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Bihar's Political Chants of Change:

Political Slogans as Windows into Bihar's
Transformation

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Executive Summary

Over five decades, Bihar's political slogans have mirrored deep transformations in governance, caste relations, economic aspirations, and identity politics. This report explores how these slogans have functioned as powerful expressions of Bihar's evolving social consciousness and political imagination, tracing these changes across four key stages.

The period of the 1970s to the 1990s marked the decline of the Congress' hegemony and the rise of backward caste assertion. "*Sampoorna Kranti*" by Jayaprakash Narayan demanded moral and systematic revolution but unintentionally opened up the political space for caste-based mobilization. The demand for representation, incorporated into the political grammar of Bihar through Karpoori Thakur's slogan "*Pichchda pave sau mein saath*" transformed these moral appeals into the demands for social inclusion and representation.

The 1990s to 2000s witnessed the consolidation of identity politics under Lalu Prasad Yadav. Slogans such as "*Bhura baal Saaf Karo*" and "*Jab tak rahega samose mein aaloo, tab tak rahega Bihar mein Lalu*" changed the definition of leadership into one of subaltern pride and cultural intimacy. Politics was now seen as a manifestation of vernacular populism, prioritizing dignity over development and legitimizing new caste orders of authority and informal rule.

With the rise of Nitish Kumar, Bihar's discourse underwent a paradigm shift towards governance and reform. The '*Sushasan vs Jungle Raj*' narrative portrayed Bihar's transformation as a moral shift—from a state of disorder to one of law and stability. However, this redefinition also diluted the idea of social justice, turning deep-rooted inequalities into matters of administrative efficiency rather than structural change.

In recent years, the intersection of nationalism and local grievance has defined Bihar's political language. "*Atmanirbhar Bharat*" reflects a nationalized vision of self-sufficiency, while "*Bihar Mein Ka Ba*" captures youth frustration, reverse migration, and disillusionment with elite models of development. Although the vocabulary has shifted—from *kranti* to *vikas*—the struggles for dignity, equality, and livelihood continue to anchor Bihar's political imagination.



The phenomenon of political slogans as a form of communication is intriguing. They simplify complex socio-political realities into simple and memorable expressions. Bihar, considered one of the oldest lands of democracy with the republican Mahajanapadas, such as Vajji, dating back to 6th century BCE, presents a particularly rich context for understanding this form of expression. In a state marked by social inequities, political violence, and persistent agrarian conflicts, political slogans do not serve merely as communication devices. They serve as living documents of the Bihar's social history, reflecting economic distress, the activism of various political movements, and the evolving socio-political consciousness.

Since Jayaprakash Narayan's 1974 slogan of "*Sampoorna Kranti*" to the political discourse on "*Bihar Mein Ka Ba*," Bihar's political history stands as a testament to the enduring tensions between caste hierarchies and the pursuit of social justice. Within this study, political slogans are viewed as vital markers of change, reflecting shifts in social structure, rising economic aspirations, evolving political ambitions, and the transformation of governance narratives in Bihar over the past fifty years.



This analysis explores the evolution of Bihar's political history through the systematic study of important political slogans from the following periods: 1970s-1990s, 1990s-2000s, 2000-2010, 2010-present. These historical phases correspond to the political shifts that significantly reshaped the governance in the state. While the 1970s marked the decline of Congress hegemony, catalyzed by the Bihar Movement, the 1990s witnessed the consolidation of identity politics under Lalu Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal (Indian History Collective). The 2000s signalled the arrival of a 'development' oriented agenda under Nitish Kumar, while the current phase continues to reflect the persistent issues of unemployment, migration, and caste-based mobilization (Indian Express, 2023).

This analytical framework considers political slogans in three interconnected dimensions. The first one is social structure and demands. Social hierarchies of caste and issues of community dignity, representation, and gender roles are central to the social demands expressed through political slogans. In Bihar, the social landscape has evolved, with the assertion of EBC, OBC, and SC groups actively redefining the state's political landscape.

The second dimension is economic aspirations. Political slogans often highlight the issues of employment, infrastructure and overall economic development, reflecting different and sometimes competing path to state's progress.

The final dimension is political and this describes how the political slogans account for changes in the political parties, their structures, coalition dynamics, governance models, and ruling ideologies (Al Jazeera, 2015).



The empirical foundation of this study draws on leaders' speeches, newspaper archives, election manifestos, political party's campaign songs, particularly Bhojpuri songs targeting Bihar's rural electorate (Frontline, 2025). It contributes to a deeper understanding of how political discourse, social change, and governance priorities have evolved over five decades of Bihar's political history.



Chapter 1

1970s - 1990s: Total Revolution and Backward Caste Awakening

The phase of 1970s - 1990s was marked by a steep decline in Congress' hegemony in Bihar, opening up the political space for identity politics. Widespread corruption and rising prices became the trigger points for the Sampoorna Kranti movement of Jayaprakash Narayan. Years later, it was Karpoori Thakur who shifted the focus from Sampoorna Kranti's universalist vision to an identity-based assertion rooted in Bihar's caste dynamics. The slogan "*Pichhda pave sau mein saath*" captured this mood, while deepening political polarization. This phase became the staging ground for the post-1990s politics of Bihar.

Slogan 1: "Sampoorna Kranti" (Total Revolution)

On June 5, 1974, at Patna's Gandhi Maidan, Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) gave the call for "*Sampoorna Kranti*" transforming a student agitation against rising prices and corruption into a full-scale challenge to the Indian political system (Deccan Herald, 2024). Jayaprakash's vision avoided piecemeal reforms by articulating seven, albeit closely intertwined, revolutions: political, social, economic, cultural, ideological, educational, and spiritual.

This comprehensive vision derived from a conviction that the challenges India faced were rooted in deep structural inequalities and moral failures, rather than merely administrative inefficiencies. The movement's relationship with caste dynamics was, at best, contradictory. While JP explicitly rejected caste politics and prioritized universal moral regeneration, the movement unintentionally created political space for backward caste mobilization by weakening the upper-caste-dominated Congress (Indian Express, 2018).



The backward caste and Dalit youth, who were politically socialized under the movement, formed a politically active generation prepared to lead the subsequently organized caste-based political movements. Women's political engagement was visible, albeit in a limited and peripheral manner that reflected the existing patriarchal assumptions.

The Sampoorna Kranti movement identified corruption as its main target and portrayed it as the key reason behind Bihar's underdevelopment.

This narrative aligned with the widely held sentiments, although it failed to take into consideration the specific structural issues related to the development of the state of Bihar. For instance, the landlocked geography of the state and Bihar's economically dependent position within the federal structure.

The stagnant state of Bihar's economy during the time was reflected in the migration patterns, with a large number of unemployed people seeking work in the neighboring states such as Punjab, Haryana, and Maharashtra, a situation the movement responded to by emphasizing the need for local employment opportunities.

Politically, the biggest consequence of this movement was the dissolution of Bihar Legislative Assembly in 1974, which demonstrated that extra-parliamentary pressure could override formal democratic processes and marked the beginning of Congress' decline in Bihar. When elections were held in 1977, a tidal wave of anti-Congress sentiment swept Bihar, leading to the rise of Janata Party.



This ended the Congress' dominance and created space for new political formations. In this way, the movement served as a bridge between Congress-dominated democracy and the fragmented, pluralistic phase that followed.



Slogan 2: "Pichhda pave sau mein saath" (Backwards get 60 in 100)

This slogan voiced the backwards caste's demand for a proportionate share of government jobs and educational opportunities. In Bihar, where backward castes constituted about 60% of the population, leaders such as Karpoori Thakur sought reservations proportional to their population, rather than the 27 percent limit recommended by the Mandal Commission. This was a stark departure from the universalist discourse of Sampoorna Kranti to an overt identity-based assertion grounded in caste demographics.

The demand directly challenged the caste hierarchy of Bihar by asserting that backward castes were entitled to representation based on their numerical strength. For an elite upper-caste-dominated society, such a claim was radical. The slogan's focus on "dignity" carried symbolic weight— for backward castes, dignity meant more than honest governance, it demanded recognition of historic abuse and remedies for social injustice (Indian History Collective).



This slogan also fostered a cross-caste coalition among various backward groups, including Yadavs and lower backward castes, despite their historic rivalries. But the participation of women was largely symbolic, and masculinist caste politics overshadowed gender concerns.

The reservation demand resonated strongly with backward caste youth aspiring for government jobs. However, the focus on redistribution of the existing governmental jobs instead of creating new economic opportunities intensified caste polarization and reinforced a zero-sum view of development. Migration continued to rise, as economic stagnation persisted despite reservation policies.

The introduction of backward caste reservations in state jobs by Karpoori Thakur solidified the political influence of backward caste leaders, allowing them to translate symbolic power into tangible benefits. However, this shift caused deep divisions within the Janata Party - between upper caste and backward caste factions. This resulted in repeated government collapses and imposition of President's Rule in Bihar.

The legacy of this era was mixed. Backward caste movements successfully challenged upper-caste dominance and institutionalized the idea of demographic representation. Yet, it deepened political polarization and governance instability, without addressing the underlying economic stagnation that continued to define Bihar's trajectory for decades.



Chapter 2

1990s - 2000s: Identity Politics and Social Recognition

The 1990s marked a landmark period in Bihar politics with the rise of identity politics as a defining factor for both governance and electoral mobilisation. Under Lalu Prasad Yadav, politics in the state underwent a radical transformation towards a model of development rooted in social representation and backward caste assertion (Indian History Collective, 2024).

At the same time, Bihar was also deeply afflicted by economic deprivation, as the bifurcation of Jharkhand in 2000 left it with a constrained resource base and weakened revenue generation capacity.

The changing socio-political and economic structures demanded a recalibration of the language of politics, which was evident in the slogans that characterised this transformative phase.

Slogan 1: “Bhura Baal Saaf Karo”

The slogan "Bhura Baal Saaf Karo" was reportedly used during Lalu Prasad Yadav's first tenure as Chief Minister of Bihar in the early 1990s, though he has consistently denied coining it. The term "Bhura Baal" (brown hair) functions as an acronym for four upper castes—Bhumihar, Rajput, Brahmin, and Lala (Kayastha) and was interpreted as a call to end their dominance in political power.

The slogan was a coded critique of upper-caste dominance, who had for long controlled Bihar's economic and administrative structures. It was also an oblique expression of resentment against police atrocities and systemic exclusion (ETV Bharat: 2018).



This was the time when Bihar was engulfed in intense caste wars, marking one of the darkest period of social violence in the state's history (ETV Bharat, 2018). From 1990 to 2005, Bihar witnessed extreme caste-based clashes that reflected the deep polarization between upper and backward castes.

Private militias such as the Ranvir Sena, formed in 1994 by Bhumihar landlords, emerged as a violent response to Naxalite movements and the growing assertion of backward castes (Politics of Bihar, 2024). Between 1995 and 2000, the Ranvir Sena carried out twenty-seven massacres, killing around 263 people, mainly in Bhojpur and Jehanabad districts (Indian History Collective, 2024). Maoist groups retaliated with violent counterattacks, including the killing of forty-four upper-caste farmers in Bara village in February 1992 (Politics of Bihar, 2024). This cycle of massacre and retaliatory violence transformed Bihar into what critics termed "Jungle Raj," where between 1984 and 2001. (ETV Bharat, 2018).

However, women's participation in politics during this phase remains limited, despite the rhetoric of development and empowerment. Women leaders were often symbolically positioned and lacked real political autonomy, continuing to operate within patriarchal frameworks.



The slogan shifted the focus, emphasizing dignity, representation, and social recognition as core political values. This was a strategy that was in line with what scholars have described as the “politics of recognition”, where marginalized groups sought acknowledgment of their identity and social status as opposed to material gains (Electoral Behavior in Bihar, 2024). These challenges were then further worsened by the bifurcation of Jharkhand in 2000, which deprived Bihar of much of its mineral wealth, industrial capacity and other economic resources (Politics of Bihar, 2024).

Politically, the slogan unified the backward caste base of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), transforming the party into a powerful force that directly challenged both the established Congress and Hindu nationalist politics of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Indian History Collective, 2024). At this time the Communist parties - CPI and CPI(M) extended support to RJD in both 1990 and 1995 assembly elections, although their electoral presence had significantly declined, with CPI(M) winning only six seats in 1990 and two seats in 1995 (ThePrint, 2020). The more radical CPI(ML) Liberation, rooted in the Naxalites movement, remained confined to the grassroots mobilization in select districts and did not become a part of mainstream electoral coalitions until much later.

The tensions between the state and the Centre deepened as RJD’s identity-driven politics came to be viewed with suspicion by the Union government. Lalu Prasad Yadav’s dramatic arrest of BJP leader L.K. Advani during the 1990 Ram Rath Yatra symbolized his direct confrontation with Hindu nationalist politics (Indian History Collective, 2024). His strong stance against communal polarization and the consolidation of the Muslim-Yadav (M-Y) alliance positioned him as a defender of Bihar’s plural ethos, even as it alienated sections of the political mainstream (The Quint, 2025).



The legacy of “*Bhura Baal Saaf Karo*” endures in Bihar’s political imagination — it redefined the grammar of power, replacing upper-caste hegemony with a new vocabulary of dignity, identity, and representation. Yet, it also set the stage for future debates on whether social justice, once achieved, could evolve into a politics of inclusive development.

Slogan 2: “Jab tak Rahega Samose Mein Aaloo, Tab tak Rahega Bihar Mein Lalu”

If “*Bhura Baal Saaf Karo*” represented the politics of caste assertion, the slogan “*Jab Tak Rahega Samose Mein Aaloo, Tab Tak Rahega Bihar Mein Lalu*” reflected the cultural populism that defined Lalu Prasad Yadav’s mass appeal.

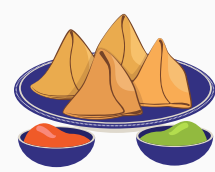
The art of politics that Lalu managed to utilize was his ability to recognize a catchy cultural allusion and repurpose it as both entertainment and a means to express political identity and daily symbolism (Indian Link, 2024). The history of food, in particular, how the humble samosa evolved beyond a street snack into a site of political expression, illustrates how the politics of Bihar were infiltrated into the everyday life of the common man. This folk meme served as something bigger than a campaign slogan; it embodied the charisma of Lalu and created an immense linkage with ordinary lived experiences of Biharis because it merged cultural recognition with political meaning (NewsBytes, 2019). The formerly informal, and low-income samosa came to represent the inevitability and permanence; just as one cannot imagine a samosa without potato stuffing, Bihar could not imagine without Lalu (Times of India, 2011). This was a brilliant borrowing that showed how popular culture and political communication could be combined to produce memorable slogans that went beyond literacy levels and geographical lines and appealed emotionally to the consumption patterns and cultural rhythms of the electorate (Indian Link, 2024).



Such a catchphrase, which translates roughly to “As long as potatoes are in samosas, Lalu will be in Bihar”, was more than a slogan- it was a cultural meme, impressing the political permanence of Lalu Prasad Yadav into the everyday consumption habits of Bihar (Quora, 2024). By invoking the humble samosa, a snack ubiquitous in tea stalls, bus stands, and school canteens, it tapped into a shared symbol of Bihar’s informal economy and working-class culture. Samosa, largely produced and sold by backward-caste men, became a metaphor for subaltern pride and economic resilience, reflecting the social dimension of this slogan.

The focus on cultural continuity as opposed to policy articulation revealed an economic message, that was deliberately vague. This uncertainty stemmed from the state’s lack of financial resources following Jharkhand’s secession, and failure of the RJD to develop consistent developmental plans (Politics of Bihar, 2024). Rather, the slogans emphasized personalistic leadership and emotional identification between Lalu Prasad Yadav and the citizens of Bihar, substituting programmatic governance with charismatic appeal (I Love India, 2024).

Popular slogans such as the “*Jab tak Rahega Samose Mein Aaloo...*” can be regarded as representations of vernacular populism, a political communication approach where direct, immediate relations are formed between the leaders and the people, through the use of regional languages, cultural idioms, and other everyday symbols (Populist Policy, 2025; Oxford Academic, 2019). Populist politicians identify with the masses by adopting the role of a layman, dissociating from traditional ruling elites and enabling common people to identify with them through a sense of closeness, direct connection and simplicity (ResearchGate, 2007).





Such 'mimetic populism' was perfectly exemplified by the fact that Lalu delivered the slogan in vernacular Bhojpuri, invoking a universally known street food that was accessible to all classes, and bypassed the complex policy jargon in favor of memorable cultural imagery (Indian Link, 2024). The brilliance of the slogan lay in its cultural transgression: it democratized political language while cementing Lalu's image as the true representative of the common people of Bihar



Chapter 3

2000s - 2010s: Good Governance & Development Focus

The decade of 2000s - 2010s became a turning point in Bihar's political trajectory, reshaping its governance model, development priorities and public discourse. The state had long been a victim of institutional decay, marked by rampant criminalization, administrative paralysis and economic stagnation. According to NCRB data, the crime situation in Bihar in the late 1990s and early 2000s was disturbing: in 2000, the number of murders reached a record 5,356, Kidnapping ransom, extortion, and lawlessness became synonymous with the state, earning it the infamous nickname, "*Jungle Raj*" (Scroll.in, 2020). Crime, coupled with limited infrastructure and outmigration generated an immediate need of systemic governance reform that would redefine political debate in Bihar in the following decade.

The rise of Nitish Kumar as Chief Minister in 2005 represented not just a change in leadership but a pragmatic shift in Bihar's political discourse from social justice mobilization of the 1990s to a development-oriented model of governance. Meanwhile, the formation of Jharkhand in 2000, which deprived Bihar of key mineral wealth, industrial hubs, and a strong fiscal base, forced the state into a phase of economic reconsideration and political rediscovery. Against this backdrop, two contrasting political slogans- "*Sushasan*" (Good Governance) and "*Jungle Raj*", came to dominate the public narrative, each symbolizing a competing vision of the state's identity and future.

Slogan 1: "Sushasan" (Good Governance)

The catchphrase "*Sushasan*" or good governance became the ideological anchor of Nitish Kumar's leadership and a counter-narrative to the previous decade's chaos.



More than rhetoric, it represented an attempt to reorient popular expectations - from redistributive caste politics to measurable improvements in law and order, and institutional performance.

The role of the slogans was entrenched in the NDA system which offered political sanctity as well as resources that could be used to undertake governance reforms. The Nitish Kumar alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) became so ingrained in the system of governance that "*Sushasan*" (Good Governance) became the antithesis of so-called Lalu Yadav's "*Jungle Raj*" (Outlook India, 2025). His technocratic efficiency, particularly after taking office in 2005, earned him the title of "*Sushasan Babu*" (Mr. Good Governance), attributed to his achievements in improving roads, policing, and schemes like free bicycles for girls which ultimately led to increasing women literacy and empowerment in Bihar (Outlook India, 2025).

Technology-based reforms in land registration, taxation, treasury management, and e-governance became the working model of "*Sushasan*," with the Government of India recognizing Bihar's turnaround with an e-governance award. This brand of development and security under the NDA umbrella created a strong electoral narrative that established "*Sushasan*" as the defining image of governance in Bihar (Business Standard, 2025).

"*Sushasan*" functioned as both political and cultural slogan, appealing to a state deeply fractured by caste identities. While preserving the spirit of backward caste politics from the previous decade, the model of governance under Nitish Kumar expanded reservations to Extremely Backward Castes (EBCs) and strengthened the affirmative action for Dalits and religious minorities. Most importantly, the slogan carried a gender dimension-introducing 50% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and promoting self-help groups.



Nonetheless, the critical examination of scholarly literature indicates that these social interventions continued to be a part of the broader development agenda rather than autonomous social goals. This focus on good governance implicitly delegitimized the identity-based mobilizations of the 1990s, rebranding them as impediments to progress rather than as expressions of social aspiration.

In terms of the economic vision, the 'Sushasan' discourse emphasized industrial revival, urbanization and infrastructure building as pathways to modernization. The slogan contributed to the collective imagination of constructing highways, power infrastructure, and educational institutions-projects that were physically and symbolically transformative.

The electoral manifestos of this era, especially those of NDA alliance, framed infrastructure expansion as the principal measure of good governance. This was a major break with the employment-oriented promises of the Lalu era: rather than the state directly providing jobs, it would ensure institutional efficiency to enable economic growth.

This economic philosophy was reflected in Bihar government's effort to attract private investment and the creation of Special Economic Zones, though the results fell short of the grand ambitions (Politics of Bihar, 2024).



Slogan 2: “Jungle Raj” (Lawless Rule)

As “*Sushasan*” was the expression of a progressive vision of institutional transformation, the slogan “*Jungle Raj*” was a backward-looking reminder of the 1990s. This slogan was a strong rhetorical tool, appealing to the masses to recollect the scenes of criminality, lack of organization in the administration, and lawlessness of the Lalu-Rabri regime.

The reference to ‘*Jungle Raj*’ alluded to widespread caste violence and social turmoil that characterized Bihar during the 1990s. The Dalit massacres, the upper-caste retaliation against reservation policies, and the rise of organised crime networks structured along the caste lines were repeatedly invoked in political rhetoric to reinforce this narrative.

Ironically, as an argument that it facilitated inclusivity and rule of law, the “*Jungle Raj*” discourse of the ‘*Sushasan*’ government, was likely to depoliticize and decontextualize the caste violence by suggesting essentially policing as a solution to this issue, rather than addressing deeper issues of land inequality and caste hierarchies (Carnegie Endowment, 2016).

The Nitish Kumar government neutralized caste-based violence by classifying both upper-caste militia massacres and Maoist reprisals as identical crimes, thereby obscuring the social roots of the conflict (ThePrint, 2025). Such technocratic governance replaced the vocabulary of social justice and caste emancipation with that of efficiency and development such that the systemic caste violence was no longer seen as the expression of structural inequality but as a form of personal criminal deviation (Penguin Random House, 2021). This strategic depoliticization allowed governance reformers to present themselves as champions of universal progress rather than participants in contentious redistributive politics.



The '*Jungle Raj*' narrative also aligned with economic arguments emphasizing the institutional foundations of development. Its supporters maintained that economic recovery required the restoration of law and order, as investment depended on predictable legal frameworks and a professional bureaucracy—both of which, they claimed, had been undermined by the previous regime. This rhetoric legitimized infrastructure expansion and growth-centric policies while marginalizing concerns about employment quality, labor rights, and distributive justice that had energized 1990s social movements.

Ultimately, binarisation of '*Sushasan*' and '*Jungle Raj*' oversimplified Bihar's complex historical trajectory. This dominant discourse reshaped public understanding of progress, shifting their focus from social justice to institutional efficiency and economic performance.



Chapter 4

2010s - Present: Development Debates & Youth of Bihar

In Bihar, there has been an interesting convergence of development rhetoric and identity politics, as the state has sought to reconcile rising economic aspirations with deeply entrenched social inequalities. This period represents a shift in Bihar's political discourse—from caste-based mobilization towards performance-based governance narratives—while identity politics continues to shape the undercurrent of voter behaviour.

This period is also characterised by the political consolidation of Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), especially after 2014, when the party became increasingly popular by combining welfare promises with a Hindutva-infused national discourse, gradually overshadowing regional agendas (Business Standard, 2025).

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a watershed moment, catalyzing a massive reverse migration of about 7.5 million workers to Bihar, thereby exposing the state's persistent unemployment crisis and fundamentally altering the electoral debate on livelihood security (Comparative Migration Studies, 2021).

Subsequently, employment became the single most defining electoral issue. Tejashwi Yadav's promise of 10 lakh government jobs during the 2020 Vidhan Sabha elections captured the attention of Bihar's youth and forced the NDA to counter with its own promise of 19 lakh jobs (NewsClick, 2022). However, coalition politics in Bihar grew unstable, as Nitish Kumar's frequent switches between alliances with the BJP and the RJD reflected not only political opportunism but also the erosion of regional autonomy under national political compulsions (Business Standard, 2025).



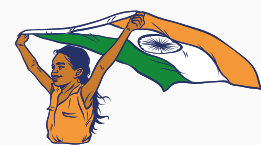
This complex political backdrop set the stage for the competing narratives and slogans that defined Bihar's 2020 elections—one driven by the BJP's nationalist developmental vision and the other by the RJD's grassroots populism rooted in local realities.

Slogan 1: “Atmanirbhar Bharat” (Self-reliant India)

The slogan “*Atmanirbhar Bharat*” (Self-reliant India), which was announced on May 12, 2020, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi became a central narrative of COVID-19 recovery strategy and a dominant theme in the Bihar's 2020 Vidhan Sabha elections. Alongside an economic stimulus worth Rs. 20 lakh crore, it quickly evolved from an economic program into a political instrument. BJP reframed Bihar's political discourse through nationalism and development, moving away from the traditional caste-based appeals that once defined the state.

In his rallies, Modi linked economic self-reliance with patriotic sacrifice, invoking the Galwan Valley clash of June 2020, in which soldiers from Bihar were killed defending the tricolour: “*Sons of Bihar lost their lives in Galwan Valley and ensured the head of Bharat Mata is held high*” (India Today, 2020). This emotional invocation transformed an economic recovery slogan into a patriotic political appeal.

‘*Atmanirbhar Bharat*’ was a socially significant movement where the caste-based mobilization of Bihar was now replaced by a unified national identity. This narrative invited Biharis to see themselves as central to India's development, with Modi asserting that “*Bharat's heart is Bihar, Bharat's respect, pride is Bihar, Bharat's culture is Bihar, Bihar is the call for independence, the call for 'sampoorna kranti' (complete revolution) is Bihar, Atmanirbhar Bharat's flagship is Bihar.*” (Mint, 2020).



This was an attempt to dilute the traditional caste politics, long used by the RJD and Congress, replacing it with an appeal to collective national pride (Academia, 2021).

The slogan was economically an attempt to repackage the unemployment crisis in Bihar within the broader narrative of national resurgence. Although the Atmanirbhar Bharat package was aimed at small businesses, it was not sufficiently extensive because the majority of it was based on bank loans instead of government expenditure (Indrastra, 2020).

Politically, the slogan served to centralize Bihar's politics under Modi's leadership, prioritizing national defence, China relations, and patriotic symbolism over local concerns such as migration, agriculture, and governance.

In summary, the Bihar 2020 election—framed through Atmanirbhar Bharat, marked the deepening nationalization of state politics. While the slogan successfully invoked emotional unity and pride, it failed to deliver structural transformation in areas such as employment, gender equality, and migration. The motto exemplified how nationalist rhetoric increasingly outweighed the reality of governance, uniting voters emotionally but achieving little materially.



Slogan 2: “Bihar Mein Ka Ba” (What’s up in Bihar?)

The commercialization of the slogan “*Bihar Mein Ka Ba*” marked a major breakthrough in Bihar’s political sloganeering. It was not merely a campaign tagline but a cultural phenomenon that transcended the traditional boundaries of electoral propaganda and became a viral expression of political satire and public sentiment during the 2020 assembly elections (YouTube, 2020). The strategic use of this informal Bhojpuri phrase by Tejashwi Yadav effectively resonated with the youth and migrant workers, two constituencies deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Indian Express, 2025).

Socially, the slogan represented an important political acknowledgment of Bihar’s migrant labour force - a group that had long remained marginal in the mainstream political discourse. The reverse migration caused by the pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of millions of Bihari workers who had left the state in search of employment outside Bihar, but returned home to joblessness and uncertainty. The promise of ten lakh government jobs by Tejashwi Yadav emerged as a direct response to this crisis, positioning RJD as the voice of unemployed and the returnee workers (The Hindu, 2020).

The slogan’s informal, conversational tone democratized political communication, allowing it to reach common citizens across class and caste divides (India Today, 2025). Its populist appeal rested on linguistic familiarity and emotional relatability, blending humour and critique in a form that ordinary people could claim as their own.

While the symbolic inclusion of women through references to household economic security was notable, the campaign lacked concrete gender-focused policy commitments (Journal of Political Science, n.d.).



Economically, “*Bihar Mein Ka Ba*” encapsulated the disillusionment of Biharis with chronic unemployment amid the narrative of supposed development. RJD’s manifesto not only promised jobs but also proposed a total overhaul of the state’s employment generation machinery (The Hindu, 2020a). This represented a direct challenge to the dominant development model, in which infrastructure growth was prioritised over direct employment creation.

Issues of disaster resilience were also foregrounded in the slogan, referencing frequent floods that devastated lives and perpetuated poverty and migration cycles (The Political Fix, n.d.). The agriculture sector’s distress and the demand for farm loan waivers along with employment guarantees became the central themes of the campaign (The Hindu, 2020).

Politically, the slogan signalled the rise of Tejashwi Yadav as an influential leader capable of mobilizing Bihar’s younger generation (India Today, 2025). The informal, questioning tone of the phrase gave it semantic flexibility, allowing it to function simultaneously as a critique of governance failure, an expression of Bihari resilience, and a call for accountability (The Hindu, 2020).

Finally, the youth-oriented and digital-first campaign strategy underscored a transformation in Bihar’s political participation, as social media amplified the slogan’s reach beyond conventional rallies and speeches, embedding it within the cultural lexicon of political dissent.



- **From Revolution to Representation:**

Bihar's political slogans evolved from Jayaprakash Narayan's "*Sampoorna Kranti*" of the 1970s, which demanded systemic overhaul, to calls for caste-based representation in the 1980s and 1990s, showing a shift from idealist mobilization to identity-driven politics.

- **Caste as Central Grammar of Politics:**

Slogans like "*Pichhda pave sau mein saath*" and "*Bhura Baal Saaf Karo*" embedded caste justice in Bihar's political consciousness, transforming subaltern assertion into a mainstream electoral idiom that redefined leadership and governance legitimacy.

- **Economy of Dignity over Development (1990s):**

Under Lalu Yadav, slogans prioritized dignity for marginalized groups over economic progress, reflecting a deliberate political choice to privilege symbolic empowerment amid material stagnation and mass migration.

- **Governance Reframing under Nitish Kumar (2000s–2010s):**

The shift to "*Sushasan*" and counter-slogans like "*Jungle Raj*" marked Bihar's entry into governance-centric politics—where performance, law, and infrastructure replaced identity as the dominant discursive frame.

- **Repoliticisation of Development (2010–present):**

Contemporary slogans such as "*Bihar Mein Ka Ba*" reflect public disillusionment with unfulfilled promises of progress.



- **Women's Emerging Visibility:**

Across phases, slogans evolved from male-dominated mobilization to include women as political subjects—symbolically in the 1970s–90s, and substantively through reservations and self-help networks post-2005.

- **Persistent Migration Narrative:**

Despite developmental slogans, migration remains Bihar's chronic subtext—its recurrence in both cultural and political discourse indicates the structural failure to absorb labour locally.

- **Continuity amid Change:**

While the language of slogans shifted from revolution to governance to development, the underlying struggles over dignity, inequality, and state neglect persist—revealing that Bihar's political imagination continuously reinvents itself without transcending its foundational social contradictions.



The history of political slogans in Bihar since the 1970s, sums up one of the most complicated experiments in the sphere of democratic communication and social change in India. From "*Sampoorna Kranti*" to "*Bihar Mein Ka Ba*", these are just a few of the slogans that trace the journey from revolutionary idealism to developmental realism - yet remain resonant with the incomplete struggles of caste, pride, and livelihood.

What started as Jayaprakash Narayan's moral uprising against corruption evolved into Lalu Prasad Yadav's subaltern assertion of pride, and later into Nitish Kumar's contested synthesis of social justice and governance reform. All slogans, then, represent not only a new turn in electoral rhetoric but a new formulation of political consciousness in Bihar.

Considered as a political phenomenon, the slogans in Bihar are acts of performative mobilization, that is, compression of ideology, emotion, and aspirations into powerful symbols of political persuasion. They are both instruments of persuasion and indicators of the socio-political anxieties of the state. The transformation from caste-based mobilization to the discourse of development indicates the democratization and commercialization of politics, in which representation has become widespread while substantive governance often lags behind.

With twenty-first-century agendas of vulnerable climate, underemployment of young people, and growth in inequalities, Bihar's political communication must move beyond populist symbolism and embrace quantifiable responsibility and accountability.



Political communication is also being digitalized which leads to enhanced participation and polarization and requires new standards of civic literacy.

In the end, the future politics in Bihar will rely on the ability of its leaders to go beyond the dichotomies of '*vikas*' versus '*nyay*' (development versus justice) and to paint a vision that will incorporate dignity and opportunity. In this regard, the tale of the slogans of Bihar is not just a localized narrative; it is a reflection of the enduring tension between rhetoric and realization that defines Indian democracy itself.



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