

Representation of Political Parties and its Impact on Community Development in Bihar

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Abstract: *This paper examines how the representation of political parties shapes community development in Bihar. The argument is that party representation in Bihar cannot be understood only as the winning of seats or the formation of governments. It also operates through the social profile of candidates, the caste-community coalitions that parties build, the language of dignity and justice that they use, the distribution of public schemes, and the way local institutions translate party competition into everyday development outcomes. Bihar is a significant case because it has experienced both intense identity-based mobilisation and a later developmental turn in electoral politics. The paper develops a conceptual framework linking descriptive representation, party competition, welfare brokerage, local governance, and community development. It uses secondary literature, election studies, historical works, and policy-oriented scholarship published before 2020. The analysis shows that political parties have expanded voice and symbolic inclusion for historically marginalised communities, especially backward castes, extremely backward castes, Dalits, minorities, and women. However, the developmental results of representation have remained uneven because representation often travels through patronage, caste segmentation, weak local capacity, and competitive populism. The paper concludes that representation contributes to community development most effectively when it moves beyond symbolic inclusion and becomes institutionalised through accountable local governance, transparent welfare delivery, inter-community bargaining, and programmatic policy commitments..*

Keywords: Bihar, political parties, representation, caste, community development, Panchayati Raj, social justice, democracy, welfare, local governance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Bihar occupies a central place in the study of Indian democracy. It is one of the most politically mobilised states in India, and its electoral politics has repeatedly influenced national coalition formation, debates on caste, and the meaning of democratic inclusion. The state is often dis-cussed through two powerful narratives. The first is the narrative of social justice, associated with the rise of backward-caste and subaltern political assertion after the 1980s and 1990s. The second is the narrative of development, associated with governance reforms, road construction, schooling, welfare delivery, and the politics of public order after 2005. These two narratives are not separate. They are connected through the question of representation: who gets represented by political parties, how communities are converted into political constituencies, and how such representation affects local development.

Representation is one of the core concerns of political science. In a democratic system, political parties do not merely compete for office; they aggregate interests, produce leadership, articulate grievances, distribute symbolic recognition, and mediate access to the state Pitkin (1967); Sartori (1976); Chhibber (1999). In socially stratified societies, parties also act as vehi-cles through which marginalised groups claim dignity, public visibility, and material resources Jaffrelot (2003); Chandra (2004); Yadav and Palshikar (2003). Bihar provides a particularly rich setting for this question because caste, class, religion, region, gender, migration, agrarian relations, and local power are deeply interwoven in its politics Frankel and Rao (1989); Blair (1980); Witsoe (2013).

The central question of this paper is: How does the representation of political parties influence community development in Bihar? The paper argues that the impact is mixed and historically layered. On one hand, party representation has democratised public life. It has given voice to groups that were once largely subordinated in formal politics, particularly backward castes, Dalits, extremely backward castes, minorities, and women in local institutions. On the other hand, representation has not automatically produced equitable development. Political inclusion has frequently been mediated by caste-based brokerage, selective welfare distribution, weak administrative capacity, and local elite capture Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006); Besley et al. (2004); Jha et al. (2007). Therefore, representation becomes developmentally meaningful only when party competition is joined with institutional accountability, social monitoring, and programmatic public policy.

The study makes three contributions. First, it clarifies the concept of representation by distinguishing electoral, descriptive, symbolic, and programmatic dimensions. Second, it situates Bihar within wider debates on party politics, caste mobilisation, decentralisation, and community development. Third, it proposes an analytical model that explains how party representation is converted into development outcomes through local governance, welfare delivery, leadership circulation, and public accountability.

II. CONCEPTUALISING REPRESENTATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Political representation is not a single-dimensional idea. Pitkin (1967) classically distinguished between formalistic, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive representation. In Bihar, all these forms matter. Formal representation appears through elections and institutional seats. Descriptive representation concerns whether elected representatives and party candidates resemble the social communities they claim to speak for. Symbolic representation refers to recognition, dignity, language, and identity. Substantive representation concerns whether the interests of represented groups are actually advanced through policy, budgetary allocations, local services, and protection from domination.

Community development, similarly, is more than income growth. It includes access to roads, schools, health facilities, drinking water, local employment, welfare benefits, social security, gender safety, participation in local decision-making, and reduction of social exclusion Dre'ze and Sen (1995); Sen (1999); Corbridge et al. (2005). A community may be politically visible but developmentally neglected. Conversely, development schemes may exist on paper but remain inaccessible to weaker groups if they lack political voice, information, or local bargaining power.

For this paper, the relation between representation and community development is understood through five mechanisms:

- M1. Voice mechanism: parties give social groups a public platform to express grievances and claim rights.
- M2. Access mechanism: party networks help communities approach officials, welfare schemes, and local institutions.
- M3. Allocation mechanism: represented groups may receive greater attention in public spending and targeted schemes.
- M4. Accountability mechanism: electoral competition can punish neglect and reward visible development.
- M5. Identity mechanism: symbolic dignity can encourage participation, but it can also fragment development claims along caste or community lines.

The impact of representation is therefore not automatic. It depends on the type of party competition, the organisational depth of parties, the capacity of local institutions, the presence of social movements, and the ability of citizens to monitor welfare delivery.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on political parties in India has long emphasised the role of parties in managing social diversity. Kothari (1964) described the Congress system as a dominant-party arrangement that accommodated diverse interests within a broad umbrella. Later scholarship showed that the decline of Congress dominance produced regionalisation, coalition politics, and the rise of caste-based and state-level parties Brass (1990); Yadav and Palshikar (2003); Tillin (2013); Yadav (1999). Bihar was one of the states where this transition was particularly sharp.

Studies of caste and democracy have shown that electoral mobilisation can transform social hierarchy into political competition. Jaffrelot (2003) argues that democratic politics enabled lower-caste assertion in north India. Chandra (2004) explains how ethnic parties succeed when voters use caste and community networks to judge credibility and

distribution. Witsoe (2013) presents Bihar as a case where democratic assertion challenged older forms of social domination but did not necessarily produce a conventional development model.

A second body of literature concerns state capacity and development. Kohli (1987) and Kohli (1990) emphasise how political organisation and state institutions shape poverty-related outcomes. Corbridge et al. (2005) examine how ordinary citizens encounter the state through local offices, schemes, documents, and intermediaries. In Bihar, these encounters are often mediated by party workers, caste leaders, local brokers, Panchayati Raj representatives, and district-level administrators.

A third stream focuses on decentralisation and local governance. Panchayati Raj institutions were expected to deepen democracy by bringing representation closer to citizens Mathew (2000); Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006); Jayal et al. (2006); Manor (2010). However, decentralisation can be weakened by elite capture, low capacity, informal domination, and limited fiscal autonomy Crook and Manor (1998); Jha et al. (2007). Research on reservations in local bodies has shown that women and marginalised groups can gain visibility and policy influence, although the effect varies by institutional design and social context Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004); Pai (2002).

A fourth literature directly addresses Bihar. Blair (1980) studied caste and electoral mobilisation in Bihar during the earlier phase of democratic competition. Frankel and Rao (1989) located Bihar within the changing structure of dominance and agrarian power. Verma (2010) examined the complex relation between political parties and Panchayati Raj institutions in Bihar. Ankit (2018) provides a historical account of caste politics in Bihar, connecting the rise of backward classes to a longer history of social struggle, while broader scholarship on Dalit and backward-caste assertion helps situate this transformation Omvedt (1993); Shah (2004). Witsoe (2013) argues that Bihar's democratic transformation produced strong political inclusion but also generated tensions with technocratic models of development. Aiyar and Walton (2015) discusses Bihar's shift from dysfunction to redistribution and governance after 2005.

The gap in the literature is that representation and community development are often studied separately. This paper brings them together by asking how party representation actually travels into development outcomes at the community level.

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objectives of this paper are:

1. To analyse the forms of political party representation in Bihar.
2. To examine how caste, community, gender, and regional identities shape party representation.
3. To study the pathways through which party representation affects community development.
4. To identify the limits of representation when it remains symbolic, patronage-based, or weakly institutionalised.

The paper is based on qualitative secondary analysis. It draws on books, research articles, election studies, and pre-2020 public documents. The approach is interpretive and analytical rather than statistical. Bihar is treated as a case study in democratic transformation, where the meaning of development is negotiated through electoral competition, caste-community mobilisation, and local governance institutions.

The paper does not claim to present a new field survey. The chart and diagram used in the paper are conceptual-analytical devices constructed from the literature. They are included to make the argument transparent and to show how the mechanisms of representation may be connected to community development.

V. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PARTY REPRESENTATION IN BIHAR

Bihar's party system has passed through several phases. In the early post-independence period, Congress dominance allowed upper-caste and landed elites to remain influential within a broad political coalition Kothari (1964); Frankel and Rao (1989). The Congress system did accommodate lower groups, but its local organisation often reflected existing social hierarchies. Political participation expanded, yet the distribution of leadership remained unequal.

From the late 1960s and especially after the 1970s, Bihar witnessed the growth of non-Congress politics, socialist movements, peasant mobilisation, and anti-Congress coalitions Brass (1990); Blair (1980). The legacy of socialist

politics was important because it provided an ideological language for backward-caste assertion. The Mandal moment later transformed this language into a powerful electoral force. Parties such as the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Janata Dal (United) [JD(U)], Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), Congress, and Left parties represented different combinations of caste, class, religious, and ideological con-stituencies.

The 1990s are often described as the period of social justice politics in Bihar. The rise of Lalu Prasad Yadav symbolised the political empowerment of backward castes and Muslims, challenging the older dominance of upper-caste elites Jaffrelot (2003); Witsoe (2013). The language of dignity became a major political resource. For many marginalised communities, representation itself was experienced as development in the sense of public voice, self-respect, and freedom from older forms of social humiliation.

After 2005, Bihar politics saw a stronger emphasis on governance, roads, schooling, law and order, women-centred schemes, and targeted welfare. Nitish Kumar’s politics combined development with a reworking of social coalitions, especially through the mobilisation of ex-tremely backward castes, Mahadalits, women, and sections of minorities Aiyar and Walton (2015); Kumar (2011). This did not end caste politics; rather, it changed its grammar. De-velopment became a competitive language through which parties tried to widen their caste-community base.

VI. MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR REPRESENTATIONAL CLAIMS

Political parties in Bihar do not represent communities in a fixed or pure manner. Their social bases shift across elections, alliances, leadership changes, and local candidate selection. Still, each major party has developed a recognisable representational language. Table 1 summarises these broad tendencies.

Table 1: Major Parties in Bihar: Representational Claims and Developmental Emphasis

Party	Broad social-political appeal	Representative language	Developmental emphasis
RJD	Backward castes, especially Yadavs; Muslims; sections of rural poor	Social justice, dignity, secularism, protection from upper-caste domination	Welfare claims, social dignity, representation in public life; criticised for weak governance in some accounts Witsoe (2013); Ankit (2018)
JD(U)	Extremely backward castes, women, Mahadalits, Kurmi-Koeri base, sections of minorities	Good governance with social inclusion; targeted empowerment	Roads, schooling, cycles for girls, local governance, law and order, welfare delivery Aiyar and Walton (2015); Kumar (2011)
BJP	Upper castes, urban groups, traders, sections of OBCs and youth	Nationalism, governance, Hindutva, development	Infrastructure, central schemes, entrepreneurship, law and order, coalition-based state development Brass (1990); Tillin (2013)
LJP/LJP-related formations	Paswan/Dalit constituencies; youth and alliance voters	Dalit assertion, dignity, leadership representation	Targeted welfare, reservation, symbolic inclusion, coalition bargaining Pai (2002); Jaffrelot (2003)
Congress	Historically broad coalition; now reduced but retains minority and legacy appeal in pockets	Secular nationalism, inclusive welfare	Rights-based welfare, minority protection, historical development claims Kothari (1964); Weiner (1967)
Left parties	Landless labourers, poor peasants, workers, radical democratic constituencies in pockets	Class struggle, land rights, anti-feudal mobilisation	Land, wages, labour rights, redistribution, local collective action Frankel and Rao (1989, 1990); Kohli (1987); Krishna (2002)

Table 1 shows that representation in Bihar works through multiple languages: caste dig-nity, secular protection, governance, welfare, nationalism, Dalit assertion, class struggle, and women's empowerment. These languages are not mutually exclusive. In practice, parties com-bine them strategically. For example, development rhetoric may be attached to caste coalitions, while caste representation may be justified through the language of inclusive development.

VII. REPRESENTATION AS SOCIAL JUSTICE

One of the most significant impacts of party representation in Bihar has been the expansion of social justice politics. Before the rise of backward-caste mobilisation, many communities had numerical strength but limited symbolic power in public institutions. The entry of backward-caste leaders into high office changed the social imagination of politics. It told communities that the state was not only an arena of upper-caste authority.

This symbolic shift matters because development is not only material. A road, school, or welfare scheme has limited meaning if a community remains socially humiliated or politically voiceless. Social justice politics gave marginalised groups a language to claim respect and participation. It also changed the nature of political recruitment. Parties increasingly had to consider caste composition, local community influence, and representational balance while selecting candidates.

However, the limits of social justice politics must also be recognised. The politics of dignity did not always translate into administrative reform, employment generation, quality schooling, health infrastructure, or equitable local development. Witsoe (2013) argues that Bihar's demo-cratic assertion challenged hierarchy but also complicated development strategies based only on bureaucratic planning. In other words, the expansion of representation was real, but the conversion of representation into development remained incomplete.

VIII. REPRESENTATION AS GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

The post-2005 period brought development to the centre of Bihar's electoral conversation. Roads, school enrolment, girls' education, law and order, bicycles for schoolgirls, and wel-fare targeting became politically visible issues. This changed the meaning of representation. Communities began to ask not only whether "our people" were in power, but also whether the government was delivering visible public goods.

This shift does not mean that Bihar moved from caste to development in a simple linear manner. Rather, caste and development became connected. Targeted schemes for extremely backward castes, Mahadalits, women, and minorities created new development constituencies. Political parties learned that community development could be used to build new coalitions. Development, therefore, became both a policy agenda and a representational strategy.

The developmental turn also increased the electoral cost of non-performance. When roads, schools, and law-and-order improvements became visible, parties had to compete over gover-nance claims. Kumar (2011) argues that Nitish Kumar's electoral success was linked to the projection of development-oriented leadership. Aiyar and Walton (2015) similarly notes that Bihar's transformation after 2005 involved a combination of redistribution, governance reform, and political messaging.

Yet development through representation remained uneven. Some communities gained more access because they were electorally valuable or organisationally connected. Others remained dependent on brokers. Welfare delivery could be improved through political attention, but it could also be politicised. Thus, development-oriented representation produced both inclusion and new forms of competition.

IX. PANCHAYATI RAJ, LOCAL REPRESENTATION, AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Local governance is crucial for understanding the impact of party representation on community development. Panchayati Raj institutions are formally non-party in several contexts, but party influence often enters indirectly through candidate support, campaign networks, caste coali-tions, and post-election bargaining Verma (2010). In Bihar, local development decisions are shaped by Panchayat representatives, block officials, district administration, contractors, party workers, caste leaders, and informal brokers.

Reservations for women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and backward groups have increased descriptive representation at the local level. This matters because the physical pres-ence of marginalised representatives can change

the social meaning of authority. Women representatives, Dalit representatives, and EBC representatives can bring different priorities to the local agenda, especially water, roads, school access, health, safety, and welfare eligibility (Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004); Pai (2002)).

However, local representation faces serious constraints. First, many representatives lack administrative training. Second, local elites may control resources through informal influence. Third, bureaucratic procedures are difficult for poorer citizens to navigate. Fourth, party and caste networks sometimes convert public schemes into selective benefits. Fifth, women representatives may face proxy control by male relatives, although this varies widely across localities.

The developmental impact of local representation is therefore conditional. It is stronger where representatives have autonomy, information, social support, and access to officials. It is weaker where local democracy is captured by dominant groups or reduced to symbolic office-holding.

X. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: FROM PARTY REPRESENTATION TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Figure 1 presents the conceptual pathway developed in this paper. It shows how political party representation influences community development through both enabling and limiting mechanisms.

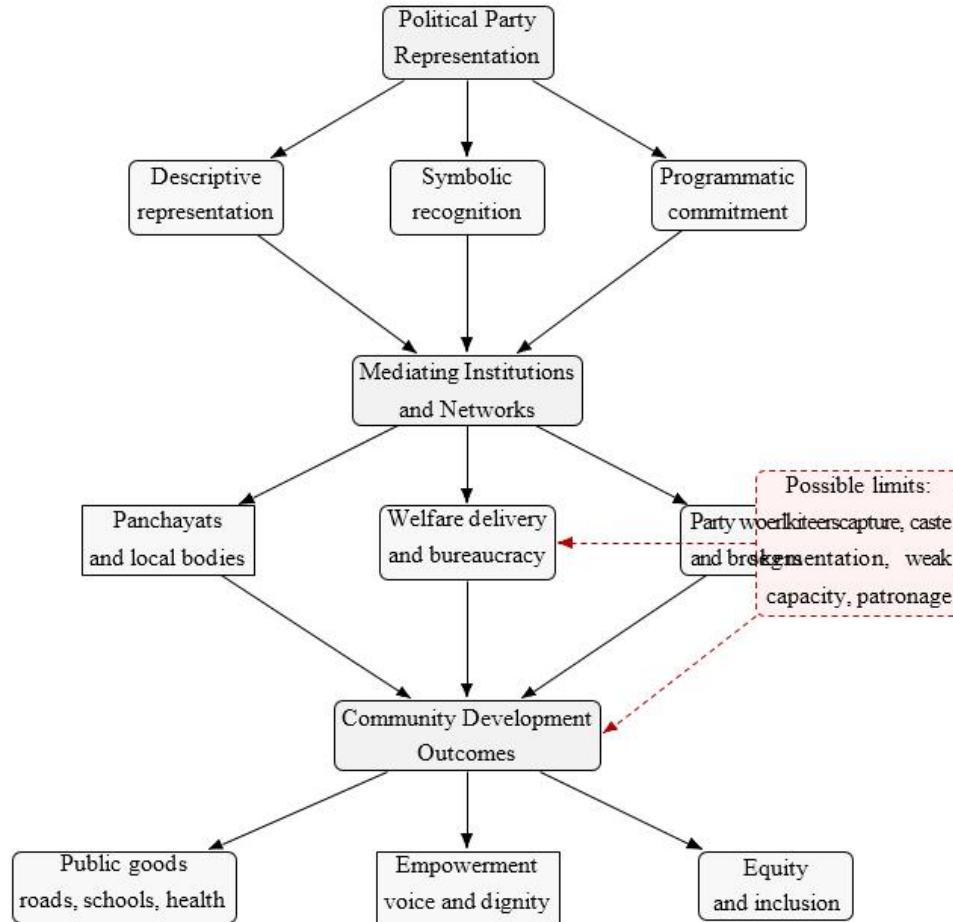


Figure 1: Conceptual pathway from party representation to community development. Source: Author’s synthesis based on theories of representation, party politics, and decentralisation (Pitkin (1967); Chhibber (1999); Bardhan and Mookherjee (2006); Witsoe (2013)).

Figure 1 shows that parties do not directly produce community development. Their impact passes through mediating institutions and networks. If Panchayats are active, welfare delivery is transparent, and party competition is programmatic, representation can improve public goods and inclusion. But if brokerage and caste segmentation dominate, representation may produce selective benefits rather than broad development.

XI. A QUALITATIVE REPRESENTATION–DEVELOPMENT MATRIX

To clarify the argument, Figure 2 presents a qualitative matrix. The scores are not survey data. They are interpretive values on a scale from 1 to 5 derived from the literature reviewed in this paper. The purpose is to summarise how different dimensions of representation may contribute to community development.

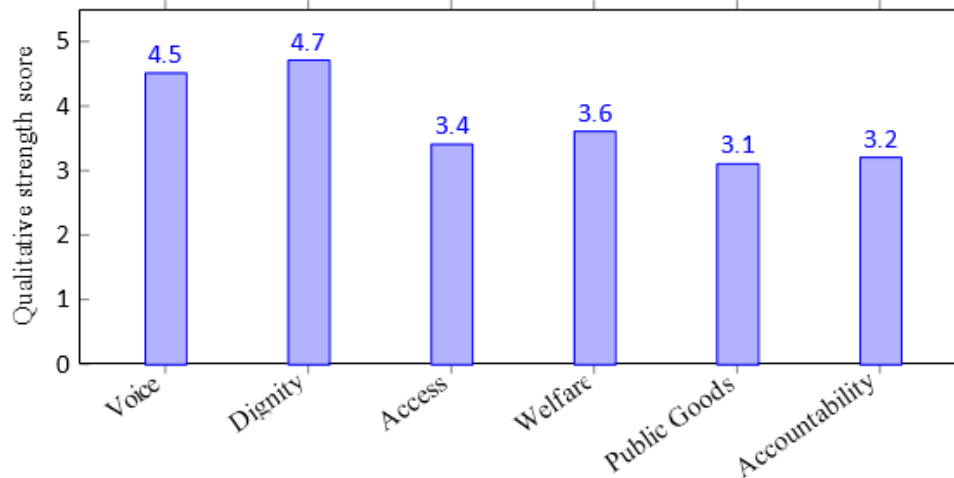


Figure 2: Qualitative assessment of representation’s contribution to selected community-development dimensions in Bihar. Source: Author’s analytical synthesis from secondary literature Jaffrelot (2003); Chandra (2004); Aiyar and Walton (2015); Ankit (2018).

Figure 2 suggests that party representation in Bihar has been strongest in producing voice and dignity. These are the areas where social justice politics had a deep democratic effect. The contribution to access and welfare is moderate because party networks often help citizens reach schemes and officials, but access remains uneven. Public goods and accountability are also moderate because they depend not only on representation but also on administrative capacity, fiscal resources, and monitoring.

XII. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES: POSITIVE EFFECTS

12.1 Expansion of Political Voice

The most visible positive effect of party representation in Bihar is the expansion of political voice. Communities that had earlier remained outside elite political spaces became active participants in electoral competition. Backward castes, Dalits, minorities, and women gained greater visibility in party discourse and local institutions. This widened the social base of democracy.

Voice is developmentally significant because it changes the bargaining position of communities. A community that can vote as a bloc, influence candidate selection, or threaten electoral punishment can demand roads, schools, police protection, welfare cards, and administrative attention. In this sense, political representation becomes a precondition for claiming development.

12.2 Dignity and Social Recognition

The politics of dignity has been central to Bihar. For historically subordinated groups, seeing leaders from their own communities in positions of power has symbolic value. It challenges inherited ideas of who is fit to govern. This

symbolic recognition is not a substitute for material development, but it is an important part of human development because it addresses humilia-tion, fear, and exclusion Sen (1999); Witsoe (2013).

12.3 Targeted Welfare and Coalition Building

Political parties have also used targeted welfare to build and maintain community support. Schemes directed toward girls, women, extremely backward castes, Mahadalits, minorities, and poor households created new development constituencies. This has two effects. First, it brings neglected groups into the policy field. Second, it makes welfare delivery electorally visible, encouraging parties to compete over development performance.

12.4 Local Leadership Formation

Representation has helped produce local leadership from communities that earlier had limited access to public authority. Panchayat reservations and party-linked mobilisation have enabled the emergence of women leaders, Dalit leaders, EBC leaders, and minority representatives. Even where such leadership begins under constraints, it can gradually create political confi-dence and administrative familiarity.

XIII. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES: LIMITS AND CONTRA-DICTIONS

13.1 Patronage and Selective Distribution

A major limitation is that representation often passes through patronage. Party workers and local brokers may help citizens access benefits, but this can make rights appear as favours. When welfare is mediated by political loyalty, development becomes selective. This weak-ens citizenship and increases dependence on intermediaries Corbridge et al. (2005); Jha et al. (2007).

13.2 Caste Segmentation

Caste-based representation can democratise power, but it can also segment development claims. Communities may compete for recognition, reservation categories, candidate tickets, and scheme benefits. Such competition is not inherently negative, but it can reduce the possibility of uni-versal public goods. Roads, schools, hospitals, and employment require broad programmatic politics; caste segmentation can sometimes narrow political attention to group-specific bargain-ing.

13.3 Weak Institutional Capacity

Development requires institutions that can plan, implement, monitor, and correct policy. Bi-har has historically faced problems of weak state capacity, poverty, migration, land inequality, and uneven local administration Kohli (1987); Aiyar and Walton (2015). Political represen-tation alone cannot overcome these structural constraints. A representative may speak for a community but still lack funds, technical knowledge, or bureaucratic cooperation.

13.4 Gendered Constraints

Women's representation in Panchayati Raj and state politics has increased visibility, but gen-dered constraints remain. Women representatives may face social restrictions, limited mobility, family control, and bureaucratic barriers. Yet it would be wrong to dismiss women's represen-tation as merely symbolic. Studies of local reservations show that institutional presence can gradually change priorities and public attitudes Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004).

XIV. DISCUSSION: DOES REPRESENTATION PRODUCE DEVELOPMENT?

The evidence from Bihar suggests a careful answer: representation produces development only under certain conditions. It is most effective when it combines three elements. First, the repre-sented community must have real voice, not merely symbolic presence. Second, the party must convert representation into programmatic commitments such as schooling, health, roads, em-ployment, and welfare rights. Third, local institutions must be capable and accountable enough to implement these commitments.

Bihar's political history shows that representation can transform the social character of democracy. The rise of backward-caste politics changed who could speak in the name of Bi-har. The later developmental turn changed what parties had to promise and deliver. But these changes did not eliminate inequality. They created a more competitive and participatory field in which communities could demand development, but outcomes continued to depend on institutional quality.

The paper therefore rejects two extreme views. The first view says caste-based representation is merely divisive and anti-development. This is too simple because it ignores the democratic importance of dignity and voice. The second view says representation itself is sufficient for development. This is also too simple because representation can be captured, segmented, or reduced to patronage. Bihar shows that social justice and development must be studied together.

XV. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The analysis suggests the following policy implications:

1. Strengthen programmatic party competition. Parties should be evaluated not only by caste balance but also by measurable commitments to education, health, livelihoods, gender safety, and infrastructure.
2. Improve transparency in welfare delivery. Public dashboards, social audits, Gram Sabha monitoring, and accessible grievance mechanisms can reduce dependence on brokers.
3. Build capacity of local representatives. Panchayat representatives, especially women and marginalised members, require regular training in budgeting, scheme implementation, legal powers, and digital governance.
4. Link representation with universal public goods. Targeted schemes are necessary for historically excluded communities, but they should be combined with universal improvements in schools, roads, health centres, and employment.
5. Encourage inter-community development platforms. Local development committees can reduce caste segmentation by bringing different groups together around shared needs.

XVI. CONCLUSION

Representation of political parties has deeply shaped community development in Bihar. It has expanded voice, dignity, political participation, and access to the state for many historically marginalised communities. The rise of backward-caste politics, the mobilisation of Dalits and extremely backward castes, the entry of women into local institutions, and the later emphasis on governance and welfare have all changed the meaning of development in the state.

At the same time, representation has not automatically delivered equitable development. Its impact has been limited by patronage, caste segmentation, weak administrative capacity, elite capture, and uneven local governance. Bihar's experience shows that democratic representation is necessary but not sufficient. It becomes developmentally powerful when symbolic inclusion is connected to substantive policy, accountable institutions, and universal public goods.

The main conclusion is that the future of community development in Bihar depends on moving from identity as recognition to identity with accountability. Political parties must continue to represent historically excluded communities, but they must also transform such representation into transparent, measurable, and inclusive development. Only then can representation become not merely a claim of power, but a pathway to collective well-being.

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