

Ethnicity and Democratic Politics In India

Caste as a Differential Mobilizer in Bihar

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Students of comparative development have found the Indian caste system of great interest as a social structure of salience in the modernization process. Indeed, it has served as an institution of upward social mobility, political mobilization and participation, and interest aggregation in recent decades. It has been suggested that, in its mobilizing role, caste works as a medium for transmitting the concepts and practices of democratic politics from national government down to the individual citizen.

In this article the author proposes to explore these suggested tendencies toward political democracy by examining the mobilizing and aggregating functions of caste in the north Indian state of Bihar. After a general consideration of the problem, we shall look first at two constituency case studies and then consider the place of caste in the politics of the state as a whole. The conclusion reached is that, while caste performs the transmission belt function, it does so in a highly differential fashion. Specifically, it is only the upper and middle caste groups, with their resources of wealth and numbers, that have enjoyed the fruits of caste-oriented democracy, while the lower castes have been left for all practical purposes outside the political arena. The politics of caste pluralism works for some, but definitely not for all. Recent developments may, however, produce change in this situation of pluralistic exclusion.

I. Social and Political Functions of Caste

One result of the development over the past decade of both a corpus of theory in comparative politics and an increasing wealth of em-

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pirical research is the recognition of structures for articulating and aggregating demand as functional requisites of all polities. Given that some citizens in all political systems make demands on the polity, and given the scale of contemporary political units, it is necessary to articulate these demands through some sort of collective agency. Such agencies in turn find it convenient and efficacious to realize their demands (or to try to do so) through specific political structures, which in the democratic states are generally political parties. The parties, besieged by a multiplicity of (often conflicting) articulating groups but at the same time dependent upon them for support, must somehow aggregate and orchestrate all their demands, presenting some to the central decision-making apparatus, deferring some for a certain length of time, and postponing others indefinitely.¹

In the North American and Western European democracies, the articulating groups in the modern period have been mainly secondary associations. Primary groups, particularly those based on religion and ethnicity, are of great importance in some spheres of Western political life, to be sure; but it is the secondary groupings that form the greater and more influential portion of the articulation and aggregation structure in the West.² In developing nations, on the other hand, secondary associations are notoriously underdeveloped. Although trade unions, business groups, and student movements are becoming increasingly sophisticated in India, they are still relatively weak, and the extent to which such groups are politically active is still in many cases the result of manipulation by political parties. In general, such would-be articulators are quite helpless and have little salience in the political process independent of that given them by the politicians.³

¹ See Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (Boston, 1966), esp. pp. 73-97; also Almond's introductory essay in Gabriel Almond and James S. Coleman, eds. *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton, 1960), pp. 3-64; and his "A Developmental Approach to Political Systems," *World Politics*, XVII (January 1965), 183-214.

² The patterns of this process are perhaps best explained and described in V. O. Key, Jr., *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups*, 5th ed. (New York, 1964), pp. 17-161. There is an increasing literature on the salience of primary associations in American political life. See *inter alia* Michael Parenti, "Ethnic Politics and the Persistence of Ethnic Identification," *American Political Science Review*, LXI (September 1967), 717-26; Raymond E. Wolfinger, "The Development and Persistence of Ethnic Voting," *ibid.*, LIX (December 1965), 896-908; Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins* (New York, 1964); and Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City*, 2d ed. (Cambridge [Mass.], 1970).

³ Myron Weiner, "Political Participation and Political Development," in Myron Weiner, ed. *Modernization: The Dynamics of Growth* (New York, 1966), pp. 205-17. The same author's *The Politics of Scarcity: Public Pressure and Political*

The effect of this political flabbiness manifested by secondary groups is that the political system must fall back upon primary groups if the articulation process is to take place at all. Religion, language, culture, and race are all important cleavages producing primary groups at the national level in India, and in some measure at the state level as well. But at the local level, where these other divisions do not exist for the most part, the caste system produces the most significant cleavage. Indeed, there are few if any aspects of social existence that are not bound up in some way with the caste system. Religion, economic activity, social intercourse, political power—all are intimately connected with it.

Before proceeding further, it would be best to clarify just what is meant by caste. Strictly speaking, the *jati*, or endogamous kinship group, is the self-perceived “caste” of the individual Hindu, or has been at least until relatively recent times. Any given *jati* stretches geographically over a number of villages, a necessity in north India where the usual rule is village exogamy combined with *jati* endogamy. Exactly how many villages or how wide an area is encompassed by the average *jati* is not known with any accuracy, for there is little published research on this aspect of caste. Indications are, however, that the area is fairly small.⁴

Jatis generally have distinctive traditional occupations (e.g., potter, priest, carpenter). Customarily, members of a number of different *jatis* are to be found within any given village.⁵ Thus, while broad differences of race, religion, culture, and language tend to be geographical in nature, the different *jatis* invariably coexist in the same locality.

Over a wide region, such as an entire linguistic area, there are often a number of *jatis* of the same name. Taken together, these *jatis* form an analytical category that is best called a “caste cluster” or “caste group.” In Bihar, for example, all the Teli *jatis* (traditionally oilseed pressers) may be considered together as the Teli caste group. The caste groups in turn may be roughly categorized in terms of the *varna* system, the familiar

Response in India (Chicago, 1962) also has much material on this subject. For a case study on the failure of a secondary group in politics, see P. D. Reeves, “Landlords and Party Politics in the United Provinces, 1934–1937,” in D. A. Low, ed. *Soundings in Modern South Asian History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968), pp. 261–93.

⁴ See Gerald D. Berreman, “Stratification, Pluralism and Interaction: A Comparative Analysis of Caste,” in A. V. S. deRenck and Julie Knight, eds. *Ciba Foundation Symposium on Caste and Race: Comparative Approaches* (London, 1967), pp. 45–73 at 51. Also F. G. Bailey, *Politics and Social Change: Orissa in 1959* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963), p. 126; and McKim Marriott, “Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization,” in McKim Marriott, ed. *Village India: Studies in the Little Community* (Chicago, 1955), pp. 171–222 at 190–91.

⁵ There are many studies of the inter-*jati* relationships within the village. See, for example, Oscar Lewis, *Village Life in Northern India* (New York, 1965), pp. 1–84.

four-fold division of Hindu society into *Brahmans* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaishyas* (merchants), and *Shudras* (workers). The first three classes are often known as the "twice-born" varnas, since by tradition they alone undergo the religious initiation ceremony of "rebirth," and in strict orthodoxy only they are allowed to hear the sacred texts of the *vedas*. Actually, of course, there is a five-fold division, for there are also the *Harijans*, or Untouchables, a class falling in rank below the *Shudras*. Table 1 shows the major caste groups of Bihar, arranged roughly according to rank.⁶

It is at the village level that the relevance of caste is most apparent politically, if we take as our definition of political power something broad, along the lines of David Easton's "the authoritative allocation of values."⁷ As any number of village studies attest, the typical Indian village falls more or less under the suzerainty of a "dominant caste," which has achieved its position through some combination of ritual status, economic power, political finesse, traditional possession of the headmanship, and/or sheer numbers. In the past, economic power, by which has generally been meant land ownership, has been the most important resource. All villages are not dominated in this way, of course. In some, two or more castes may be equally strong. In others, the dominance of one jati is mitigated in some measure by the fact that the leading caste is split into factions, often with each faction allied to elements of other jatis in the village. This pattern, in fact, may be more common than that of the unified dominant caste.⁸

Because the individual is born into his jati reference group, and because status depends on which jati he is in, upward mobility is very difficult. The only way in fact for a person to improve his own position has been to improve that of his group in the process. In the period

⁶ The *Shudras* are divided into "upper" and "lower" categories principally on the basis of their political success, which will be considered in detail later in this article. Muslims, of course, are a religious community, not a caste group, but they are generally considered the equivalent of a caste group in Bihar's political universe.

⁷ David Easton, *The Political System: An Inquiry into the State of Political Science* (New York, 1953), *passim*, esp. pp. 125-48.

⁸ The theory of "dominant caste" is primarily the contribution of the anthropologist M. N. Srinivas. See his "Social System of a Mysore Village," in Marriott, pp. 1-35, and "The Dominant Caste in Rampura," *American Anthropologist*, LXI (February 1959), 1-16. Recently he has returned to the problem in his *Social Change in Modern India* (Bombay, 1966), pp. 10-11 and 151-52. In addition, see Adrian C. Mayer, "The Dominant Caste in a Region of Central India," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, XIV (Winter 1958), 407-27. On patterns of dominance, Ralph W. Nicholas gives a good summary and breakdown of the field studies in his "Structures of Politics in the Villages of Southern Asia," in Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, eds. *Structure and Change in Indian Society* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 243-84, esp. 275-79.

Table 1 Major Caste Groups of Bihar

Category	Caste Group	Percent of Total Population
"Twice-born" castes	Brahman	4.7
	Bhumihar	2.9
	Rajput	4.2
	Kayastha	1.2
	Bania	0.6
Upper Shudras	Yadav	11.0
	Kurmi	3.6
	Koiri	4.1
Lower Shudras	Barhi	1.0
	Dhanuk	1.8
	Kahar	1.7
	Kandu	1.6
	Kumhar	1.3
	Lohar	1.3
	Mallah	1.5
	Nai	1.4
	Tatwa	1.6
	Teli	2.8
	Other Shudras (less than 1% each)	16.0
Muslims		12.5
Scheduled castes (Harijans)		14.1
Scheduled tribes		9.1
Total		100.0

NOTE: The "twice-born" castes and upper Shudras have been listed in the order of their generally accepted social precedence. The lower Shudras, concerning whose ranking there is no such consensus, are listed here in alphabetical order.

SOURCES: For Muslims, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes (who generally live in areas of Bihar remote from those considered in this article), Government of India, *Census of India 1961*, vol. 4, *Bihar*, Part II-C, *Social and Cultural Tables*, and Part V-A, *Special Tables for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes*, both by S. D. Prasad (Delhi, 1965). For all others, Government of India, *Census of India, 1931*, vol. 7, *Bihar and Orissa*, Part II, *Tables*, by W. G. Lacey (Patna, 1932). The older figures have been adjusted for boundary changes after 1931.

The 1931 data are used here because caste information (except for Harijans) has not been reported for subsequent censuses. In using data that are some four decades old, the possibility of differential growth rates must be raised. Although by now urban caste figures are certainly quite unreliable, the overall data for this 92 percent rural state may still be used, subject of course to some caution. Evidence for this assertion may be derived from the figures for Harijans, which

before independence, group mobility depended upon gaining access to some source of wealth or upon upgrading the group's ritual status vis-à-vis other jatis. The economic route could be employed within the village, where newly found wealth could be used to buy up land, thereby to obtain power on the local scene. The ritual strategem tended to depend more on mobilizing the entire jati and even the caste cluster as a whole. Here success was to be attained principally through the decennial census, which used to record the relative rank status of all the major caste groups. The only way for a group to improve was to do so as a body.⁹

The fact that independent India chose democracy with a universal adult franchise, at village as well as at state and national levels,¹⁰ has meant that numbers have become a weapon of much potency in the political process at all echelons. Older resources are still useful, to be sure. We shall soon see that high ritual status and landownership continue to count for a great deal. The latter is particularly important, for the land is the source of almost all rural wealth in a region where the village remains self-sufficient in a way that has long been forgotten in the West. But the old days when these factors (usually combined in the same caste group) *per se* meant automatic dominance are gone.¹¹

The use of caste groups to mobilize large numbers of voters at the constituency and higher levels has become widespread, for what could be more natural than the transfer of techniques used in improving ritual status to the newer arena of democratic politics?¹² As the value of social

as percentages of total population have remained almost constant from 1901 through 1961. For a more extended discussion of this issue, see H. W. Blair, "Caste, Politics and Democracy in Bihar State, India: The Elections of 1967" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1969), pp. 40-42.

⁹ There is abundant evidence of the use of both methods. An excellent and detailed example of localized economic advance is found in F. G. Bailey, *Caste and the Economic Frontier: A Village in Highland Orissa* (Manchester, 1957), esp. pp. 186-210. The most common technique employed in upward ritual mobility was that of "Sanskritization," another of Srinivas' contributions, this one denoting the emulation of high caste practices by low castes seeking to move upward in ritual rank. See M. N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay, 1962), pp. 42-62. He refines the concepts in his later work, *Social Change in Modern India*, pp. 1-88.

¹⁰ On this decision, see Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 26-49.

¹¹ A good case study of this kind of transition is offered by André Beteille in his *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966).

¹² This change is part of the more pervasive change that has come to be known as Westernization, once more one of Srinivas' formulations. See his *Caste in Modern India*, pp. 42-62, and his *Social Change in Modern India*, pp. 46-88. In addition, Harold A. Gould, "Sanskritization and Westernization: A Dynamic View," *Economic Weekly* (Bombay), XIII (25 June 1961), 945-50. Gould has recently suggested a "jati model" of politics, a modern version of the orthodox jati, which has become an operational political entity in the perception of the

resources has changed, so has the use of them. The "caste association," or organized caste cluster, has become a familiar mobilizer of votes in contemporary India.¹³ There is even one case on record in which an organization tried to weld all claimants to a particular varna status into one political bloc.¹⁴

It is argued by Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph¹⁵ that, in this process of mobilizing and articulating, the caste group also acts in effect as a transmission belt carrying ideas of democratic politics from New Delhi and the state capitals down to the village and the individual. Caste can do this for, while it is a traditionally based and cohesive unit in the system, it offers at the same time a context in which democratic politics can be meaningful to its participants. The citizen does not have to relate to the complexities of a parliamentary system through party, class, or ideology, but instead can begin his experience with it through the more easily understandable medium of the caste. By uniting with his ethnic brethren and voting a caste fellow into office, he comes to perceive the workings and benefits of a system in which the individual can have some effect over his own future. Thus, whereas Nehru and other national leaders have viewed caste in politics as harmful, reactionary, and dysfunctional to democracy,¹⁶ in fact the existence of caste politics is quite functional, both to the education of the citizenry in the practice of parliamentary democracy and to the cohesion of the democratic system.

II. Two Constituencies in Bihar

Bihar offers an especially fruitful area for examining the concepts outlined above. A state of some 54 million persons,¹⁷ it is the second largest in

individual. See his "Toward a 'Jati Model' for Indian Politics," *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), IV (1 February 1969), 291-97. See also the comments on it by Hira Singh, *ibid.*, IV (24 May 1969), 887-88; and H. Acharya, *ibid.*, IV (11 October 1969), 1645-46.

¹³ There are a number of case studies of caste associations. See, for example, Lloyd I. Rudolph, "The Modernity of Tradition: The Democratic Incarnation of Caste in India," *American Political Science Review*, LIX (December 1965), 975-89; Selig Harrison, *India: The Most Dangerous Decades* (Princeton, 1960), pp. 96-136 and 204-45; Bailey, *Politics and Social Change*, pp. 128-35; and Weiner, *Politics of Scarcity*, pp. 51-56.

¹⁴ Rajni Kothari and Rushikesh Maru, "Caste and Secularism in India: Case Study of a Caste Federation," *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXV (November 1965), 37-50.

¹⁵ Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (Chicago, 1967), pp. 17-154. Except as noted, this paragraph is a précis of their thesis.

¹⁶ See, for instance, M. N. Das, *The Political Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New York, 1961), pp. 90-91; and Weiner, *Politics of Scarcity*, p. 60; also Rammanohar Lohia, *The Caste System* (Hyderabad, 1964), *passim*.

¹⁷ This is a 1967 estimate from Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *India: A Reference Annual, 1968* (New Delhi, 1968), p. 6.

India with approximately the population of France. Its area is only about 67,000 square miles, roughly the same size as the state of Washington in the United States. Relatively poor by Indian standards, it is by most measures of modernity what one study has labeled "A Backward Region in a Backward Economy."¹⁸ It has also long been notorious as a stronghold of political casteism. The Biharis did not wait until independence to mobilize caste groups for political purposes; they began to do so in the 1920s and have continued ever since.¹⁹ Bihar, then, should provide a good testing ground for observing caste as a mobilizer in democratic politics.

The two constituencies on which we shall focus—Hisua and War-saliganj—lie in Gaya District in central Bihar, about thirty miles south of the Ganges River. Gaya is overwhelmingly rural, with an urban population of only 265,000 out of a total of 3,648,000 at the time of the 1961 census. About 150,000 of the urban inhabitants live in the district headquarters, also called Gaya, which is a Hindu religious center of considerable importance and a market town, as well as the administrative node of the district.²⁰ Like the rest of the Gangetic plain area in Bihar, Gaya District was undergoing a severe drought at the time of the 1967 elections. The monsoon of the previous summer had been a disaster. At the beginning of 1967, it was reckoned that 88 percent of the district's population (including both constituencies under discussion here) lived in villages where the major crop of rice was less than 25 percent of normal.²¹ The food shortages did not appear to have much direct

¹⁸ Kedarnath Prasad, *The Economics of a Backward Region in a Backward Economy (A Case Study of Bihar in Relation to the Other States of India)*, 2 vols. (Calcutta, 1967 and 1968).

¹⁹ There are numerous analyses of the pervasive influence of caste in Bihar over the last fifty years. See *inter alia* Ramashray Roy, "Intraparty Conflict in the Bihar Congress," *Asian Survey*, VI (December 1966), 706-15, and his "Politics of Fragmentation: The Case of the Congress Party in Bihar," in Iqbal Narain, ed., *State Politics in India* (Meerut, 1967), pp. 415-30. Also Chetkar Jha, "Caste in Bihar Congress Politics," in Narain, pp. 575-86; and R. C. Prasad, "Educational Development," *Seminar*, no. 107 (July 1968), 26-31. The virulence of Bihar caste politics over the years may in fact be one reason why the state remains so backward; see Francine R. Frankel, "Democracy and Political Development: Perspectives from the Indian Experience," *World Politics*, XXI (April 1969), 448-68.

²⁰ Population data from Government of India, *Census of India 1961*, vol. 4, Bihar, Part II-A, *General Population Tables*, by S. D. Prasad (Delhi, 1963), pp. 26-29. On the religious importance of Gaya town, see L. P. Vidyarthi, *The Sacred Complex in Hindu Gaya* (Bombay, 1961).

²¹ From figures generously supplied to the author by the Revenue Department, Government of Bihar. A good account of the famine is given in B. G. Verghese's monograph, *Beyond the Famine: An Approach to Regional Planning for Bihar* (New Delhi, 1967).

effect on politicking, however, and the campaign proceeded on schedule, culminating in the election in mid-February.²²

Hisua and Warsaliganj constituencies elect one member each of the Legislative Assembly of Bihar State, who is known in both English and Hindi as an "MLA." There are 318 MLA's altogether in the Legislative Assembly, each of whom represented a constituency of about 160,000 population at the time of the Fourth General Elections in 1967. Our two seats go along with four others to make up the Nawada Parliamentary constituency, which returns one Member of Parliament (M.P.) to New Delhi. Although both levels were being contested in the 1967 elections, our interest here is in the two MLA seats.

The largest habitation in the Hisua constituency is the town of Hisua, which contained some 10,088 people according to the 1961 census. The area is relatively well endowed with transportation connections, for Hisua town sits astride a branch railroad line running out from the district headquarters at Gaya town, about twenty-five miles to the west. The shortest available hard-surfaced road between Gaya and the state capital at Patna also goes through Hisua, providing it with bus service several times daily in addition to the rail connection.

For the 1967 elections, the constituency was divided into 94 polling stations, or booths, each of which included an average of 900 or so voters.²³ In most cases one to several villages made up a booth, but larger villages were split up between one or more booths. Hisua town, for instance, had five polling stations. Most booths, like most villages in this region, could be said to be dominated by one or another jati, for they were made up of villages so dominated. In some cases, of course, booth dominance was split; for example, in a two-village booth one jati may dominate one village and a different jati the other. In such a case the booth could be said to have "mixed" dominance. (For the most part, however, village dominance seems to run in areal patterns, such that a single caste dominates groups of villages in a region.)

The high caste Bhumihars are the leading community in Hisua, and are reckoned to dominate fifty of the seat's ninety-four booths, a long way ahead of the next most powerful group, the Yadavs, who hold sway over seventeen polling stations. The Koiris who, like the Yadavs,

²² Of approximately 150 politicians interviewed in connection with the author's research in Bihar, only two or three thought that the drought had any significant impact on the elections.

²³ In India, as in the United Kingdom, voter registration is not incumbent on the individual, but is instead conducted by state registrars who, in theory at least, include on the electoral roll everyone eligible to vote. See Government of Bihar, *Report on the Fourth General Elections in Bihar: 1967*, by V. Narayan (Patna, 1968), pp. 17-24 and 32-33.

are classed in the "upper Shudra" category, dominate nine booths, the Baniyas five, Muslims four, and Harijans one. In eight stations no single caste can be said to dominate.²⁴ It is difficult to compare these data on dominance with each caste's strength in the population because of the lack of recent census figures.²⁵ An impressionistic estimate, gathered locally, is that Bhumihars comprise perhaps 15 percent of the total population, Yadavs probably a bit more. Whatever the exact figures may be, there is no doubt that the Bhumihars have a position of dominance that is out of all proportion to their numbers. We shall now observe how this translated politically in the 1967 elections for the Legislative Assembly.

For many years the Hisua area had been virtually the personal fief of a Bhumihar politician named Shatrughan Sharan Singh. He was deeply involved in the independence movement in Bihar and spent some time in British jails as a result of his activities. Even before independence, he became the leading Bhumihar Congressman in Gaya District, and he has managed to retain this position without serious challenge ever since. In the elections of 1957 and 1962 he ran his wife as the Congress MLA candidate from Hisua, and both times she won handily. For the 1967 poll she again applied for the Congress party ticket, but was refused—ostensibly because she had been implicated in an alleged case of party indiscipline in the Bihar Legislative Assembly, actually because of a shift in factional alignment in the higher echelons of the Bihar Congress. Shatrughan Sharan Singh protested vigorously, and since he was too important a Congressman to be put off with such allegations, the Congress

²⁴ For both Hisua and Warsaliganj, the method used to obtain the pattern of caste dominance was simply to ask a candidate from each constituency to go through the official booth lists (showing the villages making up each polling station) and tell the author which caste was dominant in each booth. In order to gain objectivity, an additional candidate in each seat was asked to perform the same exercise. In both Hisua and Warsaliganj, the two candidates were in agreement for about 90 percent of the booths. When there was disagreement, a number of techniques were used to make a decision. For further explanation, see H. W. Blair, "Caste, Politics and Democracy in Bihar State, India: The Elections of 1967" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1969), pp. 98–100. This analysis incorporates case studies of thirteen MLA seats, of which Hisua and Warsaliganj are two. The same method was employed to determine caste dominance for all thirteen.

²⁵ The 1931 data used to make up Table 1 are for district level. Since Gaya District contained twenty-five MLA seats in 1967, it would be most unwise to make inferences down to the level of Hisua. There are data from the 1911 census for the Nawada Revenue Thana, an area that is smaller than the district but still about three times the size of the present Hisua constituency. In 1911, Bhumihars amounted to 14 percent of the thana's population, Yadavs 13 percent, and Koiris 7 percent. See Government of Bihar and Orissa, *Gaya District Gazetteer: Statistics, 1900–01 to 1910–11* (Patna City, 1915), pp. 6–7.

eventually made up for denying his wife by giving him the official party nomination.

The Communist party of India (CPI)²⁶ put up its own Bhumihar candidate, hoping no doubt to capitalize on the fact that so much of the constituency was dominated by that caste. The only other entrant was put up by the Hindu-oriented Bharatiya Jana Sangh. His caste group, the Kahars, had only negligible strength in Hisua, and he polled a mere 6 percent of the MLA vote. Table 2 shows how the two Bhumihar candidates fared.

Table 2 Mean Percentages of Vote for Major MLA Candidates and Turnout in the Booths of Hisua Constituency, 1967

Candidate	Bhumihar- Dominated Polling Booths	Non-Bhumihar- Dominated Polling Booths	Average in All Booths
	%	%	%
Shatrughan Sharan Singh, Congress	78.6	42.7	61.8
Lal Narayan Singh, CPI	19.0	44.3	30.8
Turnout	75.6	51.7	64.4
(N)	(50)	(44)	(94)

Shatrughan Sharan Singh finished more than 30 percentage points ahead of his CPI rival. In the Bhumihar-dominated booths, he was especially formidable, piling up a margin of sixty points. To look at his phenomenal vote-pulling power in a different way, it could be observed that he won twenty-three of the fifty Bhumihar stations with over 90 percent of the valid vote, and ten of these with more than 95 percent.²⁷ Another attestation to his effectiveness is the fact that turnout was considerably higher in Bhumihar booths than elsewhere; over all booths the zero-order correlation between voter turnout and vote for S. S. Singh was .761 ($r^2 = .578$). In sum, it would be difficult to imagine a more effective mobilizer of caste group strength than Shatrughan Sharan Singh.

The Warsaliganj constituency, east of Hisua, has as its focal point the town of Warsaliganj, a place of slightly more than 13,000 inhabitants in 1961. The town is about fifty miles east of Gaya town and is served

²⁶ The Moscow-oriented branch of Indian Communism, as opposed to the Peking wing, the Communist party of India (Marxist), or CPM.

²⁷ In addition, he won two non-Bhumihar booths with more than 90 percent of the vote.

by the same rail line that passes through Hisua. In addition, the area is linked by hard-surface road to the rest of the district.

As in Hisua, the Bhumihars are the preeminent caste group, dominating 43 of the seat's 102 booths. The pattern in the remaining fifty-nine booths is quite fragmented. The upper Shudra communities come next in order of influence, with the Kurmis dominant in eleven booths, Koiris in ten, and Yadavs in seven. Various other communities predominate in fifteen booths (the strongest being the Muslims, with five) and sixteen booths must be classified as "mixed."

Although geographically the Warsaliganj seat has changed considerably over the years, there is a good deal of political continuity. In the 1957 General Elections, Ram Kishun Singh, a Congress Bhumihar, defeated Deo Nandan Prasad, a CPI entrant from the Kurmi community. There was some question about the propriety of the election, however, and loser Prasad took the matter to court. Eventually he won his case, and a new election was held in 1959. Singh and Prasad both recontested, but this time the Communist won and finished out the term. In 1962, they faced each other for a third time, with Ram Kishun Singh the winner. A new entrant in 1962 was Ram Ratan Singh, another Bhumihar, who contested on the Bharatiya Jana Sangh's ticket, but drew less than 10 percent of the vote.

All three men entered the lists for the 1967 election, as Table 3 shows. Ram Kishun Singh and Ram Ratan Singh performed considerably better in the booths dominated by their own castemen than they did elsewhere, while Deo Nandan Prasad pulled in his bigger percentages in the non-

Table 3 Mean Percentages of Vote for Major MLA Candidates and Turnout in Booths of Warsaliganj Constituency, 1967

Candidate	Polling Booths Grouped by Dominant Caste					Average All Booths
	Bhu- mihar	All		Kurmi	Koiri	
		Non-Bhu- mihar *	Yadav			
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Ram Kishun Singh						
Congress	34.0	28.9	23.3	21.8	35.4	31.0
Deo Nandan Prasad						
CPI	36.0	49.2	61.6	67.5	36.7	43.6
Ram Ratan Singh						
Jana Sangh . . .	27.5	19.6	13.4	8.9	25.4	22.9
Turnout	53.5	47.9	45.8	62.2	42.3	50.2
(N)	(43)	(59)	(7)	(11)	(10)	(102)

* Includes all booths not dominated by Bhumihars.

Bhumihar booths. Prasad, in fact, pulled in an average of more than 67 percent of the vote in the stations dominated by his Kurmi caste fellows, a showing considerably enhanced by the fact that turnout was appreciably higher in the Kurmi booths than elsewhere. (The correlation between his portion of the vote and turnout for all booths, however, was a rather modest .262.) But it was the forty-three Bhumihar booths more than the eleven Kurmi stations upon which the election turned. In Hisua, Shatrughan Sharan Singh was able to keep an average 79 percent of the vote in the Bhumihar booths to himself, but in Warsaliganj the Congress candidate could hold on to no more than 34 percent of this vote. Rival Bhumihar Ram Ratan Singh averaged a bit over 27 percent of the vote in these booths, while the CPI Kurmi did better than either at 36 percent. What was virtually a solid front in Hisua was shattered between these candidates in Warsaliganj; it was shattered so badly in fact that a non-Bhumihar was able to move in and win the election.

This syndrome of fragmentation is not a peculiar one. It is to be observed elsewhere in Bihar, as well as in other regions of India.²⁸ As the Rudolphs put it, there is something paradoxical in the shattering of caste solidarity in that the democratic political process encourages the mobilization of caste groups in politics, yet this same political process encourages splits within the mobilized caste groups.²⁹ In Bihar the reasons behind such fragmentation would appear to be essentially two. First, as caste groups become more successful in the political process, younger men begin to resent the leadership of the older, established politicians (especially Congress politicians, who tend to have been around the longest) and they start to entertain political ambitions of their own. Because the political mode of operation with which they are most familiar is that of caste group politics, it is only to be expected that these younger men will try to realize their ambitions in that behavioral milieu. Second, and complementing the first point, when one particular caste cluster has a clearly preminent position in a constituency, it is natural for more than one party to put up a candidate of that caste.³⁰ Sometimes

²⁸ L. I. and S. H. Rudolph, pp. 89 ff.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

³⁰ The Rudolphs give a rather different explanation for caste group fragmentation. It should be noted that they deal with the "caste association," a term denoting a formally organized group. In Bihar, with the possible exception of the All India Yadav Mahasabha (an organization attempting to unite members of the Yadav caste group), formally organized caste associations seem to have been either moribund or politically ineffective for some time, although a sense of caste group-ness has been very real and powerful, especially in its political manifestations; see sources cited in n. 19. On the Yadavs, see M. S. A. Rao, "Political Elite and Caste Association: A Report of a Caste Conference," *Economic and Political Weekly*, III (18 May 1968), 779-82.

these strategies fail, as in the Hisua case. In other instances the dominant caste is fragmented, often with the result that someone from an entirely different caste is able to win an election, as in Warsaliganj. In this way the efficacy of democratic politics becomes meaningful not only for members of those castes which dominate more booths than any other, but also for groups in less favored positions. They also can comprehend the benefits of uniting with other members of their caste group to elect their own men to office and thereby be represented in the decision-making process that goes on at the higher levels of district and state. Caste cluster politics has, in short, served in many ways as an educator to implant the ideals of pluralistic democracy in India, just as ethnic politics has in the United States.³¹

III. Caste as a Differential Mobilizer

In Bihar state as a whole, caste group mobilization has proved its effectiveness over the last fifty years for the Kayasthas, Bhumihars, Rajputs and Brahmans, and in the past decade or so for the Yadavs, Kurmis, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, Koiris. There is no question, then, as to whether this process has been efficacious in transmitting the practice of political democracy down to the village level.

There is a very real question, however, as to exactly which groups have benefitted most from such mobilization. Just as there is increasing evidence that pluralistic democracy in the United States has in many instances had little meaning or efficacy for the black and other minority communities in many areas,³² so in Bihar caste group politics has meant little to the Hindu communities other than those named in the preceding paragraph.

Dominant castes do fragment, it is true, and their fragmentation allows men of other castes to win elections. And certainly there has been a tendency for upper castes like the Bhumihars to split and permit lower castes like the Kurmis to return men to office. But this process appears to go only a certain distance down the caste ladder, for there is no tendency for the Kurmis, Yadavs, and Koiris to fragment in favor of caste groups beneath them in the ritual rank-order. Rather, the pattern is for upper

³¹ Among others, see Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven, 1961), *passim* but esp. pp. 11-86, and Edward C. Banfield and James Q. Wilson, *City Politics* (Cambridge [Mass.], 1963), pp. 38 ff.

³² See, for example, Allan P. Sindler, *Negro Protest and Local Politics in Durham, N.C.* (Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, 1965); also Peter Bachrach, "A Power Analysis: The Sharing of Anti-Poverty Policy in Baltimore," *Public Policy*, XVIII (Winter 1970), 155-86; and Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice* (New York, 1970).

caste predominance to reassert itself. While Bhumihars are splitting in one constituency they are reunifying in others, so that over the state as a whole the relative numbers of MLA's from the different caste clusters remain fairly constant for the last three elections.

Figures 1-3 show Lorenz curves that compare the cumulative proportion of caste groups in the non-Scheduled population with the cumulative proportion of these groups among the MLA's from the nonreserved seats.³³ The nature of the curve is such that the greater the total area between the curve and the diagonal line, the greater the inequality between population and representation. The most overrepresented caste group is at the upper right in each figure, the most underrepresented at the lower left. A measure of the total inequality between population and seats is given in the Gini index, which varies between zero (perfect equality, or no area between the curve and the diagonal) and unity (perfect inequality).³⁴ The figures portray distributions following the General Elections of 1962 and 1967, as well as the special elections of 1969, held as a result of a series of ministerial collapses during 1967/68.³⁵

There is some movement up and down the curve from one election to the next as given caste groups became more or less over- or under-represented, but the overall pattern is essentially the same. "Twice-born" caste groups continued to be overrepresented way out of proportion to their numbers. Although they had only some 17 percent of the state's non-Scheduled population, the top five communities won 62.8 percent of the general seats in 1962, 60.6 percent in 1967, and 60.4 percent in 1969.³⁶ The upper Shudras have more or less managed to hold their own

³³ The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (cf. note for Table 1) are allotted quotas of seats in the Assembly and Parliament based on their proportion of the population. These "reserved" seats are single-member constituencies, just like the unreserved or "general" seats, with the difference that only members of a Scheduled community may contest them. The seat immediately to the west of Warsaliganj, for instance, was reserved for Scheduled Castes in the 1967 and 1969 elections. Because of the reserved seat factor, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes are not considered in the present analysis. See in this connection Lelah Dushkin, "Scheduled Caste Policy in India: History, Problems, Prospects," *Asian Survey*, VII (September 1967), 626-36.

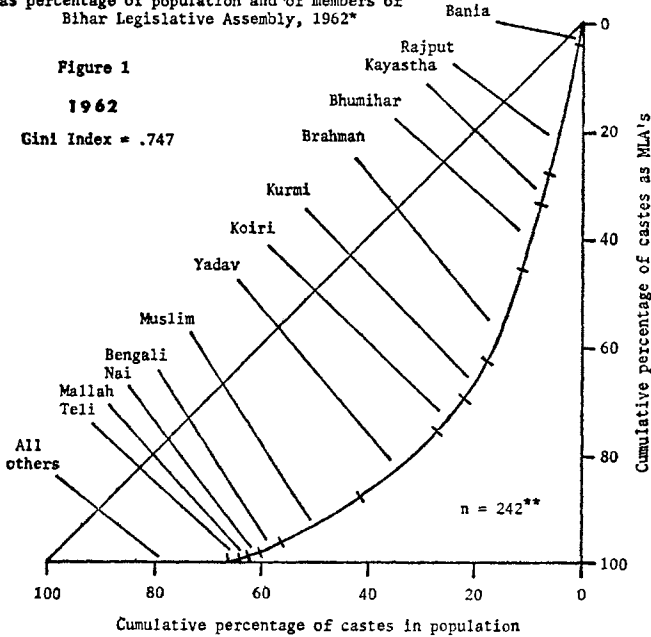
³⁴ A detailed explanation of the Lorenz curve and the Gini Index is given in Hayward R. Alker, *Mathematics and Politics* (New York, 1965), pp. 36-42.

³⁵ Paul R. Brass gives an analysis of this instability in Bihar and other states during this period in his "Coalition Politics in North India," *American Political Science Review*, LXII (December 1968), 1174-92. For a study of the election of 1969, see Ramashray Roy, "Two Patterns in India's Mid-term Elections," *Asian Review*, II (July 1969), 287-302.

³⁶ The position of the Bania community among the top five groups here cannot be explained in the same way that the presence of the other four can be accounted for. While the other four all have some history of participation in Bihar's politics as cohesive and well-mobilized groups, the Banias do not. They have not, as a group, been involved in any of the intraparty caste maneuvering that has so beset

Figures 1, 2, 3 Cumulative Distribution of Non-Scheduled Castes

Cumulative distribution of non-Scheduled Castes as percentage of population and of members of Bihar Legislative Assembly, 1962*



* Population includes all "twice-born" castes + Shudras + Bengalis + Muslims (i.e., Scheduled Castes and Tribes excluded). Sources same as for Table 1.

** Three MLA's for whom caste was not available and one Scheduled Tribesman elected from an unreserved seat have been eliminated.

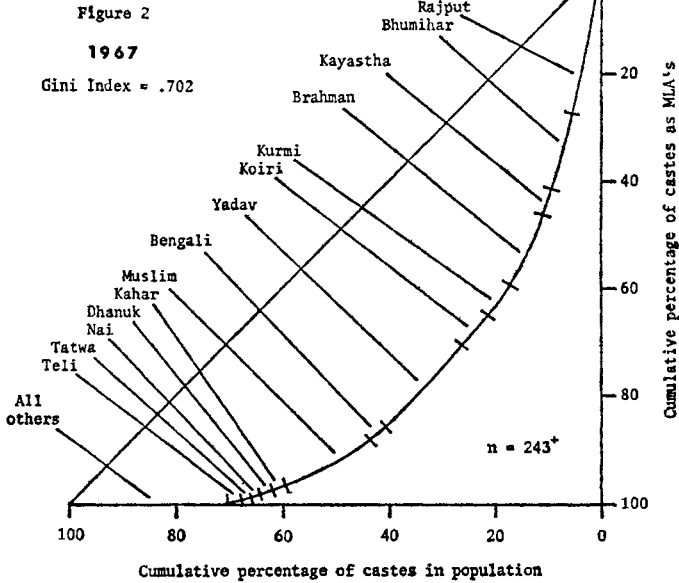
over the period, with just under 24 percent of non-Scheduled population and an average of 25.7 percent of general seats in the three elections.³⁷ Muslims and Bengalis,³⁸ on the other hand, have been somewhat under-

the Congress over the years. The Banias tend to be more urban than most other communities, which gives them some concentrations of numbers in the towns, but this factor explains very little of the Bania overrepresentation. Of the eleven seats that are all or almost all urban in Bihar, a Bania MLA was returned from only one in 1969, while fourteen Banias were returned from rural seats. It seems that the Bania prowess in Bihar politics is more nearly an individual than a group-based phenomenon.

³⁷ It is the angle between the curve and the diagonal that represents the degree of inequality. Thus, the more nearly a segment of the curve parallels the diagonal, the closer to equality are the two measures it compares: proportion of population and proportion of MLAs. That part of the curve denoting the three upper Shudra communities is almost exactly parallel to the diagonal for all three elections.

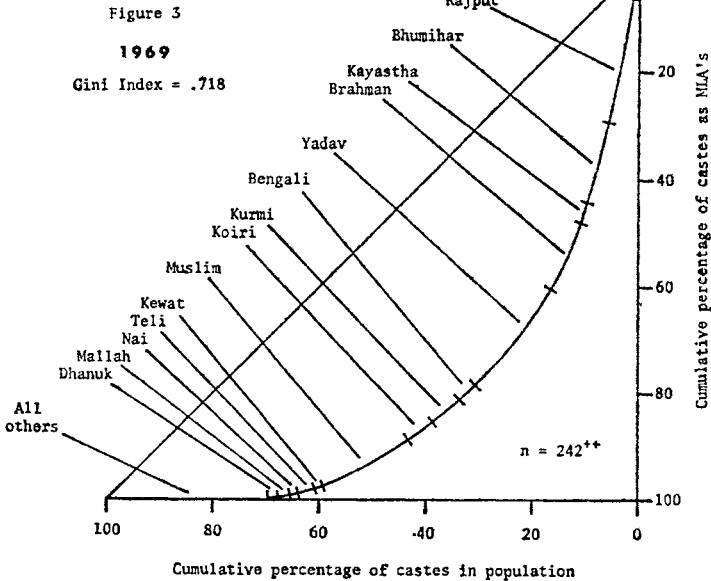
³⁸ The Bengalis are a linguistic rather than a caste community, but tend to be perceived by Biharis as a single group, not as members of different castes, and for this reason are included as one unit here. For a more detailed explanation of the problem, see Blair, pp. 319-20.

Cumulative distribution of non-Scheduled Castes as percentage of population and of members of Bihar Legislative Assembly, 1967*



+ One Scheduled Tribesman elected from an unreserved seat has been eliminated.

Cumulative distribution of non-Scheduled Castes as percentage of population and of members of Bihar Legislative Assembly, 1969*



* Population includes all "twice-born" castes + Shudras + Bengalis + Muslims (i.e., Scheduled Castes and Tribes excluded). Sources same as for Table 1.
++ Two MLA's for whom caste was not available have been eliminated.

represented, while the lower Shudras have scarcely any MLA's at all. The overall measure of inequality, the Gini index, decreased a bit over the period, from .747 in 1962 to .702 in 1967, and back up to .718 in 1969—hardly a change of any real magnitude.

There are three possible reasons for this extremely uneven distribution of political office. First, there is the lack of numerical concentration that characterizes many of the other groups. A rough idea of the problem may be gleaned from the 1911 census, the last year from which caste data are available for lower than district level (in this case that of the revenue thana, a unit about twice the size of a modern MLA constituency).³⁹ In that year the Yadavs had concentrations ranging up to 35 percent of total population in some revenue thanas; Kurmis had densities going as high as 21 percent, and Koiris up to 13 percent. Some of the "twice-born" caste groups also had significant concentrations—up to 22 percent in the case of the Rajputs, 20 percent for the Bhumiars, and 15 percent for the Brahmans. The Telis, however, who had almost 3 percent of total state population in 1931 (Table 1), were so thinly distributed that in no revenue thana did they have more than a 5.3 percent strength in 1911. Similar, though usually even more thinly dispersed, distributions are characteristic of all the other caste groups listed as lower Shudras in Table 1.

A second reason is their low position in the socioeconomic scale. For the "twice-born" groups, lack of concentrated numbers are not necessarily a bar to political success, for local dominance has long been theirs through adroit use of wealth and ritual position. The lower Shudras, having neither wealth nor ritual rank, cannot make up for lack of numbers in this manner.

Thirdly, these depressed communities have little sense of political caste consciousness. Compared to the Telis or Kahars, it was relatively easy for the high caste groups to enter the political arena and to use their various resources to win office and power. In more recent years caste awareness and corporate action have permitted the more numerous and geographically concentrated upper Shudras to follow the electoral path to political success.

³⁹ Districts in Bihar averaged about 3,000,000 population and 18 MLA's in 1967. The 1911 data must, of course, be used with extreme caution (cf. comment on Table 1 sources). The revenue thana figures were not published as part of the official census itself, but are available in the statistical series of district gazetteers based on the 1911 census returns and published between 1911 and 1920. An example is cited above in n. 25.

For all these successful groups, caste does serve as a transmission belt, bringing democracy down to the village level. But all this is of little use to the lower Shudras, who cannot use ritual rank, wealth, or strength of numbers to gain political power. One or two may break through to win an election from time to time, but for all the rest the political arena is a place they cannot enter in a meaningful way. Perhaps in time they can assume a balancing role, able to tip an election one way or another in return for political favor. But this is a much more sophisticated type of political maneuver than merely winning office through numbers or local dominance.⁴⁰ It would be asking a great deal to expect the transmission belt that carried the simpler message to the advanced castes also to carry this far more complicated idea to the weaker castes in the immediate future. Their arrival in the political kingdom seems a long way off.

IV. Conclusion

As long as other aspects of the political system of Bihar remain the same, the possibility of the lower Shudra groups entering the political arena seems bleak indeed. Indications are, however, that other factors are rapidly changing. For one thing, the Congress hegemony of the past ended with that party's defeat in the 1967 elections and its replacement by a multiparty system.⁴¹ The operation of this hegemony in Bihar was primarily the story of factional battles between the upper caste groups within the Congress.⁴² Now the struggle in the Assembly is more nearly one between parties, none of which has a majority. The new system got off to an unstable start, so shaky in fact that several ministries collapsed in rapid succession from defections within their ranks. As a result, new elections were held in February 1969.⁴³ Some day, party may form a stable basis for Bihar's political life, and may even reach down to village level, just as caste politics has in the past. If this should happen,

⁴⁰ For an example of similar difficulties in the United States, see Sinder.

⁴¹ See Brass' analysis of these developments.

⁴² During the Congress period caste was in many ways an aggregator as well as an articulator, in that in the absence of any real multiparty system, caste groups within the dominant Congress party served functionally as units of aggregation. The details of the process are given at some length in the studies cited in n. 19 above. See in addition Shree Nagesh Jha, "Caste in Bihar Politics," *Economic and Political Weekly*, V (14 February 1970), 341-44.

⁴³ Rampant defections were common in many Indian state legislative assemblies after the 1967 elections. Subhash C. Kashyap gives a comparative study in his *The Politics of Defection: A Study of State Politics in India* (Delhi, 1969); pp. 186-229 are devoted to Bihar. Caste continued to be an important influence in these defections, at least in Bihar. See Blair, pp. 342-47.

and the secondary association of party replace the primary one of caste as the basis of participation in the village, then the lower Shudras could participate in the same fashion as anyone else. Political preference rather than caste membership would determine one's allegiance. It would seem, though, that there is a greater chance of such a change in the state Legislative Assembly than at village level, where at best party might become an articulating influence in addition to caste in the villages. A social structure that has endured so pervasively in village life for many centuries will not disappear very early.

It is more likely that change will come about from another source, namely the "Green Revolution" that is sweeping so much of South Asia. Based on the introduction of new seed varieties that can dramatically increase crop yields, the Green Revolution promises to transform the rural Indian economy within a very few years.⁴⁴ But while it grows more food, it has other side effects that may transform politics at village level in the process. There is already evidence that landlords, eager to gain all the benefits of the new technology for themselves, are beginning to displace tenants and sharecroppers from the land.⁴⁵ The displaced groups have little choice but to join the already overcrowded class of landless agricultural laborers. If such tendencies continue, the outcome will in all probability be a class conflict between increasingly rich landowning classes and a landless class that is not participating in the economic growth.⁴⁶

In Bihar such class conflict would serve in the main to reinforce the older caste group conflict, for it is largely high caste members who are the landowners and consequently the dominant castes in many areas. What

⁴⁴ A good general account of these developments is given in Lester R. Brown, *Seeds of Change: The Green Revolution and Development in the 1970's* (New York, 1970). On Bihar specifically, see Peyton Johnson, "Where There Are No Fat Villagers," *CERES, FAO Review*, III (July-August 1970), 35-39.

⁴⁵ See Wolf Ladejinsky, "Green Revolution in Bihar: The Kosi Area, A Field Trip," *Economic and Political Weekly*, IV (27 September 1969), Agriculture Supplement, 147-62. John W. Mellor gives a more general analysis in his "Report on Technological Advance in Indian Agriculture as It Relates to the Distribution of Income," mimeographed (Washington, D.C.: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, December 1969). Legally, tenants and sharecroppers are protected against arbitrary expulsion, but these laws have rarely been enforced. See Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations* (New York, 1968), pp. 1301-34, and Francine R. Frankel, "Ideology and Politics in Economic Planning: The Problem of Indian Agricultural Development Strategy," *World Politics*, XIX (July 1967), 621-45.

⁴⁶ There is by now considerable evidence of such conflict. In addition to Ladejinsky, see Francine R. Frankel, *India's Green Revolution: Economic Gains and Political Costs* (Princeton, 1971), and Richard Critchfield, "Sketches of the Green Revolution," mimeographed (New York: Alicia Patterson Foundation, 1970/71).

would be different would be a newly found community of interest between all the landless Shudra groups and the Harijans, frustrated in their desire to join the Green Revolution. Whether individuals belonging to previously submerged and nonparticipating groups would come into their own in a new class-based system is problematic; but at least there would be more chance for their doing so in a political system based only partly on ascription than in one completely so based, as has been the case in the past.

Whatever does happen, whether these excluded groups enter the polity or not, Bihar has in many ways been well served by the politics of caste. It has been a system that did not include everyone, it is true, but then there are few democracies anywhere that can boast political structures in which all are included equally. There are even fewer underdeveloped polities that have managed to include a substantial portion of their citizenry in meaningful political participation for more than twenty years. That Bihar has been able to do this is in great measure a function of its caste groups and their political mobilization.