may have been arbitrary, they still reflect several philosophies that have had a considerable effect on Indian politics, particularly with regard to the relationship between social justice and democracy. Before getting into the specifics, it is important to consider the key components of the Indian legal system throughout the British colonial era and during the Middle Ages. The theocratic character of Muslim governance served as a major guide for the administration of justice throughout the early and late mediaeval periods. The necessities of religion supposedly supported the existence of Muslim authority in India. In theory, the Sultan's power was constrained by the Quran's Holy Law, but in reality, the Muslim ruler of India was an authoritarian whose decrees were binding. Even the Mughal judicial system only adhered to the *fatawas*, or earlier interpretations of the Holy Law by prominent jurists, and the *qanuns*, or decrees of the Emperors. The primary goal in creating the British legal system was to support their colonial organisation. The Regulating Act of 1773 was enacted, and the Supreme Court of Judicature was founded in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1774. Later, Supreme Courts were founded in Madras and Bombay (now Mumbai) (now Chennai). Following the passage of the High Courts Act of 1861, which created provisions for the establishment of High Courts in several provinces, these courts were disbanded. The Government of India Act, 1935, also created the Federal Court of India. The current Supreme Court was created in 1950, after India's Independence and the promulgation of its Constitution. Since the time of British control, the current legal system has been built on the codification of laws, and the judicial institutions in India follow the Constitution's directives.

#### **AMBEDKAR, GANDHI, AND AMARTYA SEN'S POINTS OF VIEW**

In the contemporary era, different philosophers in India have advanced the concept of social justice. The Constituent Assembly's thorough discussions resulted in the Indian Constitution. Other features of Indian politics that effectively express the notion of social justice include the socialist undertone that has pervaded public policies since Independence, the public sector's continued dominance up until 1990, and the social initiatives of various political parties that swore allegiance to socialism. However, the concepts of M K Gandhi, B R Ambedkar, and Amartya Sen are the most successful at capturing the many schools of thought that would offer a grasp of the notion of social justice in India in modern times. The sentences that follow will make an effort to present some of their concepts.

Gandhi wrote extensively on social justice, including issues pertaining to the advancement of women, lower castes, and other socially excluded groups. Gandhi's constructive programme was really a complete strategy for eradicating societal ills, and his concept of *swaraj* was linked to the notion of a dignified existence for people.

Gandhi was subjected to prejudice while living under colonial control, and it was these experiences and his perceptions of injustice that inspired him to believe that everyone should be treated fairly in

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society. Gandhi saw the problem of social justice through the lens of the Dharma philosophy of the Hindus. Gandhi's idea of a fair society is based on "duties," as opposed to the "rights-based approach." Gandhi's conception of social justice included giving weight to the "Varnashrama Dharma" or "Discipline of the Castes," among other things. Gandhi's understanding of the caste system is based on obligations allocated to them precisely, not on pride or conceited ideas of social superiority, as has been stated by one of the writers of Gandhi: According to Gandhi, the practise of social justice strives for a religious paradise, which is very much in line with Indian (Hindu) ideas and culture. He refers to it as the Ramarajya (Rule of Rama or Kingdom of Rama) in which justice would reign as it did under the mythical King Rama. According to Gandhi, there is only one fundamental way to create a fair society where everyone's well-being is guaranteed, and that is through "hanging on to truth" (Satyagraha). The next principle, nonviolence (ahimsa), shall be used in light of satyagraha.

While Dr. B. R. Ambedkar held that social justice may be governed by a divine element, social justice is also governed at the level of the individual who has purity of mind. Whereas Gandhi's concept of social justice was rooted in the Indian concept of Dharma and upholding the varna structure that would ensure dignity and equality to the individual. Since it deals with morality or human values as they are defined in terms of liberty, fraternity, and equality, the latter is more significant in social life.

Ambedkar based the first theory on early Vedic Indian beliefs that were characterised by a belief in God and the concept of Karma, while the second thought was influenced by Charvaka, Buddhism, and Jainism.

However, Ambedkar felt that social justice should be built on human ideals like liberty, equality, and fraternity, as described above, in order to treat the disadvantaged or marginalised elements of society fairly. Ambedkar also recognised that even in a society where freedom reigns, there must also be equality for there to be any social ties. According to him, social compassion, cooperation, and reciprocity are the bonds that link mankind together. However, Ambedkar placed more emphasis on "moral equality," which rejects any notion of supremacy based on skill, riches, or physical prowess. According to Ambedkar, a society that embodies such values as liberty, equality, and fraternity is a social democracy.

Amartya Sen, on the other hand, has examined the amount of advancement achieved by the Indian state, particularly in the social sector, and has vehemently maintained that development and growth must be understood in the context of its social dimensions. He has steadfastly pushed the notion of social justice forward, and it contrasts with the justifications offered by Rawls. As was already said, Rawls views "justice as fairness." However, according to Sen, "every theory of justice must pick an informational emphasis," or, more specifically, it must choose which aspects of the outside world we should pay particular attention to when evaluating a society and fairness and injustice. For him, it's crucial to have an opinion on how to judge a person's total benefit.

He makes the case for the freedom-based capabilities approach after examining several methods that provide certain criteria to judge an individual's total benefit, such as utilitarianism (utility-based

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approach) and other theories in economics (resource-based approach). According to this perspective, individual advantage is determined by a person's capacity to carry out tasks they have a good reason to value. According to Sen, "A person is deemed to have less of an edge in terms of opportunities than another if she has less capability—less of an actual opportunity—to obtain those things that she has reason to value." (Ibid) This method focuses on a person's actual freedom to engage in activities that they may value engaging in or being. Freedom, in his opinion, would entail having the ability to choose what one wants, values, and ultimately opts for. Thus, capability and the opportunity component of freedom would be related.

According to the discussions in the preceding paragraphs, it can be said that social justice requires consideration of the socioeconomic environment in which the debate is taking place.

Any concept of social justice must take into account the social and cultural ramifications of the goal of equitable treatment of individuals in all of their dimensions, depending on what the current political climate decides. It follows that the concept of social justice would be closely related to democratic processes.

### **INDIA'S SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES**

Social justice initiatives and democratic procedures complement and strengthen one another. Public institutions should be focused on the interests and wants of the public if a vigorous democracy is considered as being responsive and accountable. As a result, the term "democratic method" may refer to a "institutional arrangement for reaching political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for the people's vote," according to Schumpeter (2011), but the decisions must reflect the larger aspirations of the public and may be geared towards achieving those aspirations. Therefore, public engagement may be limited to the direct or indirect selection of representatives, but democratic mobilisation relies on how the current political leadership seems to be responding to popular desires. Thus, social justice initiatives implemented by a government foster an atmosphere that makes political mobilisation of the people feasible, which in turn encourages them to engage in democratic participation, in this instance, voting in elections to choose their representatives.

### **ELECTORAL PERFORMANCES AND SOCIAL POLICIES**

The results of previous general elections, especially those held in 2019 and the assembly elections held in the state of Bihar since 2005, have shown a consistent correlation between an efficient social policy and favourable political outcomes for the incumbent party or coalition. Analysis of the 2019 elections must be done in light of data from the past elections in order to properly explain this. The information from prior elections and state assembly elections has been presented for this reason. The information on the Bihar assembly elections would be all the more important for this reason since the BJP and the state's governing JDU were coalition partners in both the 2005 and 2010 elections, but the partnership experienced a brief rupture before the term was up. The BJP-led NDA and the JDU-Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) coalition both ran candidates in the 2015 election.

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However, JDU and RJD split up, and JDU is now back in the NDA alliance and expected to make substantial gains in the 2019 general elections—something that did not happen in the general elections of 2014.

Table 1 (below), which focuses on votes cast and seats gained in Bihar, summarises the performance of the BJP and other political parties. While the BJP and its coalition allies (the JDU and LJP) have clearly benefited, the RJD's performance has fallen in terms of seats won and the percentage of valid votes cast. During the 2019 elections, RJD was unable to gain even one seat. In another way, Table 1's findings are noteworthy. As previously mentioned, JDU did not run for office in 2014 as a BJP ally. When compared to 2019, when the party received almost 22% of all valid votes and gained 16 seats, JDU's proportion of total votes cast (16%) and seats won (two) were substantially lower. While there was somewhat of a Modi wave in the 2014 elections, JDU's poor result may also be ascribed to the fact that, in the eyes of the public, Bihar had begun moving in the direction of development since BJP and JDU had collaborated on that goal since 2005. On the other side, BJP received less votes and had fewer seats in 2019, but this was mainly because the party gave greater room to its coalition allies, especially JDU and LJP. Most notably, the latter attribute their success to their affiliation with the BJP. The BJP had been successful in projecting an image of itself to the public as a party that had contributed to national development and fought for the rights of underprivileged groups in society, such as Muslim women (on the issue of triple talaq) and economically backward upper castes (10% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions). However, as can be seen in Table 1, the BJP performed better than it did in the 2014 elections throughout all of India. The party received 31.34 percent of the total valid votes in 2014 and won 282 seats; in 2019, it received 37.38 percent of the vote and won 303 seats.

This shows that the BJP had a significant role in the 2019 elections, and its victory in those elections was primarily (if not entirely) attributable to the social sector reforms that the party/NDA had started and carried through over the five years of its rule between 2014 and early 2019. At this point, it is important to examine some of the social programmes that the NDA had implemented and the people who benefited from them.

**Table 1: Results of different political parties in the general elections of 2014 and 2019**

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

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According to some of the preliminary poll findings, the BJP-led coalition's election triumph was largely due to its commitment to good administration. According to a research by Dr. Rituparna Bhattacharyya and Dr. Venkat Pulla, the impoverished unquestionably gave the 2019 Election their blessing for "excellent administration." The majority of the country's populace, which is impoverished, fully understood the three positive Ns (Niyat-intention, Niti-policy, and Neta-Leader). (Pulla and Bhattacharya, 2019:11) This became apparent in some of the social programmes the NDA administration implemented at the union level after taking office in 2014.

For instance, Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) connections were generously provided at no cost to low-income homes under the Ujjwala Yojana. This kind of greener fuel energy was primarily intended for underprivileged women. According to estimates,

Currently, nine out of ten residences have an LPG connection, compared to five out of ten in 2014, and there are 7, 23, 25, and 948 LPG connections. 714 districts have 714 districts covered by the plan.

While women were the primary beneficiaries of the above programme, which provided clean energy to low-income households, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojna was created as a programme for the participation of the underprivileged in the financial system. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) is touted as one of the largest financial inclusion efforts in the world on the official website. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the programme on August 15, 2014, and it officially began on August 28, 2014. According to the Prime Minister, the event was a celebration to commemorate the release of the underprivileged from a vicious cycle. According to the official website, "the Government of India from August 23 to 29 2014 accomplished the most bank accounts established in one week as part of the financial inclusion drive, which is 18,096,130." (Ibid)

According to the data that is currently available, this initiative resulted in the opening of almost 318 million bank accounts with a deposit of Rs. 792 billion.

As a result, it is abundantly obvious from the nature of the government's programmes that the poor and women were their primary beneficiaries. It was evident that such programmes, if adequately publicised, would encourage political consciousness and mobilisation among the demographic segments that had benefited from them and would also serve as the backbone of support for the current political system.

Even if there are many social programmes, the Ayushman Bharat Yojana's health programme deserves to be mentioned. The programme debuted on September 23, 2018. According to the information that is currently available, 15,623 hospitals with empanelled status have admitted 29,16,040 beneficiaries. The World Health Organization's director general has praised this endeavour. (See <https://www.pmjay.gov.in/> for further information.)

The list of social policies may be extensive, as was already mentioned, but those mentioned above as well as others, including Swatch Bharat Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, and Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, among others, addressed the fundamental needs and requirements of the target population,

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which is largely comprised of women, the poor, the elderly, the sick, and the homeless. Additionally, the programmes were designed to assist the recipients in resolving day-to-day issues with housing, renewable energy, health care, and other related issues. Thus, it is clear that the BJP was able to expand its support base via these programmes and that this was made possible by the social sector reforms that the BJP-led NDA had initiated.

Similar to this, if one examines the results of the assembly elections in Bihar, the government's emphasis on development seems to be a key factor in the coalition or alliance headed by the JDU being in power in the state. Additionally, progress on the development front was perceived as the result of BJP and JDU working together, since RJD has a poor reputation with the general population in this area. The performance of the BJP and JDU has been almost constant during the previous three (four) elections, as indicated in Table 2 below. However, in 2015, when the JDU momentarily split up with the BJP, the RJD was able to ride on its back and win a sizable number of seats. Later, when the former coalition partners came back together, RJD's performance in terms of seats gained was back to being appalling. The RJD failed to gain even one seat in the 2019 legislative elections, as was previously mentioned in the paragraph above.

### CONCLUSION

Effective social policies are essential for building a support base that can really vote for the party viewed as leading the programmes, according to the research in the paragraphs above. Even though the then-prime minister Manmohan Singh may have had a clean reputation for himself, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), which held office for two terms in a row between 2004 and 2014, was unable to establish such a support base. There were undoubtedly problems with the congress's leadership as well. In contrast, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was seen as a powerful and charismatic figure who could provide an honest government in the best interests of the Indian people. The public also had faith in the NDA, which is headed by the BJP, to provide an open and transparent government. This contributed to the creation of a support base that voted for the BJP and its coalition, along with the NDA's successful social initiatives from 2014 until the beginning of 2019. This significantly explains the governing coalition headed by the NDA's return to power.

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