CHAPTER VI

JANATA PARTY AS A POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE TO THE CONGRESS

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The Indian society, ever since independence, is engaged in the tremendous task of transforming itself from a traditional, hierarchical, poverty-stricken society to a modern, equalitarian and affluent society. After independence, it chose to adopt an open and eclectic model of development, one that involved simultaneity of goals and a mix between tradition and modernity. The Indian National Congress, which was itself an outgrowth of considerable intellectual awakening, social "renaissance" and reformist activity throughout the 19th century, and indirectly of the systems of administration, education, law and communication developed under the British Raj inherited power from them and became the vehicle of change in the society after independence in 1947. It was a highly amorphous and eclectic organization with a pragmatic leadership, accommodating various strands of thought and commitment. Its identification with the freedom movement in India made it the dominant entity in Indian politics.


Soon after coming into power the Congress had to take up the difficult and complex task of "simultaneous and consistent growth in all sectors" which is an impossible endeavour in a society like India "where stagnation of some parts and dynamism of others are generally marked." Even in the field of politics, this problem cropped up. The adoption of the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy did not mean a wholesale institutionalization of the British model of government. The institution of political opposition, which took centuries to develop there could not develop immediately in India with the adoption or transplantation of the system. We must not forget that the constitutional development and the institution building in the so called 'models of developed nations' had to pass through ordeals of revolutionary strifes, religious conflicts and even wars and these crisis to quote Fred W. Riggs were not only "unavoidable consequences of development but perhaps in a more significant way they were the causes of development." The era of the state of emergency in India during 1975-77 may be

3. Haridwar Rai and Vijay Kumar, op.cit, p.49.
4. Ibid.
characterised as one of such crises which imparted the necessary dynamism for the development of a viable alternative to the ruling Congress Party, so necessary for the health of a successful and effective parliamentary democracy.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to delineate the emergence of the Janata Party as an alternative to the Congress in the State politics of Bihar vis-a-vis the national politics. State politics assume significance within the Indian federal polity where the states operate as units of the nation, though not as independent and truly autonomous political entities but in the light of the existence of territorial, cultural, linguistic, religious and socio-economic differences which reflect in a microcosm the plurality of India. Since states perform most of the traditional functions of governmental units and ideal with subjects having direct, immediate and intimate impact on the fortunes of the citizens, state politics has an obvious and tangible objective relevance. It is the states which cater to the aspiration of the people and bear the burnt of their frustrations.

7. Ibid., p.132.
Talking in 1971 Norman D. Palmer, observed that a "healthy party system has not emerged, and there seems little likelihood that it would emerge in the foreseeable future."

But within a couple of years, the prediction of Palmer was contradicted and one party dominance system proved to be a "transitional system". People began to look forward for a change in the party system the opportunity for which was thrown up to the opposition parties by the period of emergency which made them sink their individual differences and coalesce together to form a viable front to the Congress in the 1977 general election.

The absence of a viable or effective democratic alternative to the Congress party which has been continuously in power at the centre and also in most of the states till 1977 (though for a brief period in 1967-69 its dominance was broken in states) was one of the major factors militating against democracy both at the federal and state levels of Indian politics. Multiplicity of opposition parties and the consequence splitting up of the opposition votes enabled the Congress to

ride to power in successive parliamentary and Assembly elections on the strength of just over 40 percent of the polled votes. Even when the Congress failed to get a clear majority in some of the states including Bihar in the general elections of 1967, the absence of any one single viable party in the opposition resulted in the formation of unprincipled coalitions which were doomed to failure from their very inception. Consequently the democratic functioning of the state legislatures suffered in the absence of an effective opposition. The ruling party tended to become autocratic surpassing all limits after the imposition of emergency in 1975. The opposition had not been able to hold out the threat of an alternative government to the Congress.

The multi-party system dominated the Bihar political scene as the Indian political milieu all these years with one strong party, the Congress Party in power and several minor parties and groups in the opposition. The presence of a large number of parties divided the opposition votes and no party got an absolute majority except the Congress. Sometimes it is argued that simple majority and single ballot system favour the two party system and both the simple majority

system with second ballot and proportional representation favour multi-party system. But even simple majority single ballot system failed to evolve a two party system in India both at the federal and the unitary levels because of the multiplicity of parties who consistently refused to coalesce together and form united fronts against the Congress.

Effective opposition, on the other hand, implies that that party or parties should be in a position to form an alternative government when the party in power goes out of office. And, as long as people are not sure that such an alternative government which would be stable is forthcoming, they don't usually take the risk of voting them in large number.

The splinter groups, popularly known as the opposition, had too consistently refused for nearly thirty years to join hands in the larger interests of the country to develop and preserve democratic institutions and form an alternative to the Congress in the state of Bihar in particular and the Indian union in general. They seemed to be more anxious to preserve their own individual identity and position and ensured their own advancement on the political plane rather than

allow one’s petty personality to submerge or take a secondary place so that the state may benefit from a fusion or polarization. As such what we had in Bihar till 1977 was in reality anything but a viable opposition. It is true that in Bihar as elsewhere, the Congress Party continued to hold a dominant position until at least March 1977 and again regained its dominance in 1980, but even while remaining the largest party in the legislative assembly, it has always polled less number of votes than those gained by the combined non-Congress political parties. Even the capability of the Congress to interact as a party of consensus has always been debatable particularly in Bihar which is endowed with a fractioned and fragmented plural social structure.

As a matter of fact the opposition parties here inspite of having minor strength in the legislative assemblies have acted upon the Congress party from the margin as more than mere parties of pressure. It is true that during the years of Congress dominance they have failed to project themselves a political alternative but they have carefully consolidated their support bases by assimilating the isolated political forces and also by accommodating the dissenting elements of the Congress Party within their fold. At last on two specific occasions the opposition parties could articulate and
channelise the anti-Congress sentiments to evolve them as their support structure. In 1967 it was anti-Congressism which could attract the hitherto politically deprived communities for shifting their allegiance to any political party other than Congress. Again after a decade in 1977 the realignment of political forces could take place in the state along all-Indian pattern assimilating primarily the anti-Congress elements. Thus whenever the opposition united it was able to provide an alternative to the Congress.

But across the aisles from the treasury benches, opposition parties, numerically weak and fragmented into a variety of mutually antagonistic groups, demonstrated a general inability, either singly or in combination, to provide the state of Bihar with any alternative group of rule-makers. Although the vote in the favour of the opposition has always been substantial, the number of groups are so many that singly they have been unable to pose a challenge to the Congress. In a backward state of an underdeveloped country like India the burden of social development lies squarely on the political sub-system. "There is simply too much that cries to be done." But with an underdeveloped associational infra-structure and lack of proper

opposition party to control the government, dictatorial and autocratic tendencies in a party that rules unchallenged are bound to crop up. The opposition itself was the worst victim of this tendency which raised its head in the aftermath of 1971 general elections. The fragmented opposition failed to fulfill its duty of ensuring that public affairs are run in such a manner as to ensure respect for public opinion, for the view of the minority and mass of people at large. Totalitarian form of governments results in some cases from one party rules or when the opposition is ineffective, helpless, spineless or weaks. The results of the emergency are an example of the same kind of behaviour of the opposition.

Rise of Janata Party as Political alternative

After Gujrat elections and Bihar movement emergency was proclaimed but on 18th January 1977 Mrs. Gandhi announced election within two months. She said government had to go to the people from time to time and obtain their sanction for its actions and approval of its policies and therefore she had decided to obtain a fresh mandate from the electorate by holding fresh elections to parliament one year advance. She claimed that country is more healthy, efficient and dynamic than it had been

for a long time. She announced that opposition leaders would be released but Emergency would not be revoked but opposition leaders will be allowed to carry on legitimate party propaganda for the purpose of Election. Press censorship would be relaxed during election campaign.

The opposition leaders after languishing in jail for 19 months came out convinced that this was probably the last chance of their lifetime to save themselves from the clutches of a dictator and reestablish and reinstate democracy. They had to therefore swim together or they would sink together. They forgot many of their differences - ideological, social, personal- their ambitions and their love of office, their position and power in their respective small parties or groups and came together almost without moment's hesitation, accepting the advice and pleading of Jayaprakash Narain to form themselves into a new party which was known as Janata Party. Those who came together to form this party were the BLD, the Congress 'O', the Socialist

16. Ibid.
Party and Jan Sangh. They were later joined by Jagjivan Ram and his associates who had left the Congress party to form themselves into a separate breakway group known as Congress for Democracy (C.F.D.). No democrat could have failed to admire the way in which the Janata Party leaders came together and functioned from the day they were released from the jail until election day. They indeed seemed to have forsaken their entire past at that time and they worked for the new party as if it was a matter of life and death. Within two days after being released from the jail formed themselves into a single party. They asked for no favour from or for any one and worked for singleness of purpose seldom witnessed in the politics. Having been cut off from the rest of the world for two years opposition had no organisation with which to face the electorate and fight the elections. The workers of the Janata party were completely demoralised and rudderless and the party was without any resources. It had to depend on small mercies which came mostly in the form of one rupee notes which given by the poor from the factories, mills, and offices, by the farmers and by the lovers of democracy at the election meeting. It was with the such means and an abundance of good will of the people the entire campaign was conducted.

19. The opposition leaders were released from jail on 20 January 1977 and Janata Party was formed on 22nd January 1977 at the residence of Morarji Bhai's Residence, Times of India, 23.1.1977.
The leaders moved from one part to another part with lightening speed working round the clock hoping against hope, and to give a political alternative to the Congress misrule.

The task considerably lighted however with the active participation of several well known non-party national leaders like Jaya Prakash Narain, Sahi Imam of Jamamasjid, Acharya Kripalani, Vijaya Laxmi Pandit and others. Their very presence could not have failed to make the people realise the gravity of the disaster that had to overtake the nation and that democracy which founders of the nation had established was not to be bartered away for the dictatorial rule of one individual however great her antecedents.

Jaya Prakash Narain said that there was one issue before the people a choice between democracy and dictatorship. Vijaya Laxmi Pandit, Jawaharlal Nehru's sister who was leading a retired life was compelled to come out and raise her powerful voice against those who torned the public into lunatic asylum. Sahi Imam and many others gave support to this new party.

20. The Indian Express, 1.2.1977.
22. Ibid., 15.2.1977.
This was an important development for the first time in the history of democratic elections in India, which led to the downfall of the Congress party. If these leaders were not to come out from their seclusion or retirement to expose the misdeeds of the Congress and work to save democracy, the result of the election may have different. The Janata Party may have won the elections with a narrow majority into come out as a strong opposition. Its success cannot be ascribed solely to the efforts and the ability of its members to sway the voters. Quite a lot of it was due to those who could bear the sufferings no more and were waiting for an opportunity to speak out against those who had abused their authority and power.

For the first time people of India were against misrule and divided opposition formed a single party. For the first time mass of the country thought that the opposition can be an alternative to the Congress and this government can be stable.

**Results**

When the election results were announced the people of India or at least those who believed in democracy and capable of thinking and reasoning things out definitely heaved a sigh.

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of relief that the monolith which had dominated the political scene in India for 30 years was at last smashed. The results confirmed that for once and for all the people had asserted themselves they knew better what exactly they counted and how to should be brought about. They demolished the argument that the Congress alone could rule the country and provide its political stability. They established the fact that there are and can be others who are equally capable of providing it with all that and more such a process had begun for the first time in the 30 years history of independent India.

The major and most populous part of the country in the North with the exemption of Assam partly Gujrat and the southern states viz. Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Maharashtra voted almost en bloc for the Janata Party.

The Prime Minister Indira Gandhi herself was defeated so was with her son Sanjoy Gandhi. Another 33 ministers in her cabinet were similarly rejected by the people. The home state of three Prime Minister of India Uttar Pradesh rejected the Congress

24. First Result of the Fifth Lok Sabha announced at 8 A.M. of 20.3.77 by A.I.R. and after this announcement Janata win started increasing and upto 21.3.77.

25. Congress leaders in their Election campaign said that only Congress alone can give a stable government.
luck stock and barrel and in the whole Hindi belt the Congress could hardly secure half a dozen of seats in the Lok Sabha.

In Southern states the Janata Party could not get the expected seats because in those states the effect of emergency was negligible and after this election was clear that Janata Party can be a viable alternative to the Congress party and party system can be successful in India like America and England.

Formation of New Government

The New government formed with Morarji Desai as the Prime Minister contained some of the old tried leaders of the country. Some of them may not have had much administrative experience but most of them leaders who had come to the hard way. They had made their contributions in their own sphere of activity and had struggled for years to win the support of the masses and reach the top greatness was not thrust unworthy, undeserving shoulders as it had happened with many of those who were pulling the country for more than 30 years merely because they called themselves Congress men. The opportunity came to them only after undergoing the most humiliating experience and sufferings in jail for 19 months at the hands of free India's

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own government led by prime minister who did not miss a single opportunity to be a democrat and that every section of her government was duly approved by parliament. It is this that gave them the opportunity to become the first non-congress government elected by the people.

The party had accepted the ideology based on Gandhian principle and approach to the country problems as the basis. It began its life in the government with a pledge to serve the people at the Gandhi Samadhi which was led by Jayaprakash Narain.

**Performance**

The administration at the centre was for all practical purposes was in shambles when Janata Party formed the government and to put in proper shape would itself be a Himalayan task.

The Janata Government restored peoples rights and liberties from almost that very day the Janata government took office people were once more free to talk to discuss to move about, to write, as they wished. There was no police raj. All MISA prisoners were freed and the Press, Radio and Doordarshan were


28. All the Cabinet members took oath to work on Gandhian principle at Gandhi Samadhi Rajghat on 24th March, 1977, Hindustan Times, 25.3.1977.
allowed to complete freedom to function as they were before emergency. Constitution was amended in order to restore it to its original purity and in particular to reestablish the equality of all citizens before law and to reestablish law and to assert that there is such a thing as 'basic features' in our constitution which include the fundamental rights of the people.

The leader of the opposition was given the status of a cabinet minister as in some of the oldest democracies. Members of the opposition were allowed on A.I.R. and Door Darbhan to give their opinion among the public. As soon as Janata Party assumed office the prices of various essential commodities slashed down.

Assembly Election

On 22nd April 1977 the government sent a proposal to Acting President Dr. B.D. Jatti for elections in nine states - Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. After some confusions elections in the above states were declared legal. Nine states assemblies were dissolved by the presidential proclamation and the election Commissioner was asked to hold the election as soon as possible.


The Janata, C.F.D., and their allies hailed the proclamation while the congress described it as a "dictatorial act" a blow to the federal democratic structure of the country.

The Janata Party secured a landslide victory in the June 1977 election and a new government was installed under the leadership of Karpoori Thakur.

**TABLE NO.18**

Mid-Term Poll in Bihar

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<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats Contested</th>
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<td>Independents</td>
<td>2206</td>
<td>24</td>
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</table>

The Indian Nation, 22.6.1977.

The Janata Party, in the true sense of the term was able to provide an alternative to the Congress by projecting an alternative set of rule-makers both at the centre and nine states of the Indian Union. It was for the first time in the political history of the state of Bihar in particular and India in general that an alternative to the Congress could emerge. The Janata Party worked in the state of Bihar for a period of ....
months and as long as it ruled, it proved to be an alternative to the Congress party.

The Congress in Bihar had failed to represent a consensus. The explication of caste composition of Congress members of the Bihar legislative Assembly between 1957 and 1967 clearly indicates that the Congress party was not able to accommodate properly diverse social groups. By and large, this party had remained dominated by upper castes. The lower castes in spite of their largest share in the total population of the state could not get due representation. Even the organizational wing of the Congress had remained monopolized by the upper castes whose representatives continued to hold more than two-third of the berths in the executive of the party. The emergence of the Janata Party changed the scene and upper backwards and backwards began to dominate the political decision-making in the state. The social-composition of the changed political elite, who had been till now deprived of political power in the society provided not only an alternative set of decision-makers but also gave vent to their own suppressed feelings of political and economic deprivation. This resulted in an open confrontation between the backwards on the one hand and scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and the forwards on the other. However, when the 1980 elections were held after the collapse of the Janata at the centre, there was a mood of apathy, cynicism, fatalism and even
despair and despondency at the break up of the Janata government so soon.

The Janata party, though failed to project itself as a permanent or a viable alternative to the Congress leading to the emergence of a two-party system both at the federal and the state level, testified to the potentiality of the system to throw up an alternative if the need be as such.