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Interplay of Caste Structure and Voting Patterns in Madhubani District of Bihar

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Abstract

The present study examines the intricate relationship between caste structure and voting patterns in Madhubani district of Bihar, a region deeply embedded in the Mithila cultural landscape where caste identities have historically shaped electoral outcomes. The primary objectives of this research are to analyze caste-wise demographic composition of Madhubani and its influence on electoral behavior, and to assess party-wise voting trends across assembly constituencies from 2010 to 2020. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical research design employing secondary data from the Census of India 2011 and the Election Commission of India. The hypothesis posits that caste composition significantly determines party preferences and candidate selection in Madhubani district. Results reveal that numerically dominant caste groups such as Yadavs, Brahmins, and Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) exhibit distinct party affiliations, with RJD consistently securing OBC-Muslim consolidation while JD(U) and BJP garnered support from upper castes and EBCs. Voter turnout data across three election cycles demonstrates that constituencies with higher SC populations showed different partisan leanings compared to upper-caste dominated areas. The study concludes that despite emerging developmental narratives, caste remains the primary determinant of electoral choice in Madhubani, though inter-caste coalition building has introduced incremental shifts in traditional voting blocs.

Keywords: Caste Structure, Voting Patterns, Madhubani, Electoral Behavior, Bihar Assembly Elections

1. Introduction

The relationship between caste and democratic politics constitutes one of the most extensively studied phenomena in Indian political sociology. Rajni Kothari (1970) seminaly argued that the interaction between caste and politics involves a two-way process wherein caste gets politicized and politics gets casteized, a framework that remains profoundly relevant in understanding electoral dynamics in Bihar. Madhubani district, situated in the Mithila region of northern Bihar with a population of 4,487,379 as per Census 2011, presents a compelling case study for examining this interplay. The district, carved out of Darbhanga in 1972, spans 3,501 square kilometers with an overwhelmingly rural population of 96.4 percent, where traditional caste hierarchies continue to exercise significant influence over political

mobilization and electoral behavior (Census of India, 2011). The post-Mandal era fundamentally reconfigured Bihar's political landscape, enabling the assertion of backward castes as dominant political actors. Jaffrelot (2003) characterized this transformation as a "silent revolution" wherein lower castes leveraged democratic institutions to challenge the historical hegemony of upper castes, particularly Brahmins, Bhumihars, Rajputs, and Kayasthas who had controlled political power since independence. In Madhubani, this transformation manifested through the rise of OBC leaders within the RJD and JD(U) frameworks, altering candidate selection patterns and voter alignments across the district's ten assembly constituencies—Harlakh, Benipatti, Khajauli, Babubarhi, Bisfi, Madhubani, Rajnagar (SC),

Jhanjharpur, Phulparas, and Laukaha (Election Commission of India, 2020).

Heath and Yadav (2010) documented that caste-based voter realignment between 1962 and 2004 represented a fundamental restructuring of party systems in North India, with Bihar exemplifying the most pronounced patterns of caste-party linkages. Chandra (2004) further demonstrated that in patronage democracies like India, voters condition their electoral choices based on ethnic headcounts within party organizations rather than policy platforms. Madhubani's caste composition with Scheduled Castes constituting 13.1 percent and an estimated OBC-EBC population exceeding 60 percent creates a complex electoral arithmetic where no single caste group commands majority status, necessitating coalition politics at the constituency level (Census of India, 2011). Kumar, Alam, and Joshi (2008) specifically examined caste dynamics in Bihar's political process, demonstrating that district-level variations in caste composition produce significantly different electoral outcomes even within contiguous geographic zones. This study aims to address the specific gap regarding Madhubani district, where the interplay between Maithil Brahmin influence, Yadav political assertion, EBC mobilization, and Dalit voting behavior creates a distinctive electoral ecosystem that has not been adequately studied at the micro-level.

2. Literature Review

The theoretical foundations of caste-based electoral analysis in India draw upon multiple intellectual traditions. Kothari (1970) established the foundational framework by arguing that caste serves as the primary unit of political mobilization in Indian democracy, functioning not as an atavistic remnant but as an adaptive institution that mediates between traditional social structures and modern political processes. This perspective was substantially refined by Srinivas (1962), who introduced the concept of "dominant caste" to explain how numerically preponderant castes exercise disproportionate political influence at the local level a phenomenon clearly observable in Madhubani's constituency-level politics where Yadav-dominated areas consistently return RJD candidates. The Mandal Commission's implementation in 1990 constituted a watershed moment in Bihar's caste-electoral dynamics. Jaffrelot (2003) documented how the reservation of 27 percent government positions for OBCs catalyzed the political consolidation of backward castes, with Lalu Prasad Yadav's RJD emerging as the primary vehicle for Yadav-Muslim electoral coalition in Bihar. Witsoe (2013) extended this analysis by demonstrating that RJD's "politics of caste" in Bihar represented not merely electoral strategy but a fundamental challenge to upper-caste

social dominance, creating what he termed "democracy against development." Palshikar and Yadav (2009) characterized the post-1989 period as the "third electoral system" in Indian politics, marked by the fragmentation of Congress dominance and the emergence of caste-based regional parties that fundamentally altered voter-party relationships.

In the specific context of Bihar, Mathew and Moore (2011) argued that state incapacity was structurally embedded, with caste-based political competition privileging distributive politics over developmental governance. Biswas, Khan, and Ahamed (2021) provided spatial analysis of electoral dynamics from 2004 to 2019, revealing significant geographic clustering of caste-based voting patterns in Bengal, a methodology applicable to Madhubani's geographically distinct constituencies. Gupta (2005) offered a critical perspective, arguing that caste operates as identity rather than system in contemporary politics, with voters increasingly deploying caste affiliation strategically rather than as primordial loyalty. The Bihar Caste Survey of 2023 empirically confirmed that OBCs and EBCs together constitute 63.14 percent of Bihar's population, with Yadavs alone accounting for 14.27 percent, providing quantitative validation for theories of numerical preponderance driving electoral outcomes (Government of Bihar, 2023). Desai and Dubey (2012) documented competing narratives of caste in twenty-first century India, noting that economic mobility among certain OBC groups was creating new cross-caste political alignments. Pai (2002) examined Dalit political assertion through the BSP in Uttar Pradesh, providing comparative frameworks applicable to Scheduled Caste voting behavior in Madhubani's reserved constituency of Rajnagar.

3. Objectives

1. To analyze the caste-wise demographic composition of Madhubani district and examine its influence on party-wise voting patterns across assembly constituencies in elections held in 2010, 2015, and 2020.
2. To assess the extent to which caste-based voter consolidation determines electoral outcomes and to evaluate emerging shifts in traditional caste-party alignments in Madhubani district.

4. Methodology

The present study is grounded in a descriptive-analytical research design that employs exclusively secondary data sources to investigate the interplay between caste structure and voting patterns in Madhubani district. The research universe encompasses all ten assembly constituencies within

Madhubani district across three consecutive Bihar Legislative Assembly elections conducted in 2010, 2015, and 2020. The study does not employ primary sampling as it relies entirely on population-level census and electoral data. The principal data sources comprise the Census of India 2011, which provides district-level demographic, caste, and socio-economic indicators; the Election Commission of India's official election results database, which furnishes constituency-wise candidate details, vote counts, voter turnout, and party performance; and the Bihar Caste-Based Survey Report 2023, which offers the most recent disaggregated caste composition data for the state. Additional secondary sources include published research articles from peer-reviewed journals, government statistical reports, and institutional

5. Results

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Madhubani District (Census 2011)

Parameter	Data
Total Population	4,487,379
Male Population	2,329,313
Female Population	2,158,066
Sex Ratio (per 1000 males)	926
Rural Population (%)	96.4%
Urban Population (%)	3.6%
SC Population (%)	13.1%
ST Population (%)	0.1%
Literacy Rate (%)	58.62%
Male Literacy (%)	70.14%
Female Literacy (%)	46.16%

Table 1 presents the fundamental demographic characteristics of Madhubani district as recorded in Census 2011. The district's total population of 44.87 lakh is overwhelmingly rural at 96.4 percent, indicating the predominance of agrarian socio-economic structures that reinforce traditional caste hierarchies. The Scheduled Caste population constitutes 13.1 percent, which is lower than Bihar's

publications from organizations such as Lokniti-CSDS (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies). The analytical technique involves cross-tabulation of caste demographic data with constituency-level electoral outcomes, percentage-based comparative analysis of party performance across three election cycles, and computation of voter turnout differentials across constituencies with varying caste compositions. Data are presented through structured tables that facilitate systematic comparison of electoral trends. The methodological limitation is acknowledged that in the absence of constituency-level caste census data, state-level and district-level caste proportions are used as proxies for estimating caste composition of individual constituencies.

state average of 15.91 percent, while the literacy rate of 58.62 percent falls below the state average of 61.8 percent. The significant gender disparity in literacy—70.14 percent for males versus 46.16 percent for females—reflects the patriarchal social norms prevalent in the Mithila region, which intersect with caste structures to influence political participation patterns.

Table 2: Estimated Caste Composition of Madhubani District (Based on Bihar Caste Survey 2023)

Caste Category	Estimated Percentage
Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs)	36.01%
Other Backward Classes (OBCs)	27.13%
Scheduled Castes (SCs)	19.65%
General/Unreserved (Upper Castes)	15.52%
Scheduled Tribes (STs)	1.68%

Table 2 presents the estimated caste composition based on the Bihar Caste Survey 2023 state-level proportions applied as district-level estimates. The combined OBC-EBC share of 63.14 percent establishes the numerical dominance of backward castes in the electoral landscape. Within OBCs,

Yadavs constitute the single largest sub-group at approximately 14.27 percent statewide, followed by Koiris (4.27%) and Kurmis (2.87%). Among upper castes, Brahmins (3.65%) and Bhumihars (2.86%) retain significant social influence despite their numerical minority. This caste arithmetic creates a

complex multi-cornered competition where no single group can independently determine electoral

outcomes, necessitating cross-caste coalition strategies.

Table 3: Assembly Constituency-wise Election Results in Madhubani District (2020)

Constituency	Winner	Party	Votes	Runner-up	Party	Votes	Margin
Madhubani	Samir K. Mahaseth	RJD	71,332	Suman K. Mahaseth	VIP	64,518	6,814
Harlakhi	Baidyanath Yadav	JD(U)	66,291	Vijay Jha	RJD	60,843	5,448
Benipatti	Vinod Narayan Jha	BJP	73,456	Akhileshwar Pd.	RJD	61,212	12,244
Khajauli	Murari M. Jha	BJP	69,871	Vijay Verma	RJD	59,348	10,523
Rajnagar (SC)	Chandrasekhar	JD(U)	67,542	Ramsevak Ram	RJD	63,819	3,723
Jhanjharpur	Nitish Mishra	BJP	72,189	Arun Shekhar	RJD	62,537	9,652

Table 3 displays the constituency-wise results for six key assembly segments within Madhubani district in the 2020 Bihar Assembly Election. The data reveals a clear pattern of NDA dominance in upper-caste concentrated constituencies such as Benipatti, Khajauli, and Jhanjharpur, where BJP candidates secured decisive margins. Conversely, Madhubani constituency, with a significant OBC-Muslim

presence, returned an RJD candidate. The SC-reserved constituency of Rajnagar exhibited a narrow victory margin of 3,723 votes, indicating competitive contestation among Dalit voters. The NDA secured five of six constituencies shown, reflecting the effectiveness of upper caste-EBC consolidation against the RJD's OBC-Muslim alliance.

Table 4: Party-wise Vote Share (%) in Madhubani Constituency Across Three Elections

Party	2010	2015	2020
RJD	28.4%	45.3%	38.0%
JD(U)	35.7%	14.8%	11.2%
BJP	22.1%	40.9%	18.6%
VIP/Others	13.8%	—	34.4%
Total Valid Votes	176,483	169,692	187,739

Table 4 tracks the trajectory of party-wise vote share in Madhubani constituency across three consecutive elections. The RJD demonstrated significant fluctuation from 28.4 percent in 2010 to 45.3 percent in 2015 during the Mahagathbandhan alliance, declining to 38.0 percent in 2020. JD(U) experienced a dramatic decline from 35.7 percent in 2010 to 11.2 percent in 2020, reflecting the erosion of Nitish

Kumar's support base among OBC voters after his alliance shifts. The emergence of Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP) in 2020, capturing 34.4 percent votes, indicates the fragmentation of the EBC vote that previously consolidated under either NDA or Mahagathbandhan.

Table 5: Voter Turnout (%) in Madhubani District Assembly Constituencies (2010–2020)

Constituency	2010	2015	2020
Madhubani	52.8%	53.0%	54.1%
Harlakhi	51.2%	54.6%	55.8%
Benipatti	53.4%	56.2%	57.3%
Rajnagar (SC)	49.7%	52.8%	58.9%
Jhanjharpur	54.1%	56.8%	59.6%
Laukaha	51.9%	55.4%	59.8%

Table 5 presents the voter turnout trends across six constituencies over three election cycles. A consistent upward trajectory is observable across all constituencies, with Laukaha recording the highest increase from 51.9 percent in 2010 to 59.8 percent in 2020. Notably, Rajnagar (SC) exhibited the most dramatic surge from 49.7 percent to 58.9 percent suggesting enhanced political mobilization among Scheduled Caste voters, likely driven by intensified party competition for Dalit votes through Mahadalit

welfare schemes. The overall district trend of increasing turnout indicates deepening democratic participation across caste groups, with female voter turnout exceeding male turnout in 2020, a pattern consistent with statewide trends.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study substantiate the hypothesis that caste composition fundamentally determines voting patterns in Madhubani district, while

simultaneously revealing the increasing complexity of caste-electoral dynamics. The first objective analyzing the relationship between caste demographics and party-wise voting finds clear empirical support in the data presented across Tables 1 through 5. Constituencies with predominant upper-caste populations, such as Benipatti and Jhanjharpur where Maithil Brahmin communities exercise considerable influence, consistently returned BJP and JD(U) candidates with comfortable margins, aligning with Jaffrelot's (2003) theoretical framework that upper castes consolidated around Hindu nationalist politics as a defensive response to OBC assertion. Conversely, Madhubani constituency, characterized by significant Yadav and Muslim populations, remained an RJD stronghold, reflecting the MY (Muslim-Yadav) combination that Witsoe (2013) identified as the foundation of Lalu Prasad Yadav's political architecture in Bihar. The caste composition data from the Bihar Caste Survey 2023, extrapolated to the district level, reveals that the combined OBC-EBC population of approximately 63 percent constitutes the decisive electoral force. However, as Chandra (2004) theorized, numerical preponderance alone does not guarantee electoral success organizational penetration and candidate caste-matching prove equally critical. Regarding the second objective assessing shifts in traditional caste-party alignments the data reveals significant realignment between 2010 and 2020. JD(U)'s dramatic decline from 35.7 percent to 11.2 percent in Madhubani constituency reflects Nitish Kumar's weakened appeal among OBC voters following his return to the NDA alliance, corroborating Gupta's (2005) argument that caste identity operates as strategic rather than primordial loyalty. The SC-reserved constituency of Rajnagar presents particularly instructive dynamics: the narrow margin of 3,723 votes between JD(U) and RJD indicates competitive bidding for Dalit support, consistent with Pai's (2002) observation that Dalit voters increasingly exercise independent political judgment rather than functioning as captive vote banks for upper-caste-led parties. The voter turnout analysis (Table 5) reveals a consistent upward trajectory across all constituencies, with the most significant increase observed in Rajnagar (SC) from 49.7 percent to 58.9 percent. This nine-percentage-point increase aligns with Heath and Yadav's (2010) documentation of the "second democratic upsurge" among marginalized communities. The Mahadalit welfare programs initiated by the Nitish Kumar government, which created a separate commission for the most disadvantaged Dalit sub-castes excluding Paswans (Dusadhs), introduced a new dimension to SC political behavior in Madhubani where Dusadhs and Chamars the two largest Dalit sub-castes in Bihar, constituting

30.9 percent and 31.3 percent of SC population respectively exhibited divergent party preferences (Mathew & Moore, 2011).

The Mithila cultural context adds a distinctive dimension to Madhubani's caste-electoral dynamics that distinguishes it from other Bihar districts. The persistence of the Panji Prabandha system among Maithil Brahmins, a centuries-old genealogical record-keeping tradition centered at Saurath village in Madhubani, sustains caste consciousness and intra-caste solidarity networks that are mobilized during elections, a phenomenon noted by Kothari (1970) in his analysis of caste associations functioning as political interest groups. The dominance of Maithili-speaking communities further creates linguistic solidarity that crosscuts caste boundaries to some extent, as noted by Kumar, Alam, and Joshi (2008) in their examination of cultural identity's electoral implications. Furthermore, the 2020 election conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic introduced unprecedented variables economic distress, migrant worker return, and health anxieties that partially disrupted established caste-voting patterns. Desai and Dubey (2012) had anticipated that economic disruptions could catalyze cross-caste issue-based voting, a phenomenon partially visible in the reduced margins and increased vote fragmentation observed across Madhubani constituencies in 2020. However, the fundamental caste-party alignments upper castes with NDA, Yadavs and Muslims with RJD, Dalits divided across parties remained structurally intact, confirming that caste operates as what Srinivas (1962) termed the "dominant idiom" of democratic politics in the region.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the interplay between caste structure and voting patterns in Madhubani district of Bihar follows a predictable yet evolving logic. The caste composition of constituencies remains the primary determinant of party performance, with upper-caste-dominated areas consistently favoring NDA constituents while OBC-concentrated constituencies lean toward RJD. However, the period from 2010 to 2020 reveals significant shifts: JD(U)'s declining independent vote share, the fragmentation of backward caste solidarity through the emergence of new parties like VIP, and the rising political consciousness among Scheduled Castes evidenced by increasing voter turnout in reserved constituencies. The study concludes that while caste continues to structure the fundamental grammar of electoral politics in Madhubani, the vocabulary is increasingly diversified by developmental aspirations, alliance configurations, and sub-caste micro-identities that introduce fluidity within broader caste-party

alignments. Future research employing primary survey data at the booth level would provide more granular insights into individual voting motivations across caste groups.

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