

BIHAR ASSEMBLY ELECTION 2025

# Outlook

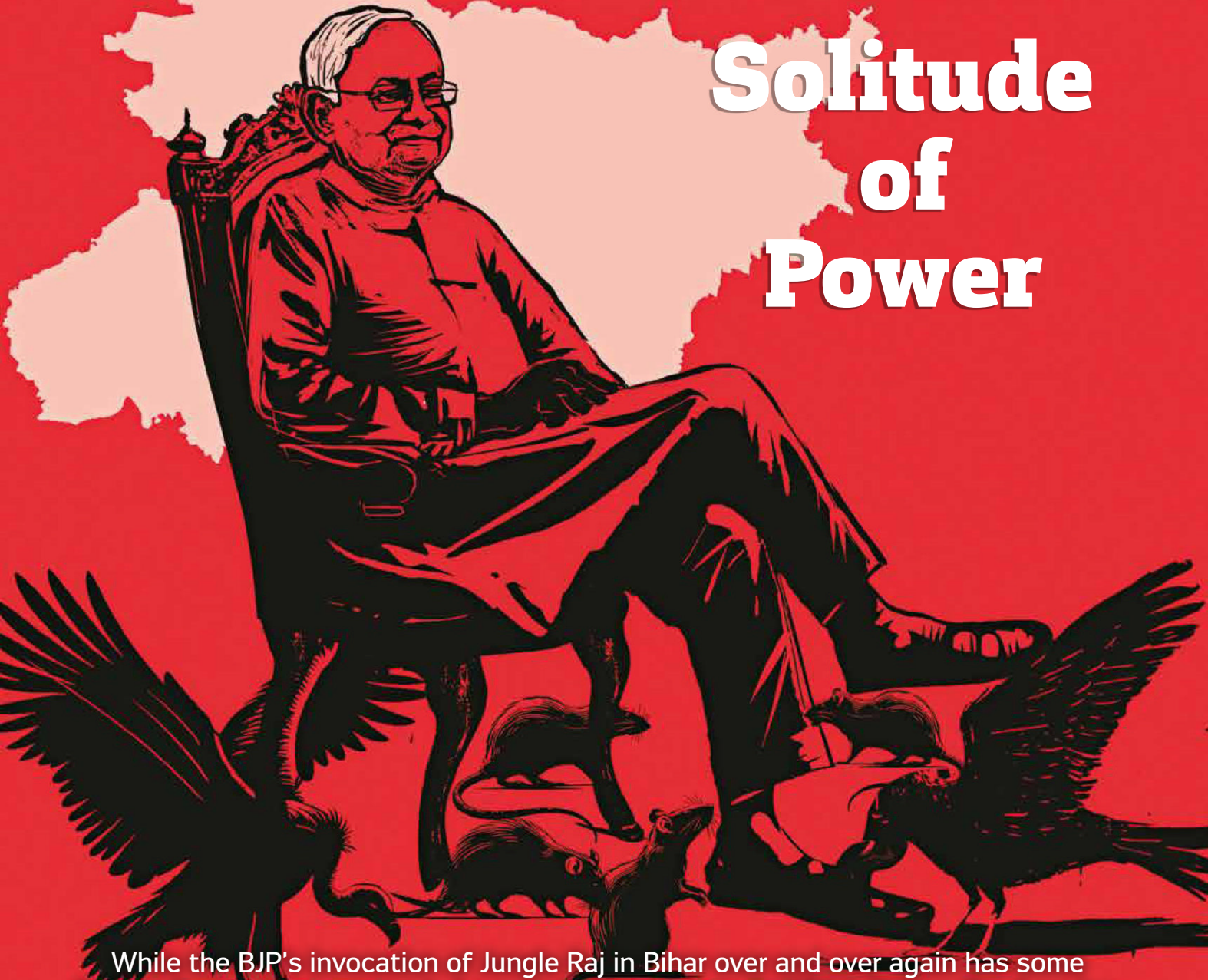
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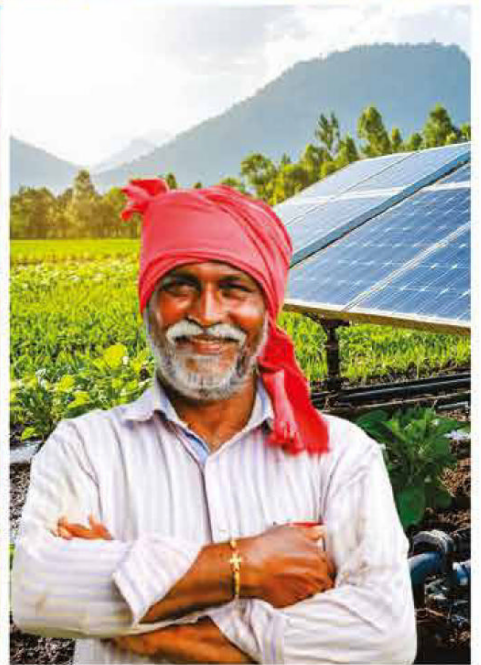
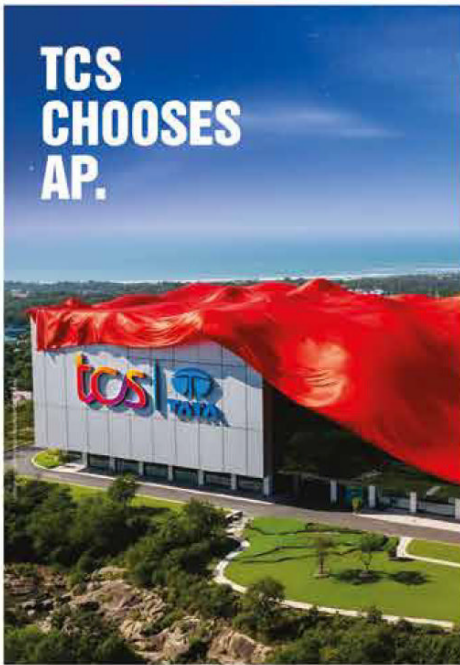
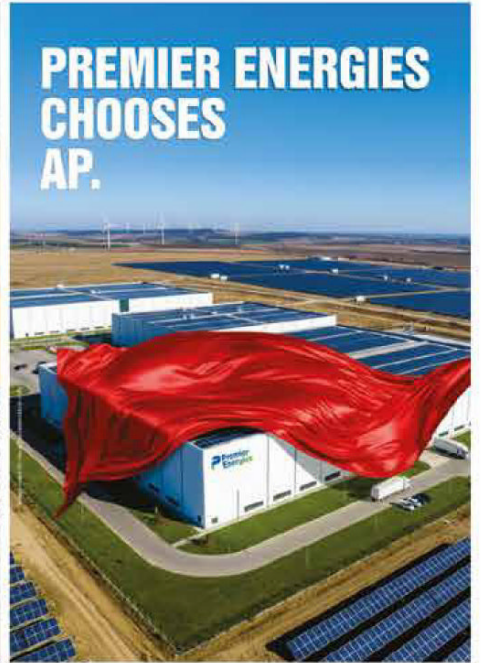
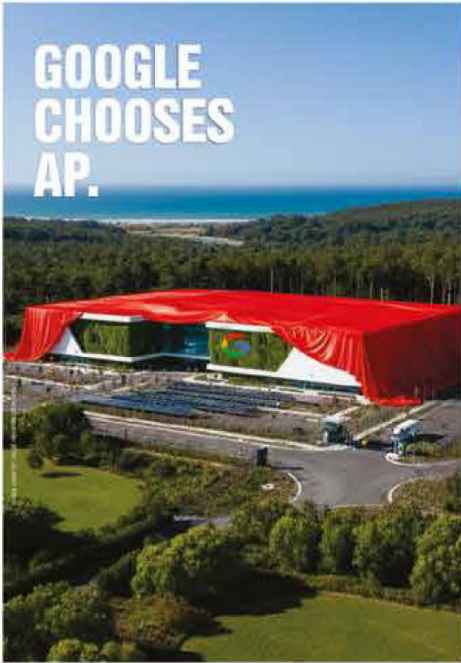
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## Solitude of Power



While the BJP's invocation of Jungle Raj in Bihar over and over again has some fatigue factor, there seems to be no anti-incumbency for Nitish Kumar. For decades, he has navigated the politics and the ideologies and the alliances to remain in power and 2025 will be the test of his shrewdness as he faces betrayals, and caste loyalties still dictate elections. Will he beat them all?





Issued by: Director, Information & Public Relations Dept., Andhra Pradesh.

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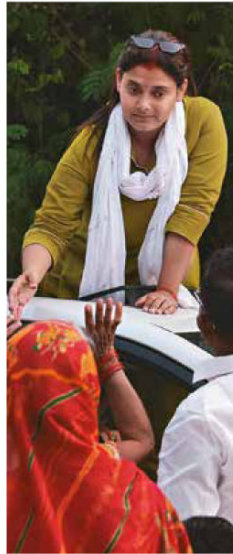
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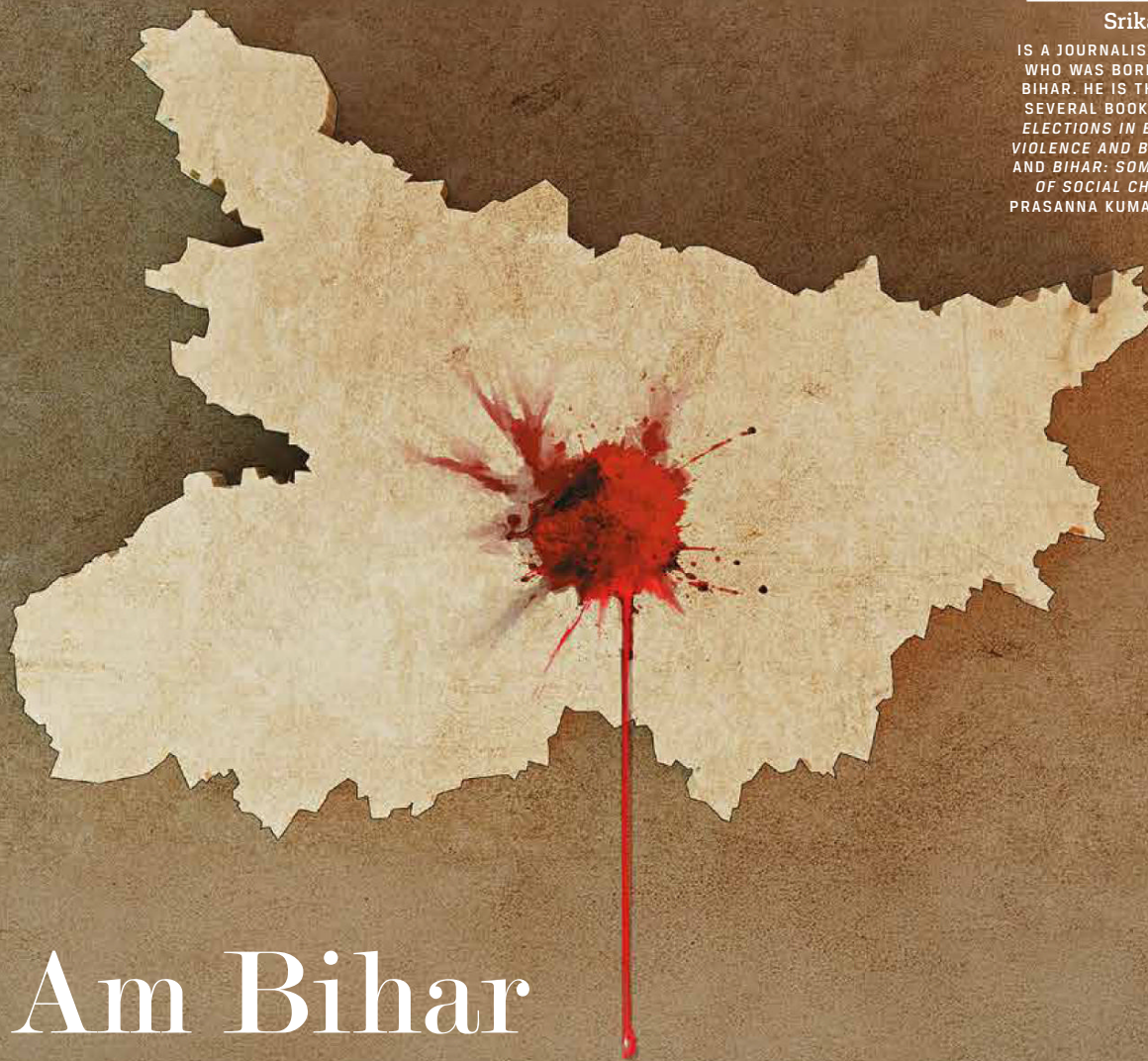
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Srikant

IS A JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR WHO WAS BORN IN NAWADA, BIHAR. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF SEVERAL BOOKS, INCLUDING *ELECTIONS IN BIHAR: CASTE, VIOLENCE AND BOOTH LOOTING*, AND *BIHAR: SOME DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL CHANGE* (WITH PRASANNA KUMAR CHAUDHARY)



# I Am Bihar

*Main Bihar Hoon (I am Bihar)* is a dramatic adaptation based on Srikant's political articles and stories. A stark commentary on Bihar's social and political realities, the play focuses mainly on the period referred to as 'Jungle Raj' in the state's history. It delves into the challenges of governance, issues of corruption and crime, providing a closely observed perspective on life in Bihar as seen through a journalist's eyes. The play recollects crucial moments in Bihar's history and voices the anguish and aspirations of its people. An excerpt:

I am Bihar. My life's thread is attached with Delhi. Along with Delhi, I too was born. The British rule made two decisions. Delhi became the capital of modern India and I too got a new form. I am Bihar. Gautam Buddha's Bihar. Mahavir's workplace. Ashok and Chandragupta are my children. Vaishali Republic is my past. Bihar with a new democratic set-up. My present. I too got a new identity along with Delhi, however, like Delhi, my identity is not static.

...

I am Bihar. Along with fields and lands of the plain areas my identity has been made from the coal and copper mines. I was seen by Xuanzang, Megasthenese and Buchanan. They saw my progress and helplessness. The ruins of Nalanda and Vikramshila are witness to these. Ganga of knowledge, the politics, that diplomacy starts with my own Chanakya; the reform movement of Arya Samaj is associated with

me; the arrival of Gandhi and his Champaran Satyagraha. I was the one who gave Gandhi his new identity. I inspired Baba Ram Udaar to give the slogan, “Don’t run away but change the world”. Before the second independence of JP, I also became the base area of Swami Sahjanand, Triveni Sangh and Lohia. The underground life led by Vinod Mishra. Youth looking for a ground for movement. Crumbling fortresses and monasteries.

...

I am Bihar. I don’t talk about revolt. Still, the first Urdu Newspaper ‘Murg-e-Bihar’, wrote ‘Bihar for Biharis’. I also like to breathe in free air. I have reduced from 10 crores to eight crores. I am a Bihar of 16 crores pairs of eyes and hands. More than half of the people do not have land. However, the bungalows that own land rule over the villages. The land is being guarded. Monsters have pointed guns at the agricultural lands.

...

I am Bihar. My past and present—two directions of life, rising and falling, between the currents of rivers. Whatever was, is not anymore. Settlement officer Stevenson Moore had said, “Bihari labourers are supremely satisfied”. He did not term them revolutionaries. But people became revolutionaries. Two crore children born naked from the pigs’ nests on a dark rainy night. New directors. Some Chandragupta, some Lalu. Spending nights with their mothers on rainy days with pitter patter rain drops. Waiting for nights to end. Is there someone; who can watch my children, my daughters. No. Many things have happened. Have you seen children killing mouse in the fields. Do you know how to take out mouse from its burrow by pouring in water. This is today’s dose. Don’t know what our economy data tells about hunger. But remember Nagarjuna, “Please count, count...how many bones are there in the skeleton.”

...

I am Bihar. The sun rises daily. The sun sets daily; but the sun is not coming out here. When did morning come? Has the sun risen there. There, where human and humanity do not exist. This is Raj Bhawan. That is Anne Marg. This is Minister ji’s house. He is officer ‘sahib’-sir. ‘Fair are here, and black here’. Children of Aryans and non-Aryans. Ask the feminists and the truth will be different. It feels good then to turn away from the truth. It feels right to live in dreams. To live in dreams while walking on Raj Marg. Remember my father, who was killed by terrorists’ bullets had said—the most dangerous thing is that death filled with silence, not existing, bearing everything with pain, to leave the house for work and coming back after work, the most dangerous being our dreams getting dead.

...

I am Bihar. In the villages, the rice harvest has reached the farmers’ homes, but the market lies far away; farmers’ country. My geography has also changed with the rivers’ course, but history has not changed. Indigenous rice



**MAIN BIHAR HOON | Srikant**  
Vani Prakashan | 32 pages |  
2011

varieties sit idle, while only imported goods fill the markets. The warehouses overflow with farmers’ grain. Delhi does not listen to the farmers. The government sways to the ‘high-tech warnings’ of the stock market. What can I do? My grain sells for three rupees a ser. Cheap. Buy it for almost nothing and sell it at market rates. With a population of eighty crores, we keep looking toward Delhi, while the patriots ignore the distant villages. They boast—water for every field, work for every hand. Yet crores in this country have lost their livelihoods.

...

I am Bihar. A true Bihar covered in the dust of its villages. The scent of farmers’ movements is present in my soil. Have you heard the echoes of farmers and their struggles? The left are also many and South has many more. Multifaceted people have become leaders. And the socialists—don’t even ask about them. Yadav brand, pure Yadav brand, Kurmi-Koeri brand, Bhumihar brand, Kshatriya brand; flags of every kind. Linked to these brands are the former rulers and the Leninist-Marxists. These are the real ones, those are fake ones. Some carry weapons, others do not. Some rule the hills, others rule the plains. Some contest elections and get labelled reformists. They break and rebuild castes, temples and mosques.

...

I am Bihar. I am sold a lot; in newspapers, on radio, on television, and now in the age of the internet. News has grown wings. Publishers in London love me, and so do the locals. Once, an Englishman named Mr. Halton served as Chief Secretary. He wrote a book titled ‘Bihar: The Heart of India’. But today, no one sees me through his eyes. Today’s so-called writers would describe me in such a way that you could hardly bear to read it. Their message would be: if there is a hell anywhere, it is Bihar. These pen-pushers have no idea how eight crore people survive here. Has their writing increased our harvests? Has it strengthened the spirit of enterprise among Biharis? How do four crore people stay alive after eating just one meal a day? If you really want to see Bihar, look at the Tatma Toli in Gaya district, where IAS officers, engineers, and IT professionals emerge. See Silicon Valley in IIT and all. Look at the Bihari labourers who send two thousand crore rupees home every year. I sell when I win, and even when I lose, the market remains just as eager for me; the craze remains the same.

...

I am Bihar.  
Once, I was Vihar, then I became Bihar.  
Now, it feels like only Haar (defeat) remains.  
There may be nothing in a name, but there is a lot in my name.  
The word haar in my name means something.  
It could be a garland of flowers—or the feeling of defeat.  
So, have I been defeated?  
Or have all Biharis lost? ❏

PHOTOGRAPHS: SANDIPAN CHATTERJEE



# Where Angels Fear to Tread

While slain Dularchand Yadav is referred to as a dacoit, Anant Singh is a Bahubali. In Bihar, caste is an undeniable fact where most Bahubalis belong to the upper castes and have a lot of wealth accumulated through their many dealings and those who come from the lower castes are called *baghis* (rebels) or dacoits. In this world of guns and gangs, political patronage continues...



Chinki Sinha  
IS EDITOR,  
OUTLOOK MAGAZINE

**O**UTSIDE a blue building in Barh, a few police personnel are looking out for any signs of trouble. The area has been on alert since the killing of a former gangster, Dularchand Yadav, in Mokama's Tartar village on October 30. The feast is due. It will happen after justice is delivered. But justice is an elusive concept in Bihar, where criminalisation of politics has existed since time immemorial.

Arrests have been made, and Mokama MLA Anant Singh, contesting on a Janata Dal (United) ticket, is in judicial custody for the murder of a former Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader who had allegedly called Singh's wife and ex-MLA Neelam Devi a nautch girl before being killed after backing Jan Suraaj's Piyush Priyadarshi.

Since then, the area has been on high alert. Violence during elections is not new in Bihar. In 2005, JD(U)'s Nitish Kumar had fought the elections on the promise of ending Jungle Raj in Bihar. It is ironic, then, that the 2025 Bihar assembly election is again being fought by



**THE LAW AND ORDER FAILURE IN BIHAR IS NOT A NEW STORY. THE AUDACITY OF THE CRIMINAL-POLITICIANS IS KNOWN TO MANY, INCLUDING POLICE OFFICERS AND ADMINISTRATION PERSONNEL.**

the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) alliance with that narrative. While the Mahagatbandhan is faced with the task of fighting that label that has become synonymous with RJD founder Lalu Prasad Yadav's reign, where the rule of law had been suspended and killings and kidnappings were reported frequently, the truth is not always that black and white in Bihar, which has witnessed massacres and caste-wars and seen criminal-politicians defy law and order and become ministers. A look at the candidates from both the alliances confirms that many Bahubalis (strongmen) are in the electoral fray and in cases where the Bahubalis have been convicted, their spouses or children are trying to claim what they think is theirs. Over 22 such candidates or their kin are contesting this time: nine from RJD, seven from JD(U), four from BJP, two from Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) and one from Jan Suraj. In 2020, there were 17. Nearly half now face criminal cases.

On November 9, the Director General of Police, Vinay Kumar, said in a press conference that the police are the biggest Bahubali and all such contestants are under surveillance.

\* \* \*

In this timeless part of the world where water can submerge habitations, the men who sit through the day watching the road that leads into the village of Tartar in Mokama in Bihar, say that not much has changed for them. Through the decades of promises and chaos, they have known that to find dignity, they have to be born again in another caste. Mokama, the unstable land where mobs fight for supremacy and where

**Dons and the Next Gen**  
(From Left) Shivani Shukla, RJD candidate from Vaishali; Osama Shahab, RJD candidate from Siwan; Anant Singh from Mokama

men like Anant Singh, the JD(U) incumbent MLA who is commonly known as Chhote Sarkar here and is a strongman who has the patronage of the chief minister Nitish Kumar of the JD(U), become legends.

On the edge of the horizon, a road, an elevated one, snaked through, splitting Mokama into two parts. One is prosperous with the Ganges gently flowing by; the other is the wetlands, where the poor deal with floods as a way of life. In this existential wasteland with a legacy of violence and prejudice and fear, the rise of Anant Singh, who is a Bahubali with more than 28 cases against him, is not an accidental one but a planned necessity for political leadership in Bihar. Wooed by both JD(U) and RJD, he remains in the spotlight with any convictions against him set aside by the courts, like in 2024 when he walked out of prison after a rigorous sentence of ten years for possession of weapons was set aside by the Patna High Court. His wife, who had won from Mokama on an RJD ticket, switched over to the JD(U) during the floor test in 2022.

"It is the opposition's conspiracy," Anant Singh told *Outlook* before he got arrested. "The public is the Bahubali. I am just their servant."

Unlike Lalu Prasad Yadav, who was at first averse to upper castes and tried to dismantle their influence in politics and many say that he was a political necessity in Bihar back then,

Nitish was more accommodative in his social engineering.

Both leaders have extended political patronage to Bahubalis to win several seats.

Mokama's tryst with Bahubalis is not new. In this election, the RJD has given the ticket to Veena Devi, the wife of another Bhumihar strongman, Suraj Bhan Singh, who is barred from contesting elections after his conviction. In September 2025, the MP-MLA court in Begusarai convicted the former MP in a 33-year-old case involving an attack on a police team. While Singh was sentenced to one year in prison, he got bail.

On October 9, 1992, gunmen attacked police at a Barauni wax factory, leading to Suraj Bhan Singh's arrest.

Before Anant Singh came into the picture, it is said that Suraj Bhan Singh had helped Nitish Kumar win the Barh Lok Sabha seat in 1999. In 2000, he himself contested the 2000 Assembly elections from Mokama, against his former boss Dilip Singh and won.

In 2004, Suraj Bhan Singh joined Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP and won from Ballia, but four years later was convicted for murdering farmer Rami Singh and barred from polls. Released on bail in 2012, he backed his wife, Veena Devi, who won Munger in 2014 and now faces Anant Singh in Mokama. When she attended Dularchand Yadav's funeral, stones were hurled; another reminder of Bihar's crime-politics nexus. Dularchand, a rare non-Bhumihar to rise in Mokama, had been named with Dilip Singh and Nitish Kumar in the 1991 murder of Congress worker Sitaram Singh, a case quashed by Patna High Court in 2019.

Caste lines run deep here. At Dularchand Yadav's funeral, Bhumihars say Yadavs hurled abuses, yet both alliance candidates remain from the upper caste.

Outside a polling booth in Mokama town, upper caste villagers sat at a little distance from the polling booth. An IAS officer once said this was meant to deter lower castes from voting. In 2005, the officer had ordered everyone indoors. But defiance has returned now. With Anant Singh in custody, loyalists still back him for the protection he promised.

During the 1995 Bihar Assembly election, 243 candidates faced charges, writes journalist Vikas Jha in Bihar: Criminalization of Politics (1996). That's when JD(U)'s Lalan Singh brought Anant Singh to Nitish Kumar. "He asked Anant Singh if he could ask him for a promise. Anant Singh said he could and that is how he aligned himself with Nitish Kumar," said Gyan Prakash Singh from Nadwan village in Barh, where Anant Singh hails from.

When Nitish Kumar first became the chief minister in 2005, Anant Singh, who is an upper-caste Bhumihar, had weighed him in silver. Gyan Prakash Singh even remembers it was 67 kg.

And that's how his reign began in Mokama. With gang wars, gun fights and a lot of charity. That there is a delusional aspect to his story is evident in the way he conducts himself. A person is at hand to tie his shoelaces, another to hold the ashtray when he smokes. The loyalty he commands could be a case of myth-making. They tell stories of how he swam across the river to kill the man who killed his eldest brother, Birachi, who was a *mukhia* (village headman) and a landlord like his father.

That made him the undisputed strongman in these parts and there were videos circulating on YouTube of him dancing while brandishing an AK-47.

Known for his defiance and quirks—he is said to have kept a python at home—Anant Singh once declared he was done with JD(U). By 2013, over 83,000 criminals had been convicted in Bihar, and the rule of law seemed to return briefly. Yet patronage endured: jailed strongmen like Munna Shukla saw their families thrive in politics. Two years into Nitish Kumar's tenure, Singh allegedly assaulted journalists questioning him about the rape and murder of Reshma Khatoon, though police later claimed the body found near his house wasn't hers. Now, Munna's daughter Shivani is contesting from Lalganj on an RJD ticket.

Bandana Preyasi, a senior IAS officer who was posted in Barh in 2005, said that the rule of law is not about convictions but everyday administration.

"Administration can be the biggest Bahubali," she said.

She was in charge of elections in Siwan in 2009. Back then, Siwan was still considered a dangerous place. Mohammad Shahabuddin ruled the region from the prison.

"It was a bitter election," she said.

\* \* \*

The ducks moved around the compound flapping their wings, unbothered by the presence of strangers who had gathered to get an audience with the son of the notorious criminal-politician Mohammad Shahabuddin of Siwan. The son would carry the legacy of his father. They didn't answer what this legacy would be. Questions don't matter here. And answers aren't given.

The ducks are a continuation of Shahabuddin's lifestyle. A few men pointed to the palatial structure next door with high walls and iron gates lined with palm trees and said there is a floor entirely dedicated to around 50 Persian cats there. A young supporter had shot a video of the inside of the mansion. Chandeliers, ornate winding staircases and very garish interiors. Shahabuddin had built this house around 2004 in Siwan.

Osama Shahab, the "babu", is a 31-year-old man who doesn't talk.

A team of PR professionals who have been camping here for days seemed to be very taken in by Shahabuddin's story and his conquests. It is, of course, a selective choice, given the fact that Shahabuddin's trial happened in Siwan and the privileges available to him inside the jail, like a television, were taken away in the end. He died a lonely death at the age of 53 in Tihar jail in Delhi in 2021 during the pandemic. His wife, Hena Shahab, contested twice and lost. Last year, she approached the RJD to make a case for her son's entry into politics. In such places, a son is the heir. The wife is only the bearer of the comfort and casualty.

In 2021, a man in Siwan told me the weather forecast for the next few days in Pratappur was "broken clouds".

That was when the news of the death of Shahabuddin reached his village.

He was angry. He said the administration here feared that if his body were brought down to Siwan, there would be an outrage. In Delhi's Jadid Qabristan Ahle Islam at ITO, there is a nondescript grave with an epitaph with his name, the date of birth, the date of his demise and where he came from. His son, Osama Shahab, had wanted to take the body of his deceased father to their hometown in Bihar, but the protocol related to the Covid-19 virus prohibited that.

He had been away from Siwan for a long time. The mourning in Siwan lasted for days. From then, the people here said they would wait for the son to take over.

The family had then alleged that the Director General of Tihar Jail (Delhi) had 'murdered' Shahabuddin, and his supporters accused the RJD of not doing enough for *Saheb*.

Shahabuddin was a creature born out of an unholy alliance between crime and politics in a place like Bihar that's always searching for Robin Hoods to deliver justice, especially in a time when Muslims as a minority feel threatened.

Shahabuddin emerged on the scene in the 1990s when L. K. Advani's Hindu nationalism movement was at its peak. The 1980s and the 1990s were the decades when Advani led the Hindu nationalism movement and riots happened across the country, including in Bhagalpur in Bihar in October 1989, where organised mobs burnt over 250 villages down, and mass killings took place across the district. Official figures put the death toll at around 1,000 (90 percent of whom were Muslims) but many believe it was much higher. In October 1990, Advani was arrested by Lalu Prasad Yadav in Samastipur in Bihar.

That was the year that Shahabuddin won the elections from Pratappur as an independent candidate from the Ziradei seat. His election symbol was a lion and he was only 23. He defeated Tribhuvan Singh of the Indian National Congress while he was lodged in prison.

After he won the Ziradei seat, Shahabuddin got bail.

**THE BAHUBALIS ARE KNOWN TO BE WOOED BY ALL PARTIES. IT IS NOT THE PARTY, BUT IT IS THEIR ROBIN HOOD PERSONA THAT GIVES THEM THE POWER AND THE AGENCY.**

Since 1990, Shahabuddin had been elected twice as MLA and four times as MP.

It was the M-Y (Muslim-Yadav) formula that kept the RJD in power till 2005.

Professor Jeffrey Witsoe, who spent years in Bihar researching critical rethinking of democracy and the postcolonial state through an examination of lower-caste politics in Bihar and the author of the book *Democracy Against Development* (University of Chicago Press), said Shahabuddin was a compromise that Lalu had to make to consolidate his position.

Shahabuddin's reign was so terrifying that the BJP never dared to open its offices in Siwan back then, Nand Kishore Prasad, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation's (CPI-ML) politburo member, told me in 2021. He was tasked with overlooking the party's work in Siwan in the 1990s.

It was in 1997 that CPI-ML's leaders Chandrashekhar and Shyam Narayan Yadav were killed while they were holding *nukkad sabhas* in Siwan by Shahabuddin's henchmen.

Muslims constitute about 20 percent of the district's population, closely seconded by Yadavs.

In 2016, Shahabuddin had walked out of jail. It was the year Lalu Prasad Yadav returned to power in Bihar in partnership with Nitish Kumar.

Former DGP of Bihar Abhayanand remembers his convoy of over 200 vehicles took more than 14 hours from Bhagalpur Jail, where he was lodged, to get to Siwan because people flocked around the convoy to greet him.

His bail was cancelled by the Supreme Court and on February 15, 2017. He was then shifted from the Siwan jail to a high-security cell in the Tihar jail. He had become an administrative nightmare by then, according to sources in the government.

Shamshuddin, who used to work at the sugar mill in Siwan back then, said Shahabuddin brought peace to Siwan.

"He was a messiah for the poor," he said. "We will make his son win. We owe *Saheb* this much."

So, Osama is now in the race. There is an opaqueness about him. At a rally in Hussainganj in Raghunathpur, where he is contesting from, he stood behind Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav as he addressed the crowd. Osama didn't say a word. He didn't greet the crowd either.

Akhilesh Yadav, the former chief minister of Uttar

Pradesh, has been campaigning for the Mahagatbandhan in Bihar and referred to Osama as a young man who deserves a chance in his bid to woo the young voters in Bihar.

Elsewhere in the region, men recall how Shahabuddin brought development to the region.

“Back then, the doctors couldn’t charge more than Rs. 100,” says Avdhesh Gupta, a businessman from Raghunathpur. “He ended crime here. He built roads. He was our *Saheb*. We used to feel weakened after he died, but now Osama is here.”

That’s how most stories are told and retold. Nostalgia’s rose-tinted glasses have made many here become very selective about the past. The retelling omits the ugly.

The son will become his father, another man said.

“In due time,” he said.

The flags start to mark the landscape as you enter Siwan. Green and saffron. That’s how habitations are marked here. With defiance and allegiance.

In Pratappur, the native village of Shahabuddin, the old house lies in ruins. Across the lane, a white house, which is imposing in its make, stands. The grounds are sprawling. In the open garage, an old jeep is parked.

“He (Osama) will learn to speak,” says Prabhudas Yadav, an elderly man in the constituency.

## 'SHAHABUDDIN'S REIGN WAS SO TERRIFYING THAT THE BJP NEVER DARED TO OPEN ITS OFFICES IN SIWAN BACK THEN'

“His father never spoke much and never asked for votes. He didn’t have to.”

Times have changed since Shahabuddin ruled Siwan, and for his son, it is no easy task to match that reputation, although his public relations team, led by delusion and some misplaced romanticism with the Robin Hood legend of Shahabuddin, makes a case for this silence.

“It is about maintaining power. In the old days of the Delhi Sultanate, the princes talked less and let mystery be their power game,” a man who oversees his PR team said.

Siwan and Raghunathpur are no longer fiefdoms, and Osama is no Shahabuddin. Not yet. With two pending Arms Act cases and no conviction, he stood behind Yadav, who urged voters to back youth like Osama but avoided mention of dynastic politics. Apart from his RJD ticket, little was said of Osama’s past or merit. His affidavit lists only matriculation, an income above eight crore, and “social worker” as his profession, yet locals speak of his “London degree” and his polished demeanour of an

educated man who is wary his words might be misread by the media.

Osama enters the political arena at a time when a lot has changed, and the old kind of politics no longer works.

People still queue up at the palatial house the family owns in Siwan, which was built by Shahabuddin around the time he went to jail for the first time in 2004.

Siwan is not an easy place, and Osama was just 10 when his father went to jail.

A Yadav man pointed out a stray and said if Nitish Kumar gives a ticket to a dog, the dog will win, too.

“That’s just to tell you how things are. We are looking at Patna and Delhi. We want Narendra Modi to go, so we will vote for whoever RJD will choose,” he said.

They call him *babu* and make excuses for him, saying he is too young to understand politics, and this is a heavy load of inheritance.

Osama’s cavalcade whizzed past, and somewhere in the sky, Akhilesh Yadav was returning to his home in his helicopter on November 3.

\* \* \*

In a landscape where ideologies shift, there is nothing that’s fixed. The Bahubalis are known to be wooed by all parties. It is not the party, but it is their Robin Hood persona that gives them the power and the agency. The party’s role is limited to handing out a ticket.

The law and order failure in Bihar is not a new story. The audacity of the criminal-politicians is known to many, including police officers and administration personnel.

The Jungle Raj fear that the BJP is creating in Bihar shows a lack of narrative for the party in a state where they have not been able to install their candidate as the chief minister in the last two decades. The party’s supreme leaders and their star campaigners, like UP’s chief minister Yogi Adityanath, have been campaigning in the state and Prime Minister Modi himself has had 12 rallies so far.

Their playbook is the same. Infiltrators, Hindutva, etc.

In Raghunathpur, the JD(U)’s Vikash Singh’s campaign song is an ode to loyalty to Ram.

But who is listening? The vehicle tumbled along the bumpy roads and the song faded.

\* \* \*

As you enter Lalganj in Vaishali district, you hear the pleas on loudspeakers to vote for the daughter who will bring back the glory to the area. Shivani Shukla, 28, got the RJD ticket an hour before the nominations for the Bihar Assembly Elections closed. She calls herself an accidental politician and speaks freely about her father, the Bahubali Munna Shukla, who once held the seat here and is now lodged in Bhagalpur Jail.

But his sway over the place remains. Like Mohammad Shahabuddin’s in Siwan.

Shivani Shukla said she wasn’t going to deny the Bahubali tag. Her definition is different.

“It is the power that got me the ticket,” she said.

That’s how it goes in Bihar. In every election. 

# The Robin Hoods of Bihar

In Bihar's political narrative, Bahubalis have played an important role. Here are a few who have a criminal record



**Munna Shukla:** Born in Lalganj, Vaishali, Munna Shukla emerged from the socio-political turbulence of the 1990s, when caste-based militancy and muscle power dominated the state's politics. Belonging to the influential Bhumihar community, Shukla's early years were steeped in the crime-politics nexus of north Bihar, where rival caste groups—primarily Bhumihars, Yadavs and Dalits—fought for dominance. He first made headlines in the early 1990s for his involvement in extortion, contract killings and political intimidation. His name soon appeared in connection with several high-profile murders. Over the years, he was implicated in dozens of criminal cases, ranging from murder and kidnapping to the use of illegal arms and corruption. He was elected as an MLA from Lalganj multiple times—first as an independent, then under the banner of the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), and later the JD(U). In 2007, he was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for his role in the murder of Gopalganj District Magistrate G. Krishnaiah. This year, his daughter Shivani Shukla fought the Bihar Assembly election from Lalganj on an RJD ticket.

**Ashok Mahto:** Ashok Mahto, the feared gangster from Nalanda, hailed from the Kurmi caste. He first came to prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when he formed the Ashok Mahto gang, composed mainly of Kurmi and Koeri youth who felt marginalised under the dominance of upper-caste landlords. He claimed to fight caste oppression while simultaneously running networks of extortion, kidnapping and murder across several districts. The most defining chapter in his violent career was his long and bloody feud with Akhilesh Singh, an influential Rajput landlord and legislator. The rivalry between the two men—often described as a caste war between Kurmis and Rajputs—claimed dozens of lives. In 2024, after being convicted and barred from contesting elections, the 62-year-old Mahto married Anita Kumari, a pharmacist sixteen years younger than him. This year, she is contesting from the Warisaliganj assembly seat against sitting BJP legislator Aruna Devi, the wife of gangster Akhilesh Singh.



**Ritlal Yadav:** Facing over 40 criminal cases involving charges of murder, extortion, rioting and criminal intimidation, Ritlal Yadav first came into the spotlight in 2003 when he was accused in the murder of BJP leader Satyanarayan Sinha, husband of former MLA Asha Devi Sinha. Ritlal first earned Lalu Prasad Yadav's favour when he extended support to Lalu's daughter, Misa Bharti, during her campaign from the Pataliputra Lok Sabha constituency, even after being denied an RJD ticket from the same seat. Though Misa ultimately lost the election, Lalu rewarded Ritlal's loyalty by inducting him into the party and appointing him as its General Secretary. In 2010, Ritlal Yadav surrendered in connection with several criminal cases filed against him and contested the Bihar Assembly elections that year as an independent candidate from prison and lost. While still incarcerated, he later contested the 2015 MLC elections independently and won. In 2020, after being released on bail, Ritlal contested the Bihar Assembly elections as an RJD candidate and defeated Asha Devi Sinha to secure victory from the Danapur seat. Prior to Ritlal's win, Sinha had won the Danapur seat in 2005, 2010 and 2015 on a BJP ticket. Ritlal has been lodged in the Bhagalpur jail since he surrendered in the Danapur court on April 17, 2025.

**Anand Mohan Singh:** Born in 1954 in Pachgachhia village of Saharsa district, Anand Mohan emerged from the social churn of post-Emergency Bihar as a fiery student leader and poet with socialist leanings. A product of the JP Movement, he was drawn to Lohiaite politics and came to be regarded as a representative of upper-caste Rajput assertion in north Bihar. Known for his powerful oratory and literary flair, he initially commanded respect for his poetic speeches and his ability to mobilise young people around issues of dignity and self-respect for Rajputs. Anand Mohan founded the Samajwadi Krantikari Sena, which later evolved into the Bihar People's Party (BPP) in the 1990s, an era when caste-based militancy and muscle politics defined Bihar's political landscape. However, his career soon became inseparable from Bihar's criminal-political nexus. His name began to surface in cases related to extortion and violent political rivalries. The defining moment came in 1994, when G. Krishnaiah, a Dalit IAS officer serving as the District Magistrate of Gopalganj, was lynched by a mob reportedly instigated by Anand Mohan. In 2007, he was convicted by a special court and sentenced to death, a punishment later commuted to life imprisonment by the Patna High Court. His wife, Lovely Anand, an MP from Sheohar, and his son, Chetan Anand, have continued to play active roles in politics.



**Dhumal Singh:** In the Ekma constituency on the Saran-Siwan border, strongman Manoranjan Singh, better known as Dhumal Singh, is contesting on a JD(U) ticket. Known to be close to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Dhumal Singh first entered politics

in 2000, winning as an independent from Baniyapur in Saran. Hailing from Kauwakol in Nawada district, he rose through the violent underworld of the 1990s and 2000s, an era when caste militias, extortion networks and political patronage blurred the line between crime and legitimacy. A Rajput by caste, Dhumal began as an associate and later a trusted lieutenant of powerful gangster politician Akhilesh Singh. Initially known more as an enforcer than a political actor, Dhumal played a key role in maintaining his gang's supremacy across Nawada, Rajouli and Sheikhpura. Police records link him to several cases of murder, extortion, land-grabbing and kidnapping for ransom—crimes often framed as retribution in the caste wars that ravaged Bihar.



**Pappu Yadav:** Born on December 24, 1967, in Khurda Karveli village in Madhepura, Bihar, Pappu Yadav loves his Bahubali tag—he says he stands up against the rich who exploit the poor. Yadav, a political science graduate, has a history of facing numerous

criminal charges, including serious allegations like murder and kidnapping. As of 2024, he has 41 pending cases against him. Yadav transitioned into politics in the 1990s. He has been elected to the Lok Sabha in 1991, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2014 and 2024, representing various constituencies in Bihar either independently or under different party banners, including the Samajwadi Party, Lok Janshakti Party, and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), but his electoral success has been largely independent of party affiliations. In 2008, he was convicted of the murder of CPM's one-time Purnea legislator, Ajit Sarkar. During his time in jail, Yadav penned his autobiography titled *Drohkal Ka Pathik*. In 2015, he formed his own political outfit, Jan Adhikar Party.



**Raj Ballabh Yadav:** Born in the early 1960s in Nawada, Raj Ballabh Yadav began his public life in the 1990s, a decade when Bihar's politics was being redefined by Lalu Prasad Yadav and the RJD. Yadav rose to prominence, first as a local contractor and later as a full-fledged politician aligned with the RJD. He was elected MLA from Nawada multiple times—first in 1995, then in 2000, and again in 2015. His career came crashing down in 2016 when he was accused of raping a minor girl. In 2018, a special POCSO court in Patna found Yadav guilty of rape, criminal intimidation, and conspiracy, sentencing him to life imprisonment. The verdict was one of the few instances in Bihar where a sitting legislator was convicted in a sexual assault case. His conviction led to his disqualification from the Assembly. Even from behind bars, Yadav's political shadow lingered over Nawada. His wife, Vibha Devi, entered politics and continued to contest elections on the RJD ticket. A few weeks before the 2025 Bihar Assembly elections, the Patna High Court acquitted him in the rape case.



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# Bahubalis and Social Rebels

Nowadays the people of Bihar are being warned that a victory for the Mahagathbandhan will mean a return of the dreaded Jungle Raj of the 1990s

## THE

social composition of the Bihar Legislative Assembly underwent a decisive change in the 1990s. In 1990, for the first time, the number of Other

Backward Classes (OBCs) MLAs (117) surpassed the number of upper caste MLAs (105). This trend further strengthened in 1995, when the number of OBC MLAs jumped to 161, and the number of upper caste MLAs slipped to just 56. This decisive shift got reflected in the subsequent Lok Sabha elections as well—in 1991, the number of OBC candidates elected was 24, while the number of upper caste candidates elected reduced to just 10. In 1996, the numbers were 23 and 13 respectively. Remember, the voting percentages in these elections were the highest since Independence—in 1990, it was 62.04 per cent, in 1995, 61.79 per cent and in 2000, 62.57 per cent. Hence throughout the 1990s, the ruling party enjoyed a fairly good popular support. (Between 1951 and 1985, the voting percentage moved between 39.5 per cent and 52.79 per cent. After 2000, the voting percentage dropped again and moved between 45.85 per cent and 57 per cent.)

This remarkable turning point in the political landscape of Bihar was the most important feature of the so-called 'Jungle Raj'. The four hitherto dominant upper castes were replaced by the four emerging socially and educationally backward classes of Yadav, Kurmi, Koeri and Bania. Needless to say that in this rise of the OBCs, the representation of the Extremely Backward Castes (EBCs) was meagre. There was a marginal increase in the number of their legislators—eight in 1990 and 17 in 1995. But the political importance of the EBCs grew in the later years of intense political mobilisation. However, the radical change in the social balance of forces galvanised the EBCs, and a spate of rallies of these castes swept the streets of Patna in the 1990s.

This decisive marginalisation of savarnas in the state assembly and the Lok Sabha was so shocking for the upper castes that for them the 1990s stuck in their memory as the Dark Age—as the Jungle Raj. For the ruling savarna elites, the 1990s was all about crime and corruption, and the representative face of this transformation, Lalu Yadav, was the villain, never to be forgiven.

This radical shift in the political landscape of Bihar was the logical outcome of four decades of social, economic and political movements led by the socialists and the communists involving agrarian labourers, poor and marginalised communities, Dalit and OBC students and youth, and of course, the emerging upwardly mobile and relatively prosperous OBC peasants, ready to take over the reins of power in rural areas.

Humankind has not yet found a 'civilised' way of social transformation. In the wake of the vital change in the social balance of forces, violence ensued; killings and counter-killings took place; and, savarna private *senas* indulged in the massacres of Dalits and other deprived communities. Here, we cannot go into the details of these violent incidents. Following the



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weakening of the upper caste semi-feudal hegemony, a kind of anarchy prevailed. This anarchy felicitated the rise of social rebels in various zones of the state as well as activists and cadres from among the Dalit, OBCs and EBCs. Many panchayat, block and district level present-day leaders—now in their 50s and 60s—of various parties were products of the 'Jungle Raj'. They mostly populate the lower and middle-level ranks of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), the Janata Dal-

United (JD-U) and the Left parties. Some sections of them have been co-opted by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as well.

Dons (Bahubalis) were part of Bihar's savarna feudal society since early times—apart from indulging in various criminal activities and creating terror in their areas of operation, they were used by landlords against their rivals. During elections, they were engaged in booth capturing and bogus voting. For instance, in Begusarai, Kamdev Singh, a Bhumihar don, was frequently used by Bhumihar politicians during elections in the 1960s.

Upper caste landlords' oppression and violence gave birth to resistance by Dalit and OBC rebels who took to arms and resorted to counter the violence. In the course of time, these rebels emerged as popular heroes of their caste and had to live underground. Mohan Bind of Kaimur, or Kailash Mandal of Bhagalpur *diara* (floodplains) are examples of some of the social rebels in the 1980s. Many upper caste dons later joined political parties and became MLAs and MPs; they frequently changed their political affiliation to maintain their hold over their areas and carried on their activities. Parties of various hues have been quite generous in accommodating these Bahubalis in their fold for their narrow interests.

Dalit and OBC social rebels mainly joined the RJD, the JD-U, the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) and the Left parties. At the same time, the Bahubalis and social rebels are a class apart, and they cannot be treated at par. Since every society has some sort of anarchy in its inner core, a progressive one, while suppressing the Bahubalis, accommodates and rehabilitates social rebels in its fold. Bihar's economic turnaround very much depends upon reversing this trend, and mobilising the energy and intelligence of lakhs of Bihari youth—particularly the Dalit, the OBCs and women—in rejuvenating the state's productive potential. This is also needed to prevent participation of these forces in anti-Muslim mobilisation.

Experience shows that Bihar cannot imitate western or southern India's model of development, or waste its time and energy in courting corporate houses for investment. Over the years, corporate houses have developed a vested interest in keeping Bihar a supplier of cheap labour. Bihar has to find its own path of development. The movement of social democracy and social justice needs to be combined with co-operative social economy of the workers, peasants, artisans, and all the stakeholders in different fields.  (Views expressed are personal)



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# Honour Thy Father

While convicted politicians have been contesting elections with the help of proxies, a new trend has emerged wherein the criminality of a political opponent is automatically attributed to his family

**Yahaan Ka Ulta Hai Nizam**

## UNION

Home Minister Amit Shah, as a star campaigner of the ruling alliance in Bihar, has repeatedly invoked the imagery of 'Jungle Raj' that will result if the RJD comes to power. In particular, fingers have been pointed at Osama Shahab, son of deceased RJD leader and strongman Mohammad Shahabuddin, who has been given a ticket from Raghunathpur constituency in Siwan and Shivani Shukla, daughter of Munna Shukla, who has been given a ticket from Lalganj assembly constituency in Vaishali.

The political hypocrisy of this—that the BJP and JD(U) have themselves given tickets to kith and kin of convicted criminals while decrying the fact that the RJD is doing the same—is nothing new. What does call for comment is the ushering in of a new era in recent years, where criminality of a political opponent is automatically attributed to his family.

At the height of the era of the permissibility of criminality in politics, persons accused and even convicted of heinous crimes entered politics, contested elections from jail and conducted public affairs from jail with intervals of furlough. Then the Supreme Court intervened and, in the *Lily Thomas* judgement in 2013, directed that disqualification would take effect immediately upon conviction, and wouldn't be placed in abeyance simply on account of pendency of the appeal unless the conviction was specifically stayed by the appellate court. As a result, under Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, a legislator convicted for six months or more for one of the heinous offences mentioned in the section, or for any other offence with a punishment of over two years, stands immediately disqualified from being a public representative. This moved the scene of political battle to the courtroom as the political dividend of procuring the conviction of an opponent grew.

As more and more politicians are disqualified from being MPs and MLAs, the immediate solution that presents itself is contesting elections by proxy, for while politics is passed around like a family heirloom, the law does not see criminality as heritable or attributable by familial ties.

The playbook already existed in the example of Rabri Devi, who had emerged from the kitchen to become the Chief Minister of Bihar when her husband and then Chief Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav was arrested in the fodder scam case in 1997. Convicted criminals now just pass on the baton to their wives, sons and daughters to contest elections, while they themselves remain in the background.



Saiyyad Mohammad Nizamuddin Pasha  
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The rise of the BJP's power in the last decade has brought with it another phenomenon—an extra-legal solution to the problem of proxy candidates—of immediate family members of jailed politicians being made co-accused with them in their criminal cases so that they suffer the same legal fate as their political kin. The old-school code of leaving women and children of enemies alone has been cast aside for good, replaced by a culture of seeing women of the family in particular as softer

targets through whom the armour of even the hard of heart and thick of skin can be pierced. Examples of this abound, and while each of these cases are sub judice in various courts, the pattern that emerges from simply enlisting facts that are known today makes it seem that it is by method more than mere coincidence.

Take the case of Atiq Ahmad, the famed Bahubali from Allahabad and former MP from the Samajwadi Party, who, along with his brother Ashraf, was assassinated on live television while in police custody. Atiq and Ashraf were arrested in connection with the murder of Bahujan Samaj Party MLA Raju Pal, and thereafter of Umesh Pal, an eyewitness in the case.

Of Atiq's five sons, the three elder sons—Asad, Umar and Ali—were made co-accused in the Umesh Pal murder case. Asad, after suddenly going missing, was claimed by the police to have been shot dead in an 'encounter'. Umar and Ali were arrested and are still in custody in connection with the case. Atiq's wife, Shaista Parveen, has also been made a co-accused in the same case and is said to be absconding, with a bounty on her head. Atiq's remaining sons, Ahzam (then 17) and Aban (then 15) were minors and were therefore immune from being implicated in any criminal cases. However, with their entire family killed, arrested or absconding, the two minor boys were picked up and brought before the Child Welfare Committee, saying they were unaccompanied minors found wandering around with no guardian coming forward to take charge of them, and were placed in a juvenile justice home.

Ashraf's wife, Zainab Fatima, approached the Child Welfare Committee for their custody but was soon thereafter found upon 'further investigation' to be involved in the conspiracy to murder Umesh Pal and was added as a co-accused in the murder case. After this, Atiq's sister, Aisha Noori, approached the court for the custody of her nephews, but immediately thereafter, she and her husband were also added as accused in the Umesh Pal murder case and her husband, Ikhlal Ahmad, was arrested. She was thus forced to withdraw from the proceedings. Another of Atiq's sisters,

Shaheen Ahmed, filed a petition before the Allahabad High Court for being granted custody of the two minor boys, but an FIR came to be filed shortly thereafter against her, her husband, Mohammad Ahmad, and her son, Zaka Ahmad, for extortion. She, too, then withdrew from the proceedings. It was only upon the intervention of the Supreme Court that the two boys were finally released to the custody of Atiq's remaining sister, Parveen Qureshi.

Another ready example is of Mukhtar Ansari, the now deceased politician and famed Bahubali from Mau in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Mukhtar had been in jail for several years and was incarcerated in Congress-ruled Punjab when the Yogi Adityanath government came to power in Uttar Pradesh in 2017. The State of UP filed a petition under Article 32 of the Constitution (a right typically available only to citizens against the government) against the State of Punjab demanding his transfer to UP. The Supreme Court entertained the petition and, in 2021, ordered that Mukhtar be transferred to UP. A petition was filed by his son, Umar Ansari, before the Supreme Court in December 2023, alleging that they had received information that there was a plot to murder Mukhtar in jail in the run-up to the General Elections in May 2024. The Supreme Court called for a reply from the State, and while the matter was pending, Mukhtar Ansari was said by the jail authorities to have died of cardiac arrest in March 2024. Thereafter, though Umar demanded an impartial investigation into the circumstances of his death, the State of UP took the position that the petition had become infructuous and served no purpose as the subject is no more, and the Supreme Court dismissed the petition on this ground.

Meanwhile, in 2019, Mukhtar's wife Afshan was made a co-accused with him in some cases and is since absconding with a look-out notice in her name and a bounty on her head. Their two sons, Abbas and Umar, have had various FIRs filed against them since 2019, including being implicated as co-accused with their father in some of his cases. Abbas, a shooter on India's trap shooting team, was originally arrested in connection with a case of illegal possession of firearms.

When it was found that as an international shooter, he was entitled to possession of eight weapons and the guns were licensed and used for sport, the State alleged, among other things, that the cartridges recovered from him were full metal jacket cartridges, which are not permitted for use under the rules followed for the sport in the Olympic Games and other international competitions. Needless to point out that this argument glosses over the fact that a potential Olympic rules violation which has not yet occurred is not, at least so far, an offence under our applicable laws, even in Uttar Pradesh. Finally, Abbas was released after two and a half years in jail after obtaining bail from the Supreme Court in this as well as various other cases, including one of money laundering where the allegation against him is that the pocket money given to him by his mother was ill gotten gains of her crimes and he was laundering it by spending it on food, clothes, shoes, sports equipment and car accessories, and another where he is accused of conspiring with his father in illegally wrangling property from the hands of the Custodian of Enemy Property in 1973—a time when Mukhtar Ansari was six years old, and his sons were still a smile on their mother's lips.

While Abbas was still in jail, his wife, Nikhat, too, was arrested when she went to visit him in Chitrakoot jail on the allegation that she was allowed to enter without signing the visitor's book or surrendering her phone and bribed jail officials to allow her private time with her husband. She remained in jail for eight months until the Supreme Court ordered her release.

Most recently, Abbas was convicted of the offence of threatening a public servant. The case concerns an election speech where he is alleged to have said that officials in the State who were doing the government's bidding would be called to account (*"hisaab kitab hoga"*) if the Samajwadi Party came to power. This, the trial court seems to believe, amounted to threatening all public servants in UP. Abbas, thus, stood disqualified under the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and consequently, his assembly seat of Mau was immediately declared vacant, to be filled by a by-election. Mukhtar's younger son, Umar—the likely candidate from the family in the event of a by-election—was immediately arrested in a late night 'raid' in relation to an FIR for forgery. The FIR was filed, saying an application filed by his mother in some case carried her signature, but since she was absconding and it was unlikely that a hardened criminal like her would take the risk of coming out of hiding to sign an application, her signature was most likely forged by Umar. Abbas's conviction was subsequently stayed by the Allahabad High Court, and his legislative assembly membership was restored. As such, the by-election was rendered no longer necessary and co-incidentally, Umar was released on bail soon thereafter.

Similar is the case of Azam Khan, who has been accused in close to a hundred FIRs since the BJP government came to power in 2017, with his wife, Tazeen Fatima, and son, Abdullah Azam Khan, being made co-accused in several of them. The charges vary widely from forgery and land grabbing to entering into a conspiracy for stealing a goat, stealing a buffalo, robbing an old woman of her jewellery, robbing a man of Rs 16,500, stealing books from a madrasa and stealing a sweeping machine from the municipal corporation. Several of the FIRs have been filed with inordinate delay, with one of the FIRs having been filed with a delay of 16 years and 27 of the FIRs having been filed 13 years after the alleged cause of action. Multiple FIRs are lodged with the same cause of action serving only to increase multiplicity of proceedings. The three have been in and out of jail since 2019, and presently stand disqualified from contesting elections as per the election law on account of having been convicted in some of these cases. As a result, the Parliament as well as the Assembly seats in Rampur, the family's traditional stronghold, have gone out of the family, with the Rampur seat being won by the BJP for the first time in election history.

From a perusal of the facts stated above, it emerges that either crime too, like politics, has become a family enterprise, or that the era of rule by proxy has been succeeded by the dawn of an era of politics as a family feud with no rules of honour to the effect that women and children must be left alone. So perhaps the BJP can do with being reminded that Jungle Raj lies not simply in children taking the place of their fathers in the circle of life, but in wild beasts mauling the offspring of their rivals when a pride or territory is taken over, so that the next generation of opposition can be nipped in the bud. ❏

*(Views expressed are personal)*

# Dus-Hazaari Hazard

The fight for Bihar is close. But NDA's scheme of Rs 10,000 to women could swing votes in its favour

SATISH PADMANABHAN



**Game Changer?** Women who have come to collect their Rs 10,000 in a bank in Maner near Patna



Satish Padmanabhan

IS MANAGING EDITOR,  
OUTLOOK

**T**HE liquid in the swamp is thick as grease, and about the same colour. The stench—of dead rodents, rotting vegetables, faeces—and the fumes of chemicals make the nose clog and the eyes water. In this swamp are about a dozen people, from children of about six to seven years old, many women and an elderly man with greying hair, wading through the slush reaching up to the waist of the grown-ups and up to the neck of the children, hunting for ‘mudfish’. Two or three of them hold a net and swoop the muck, the children put their hands inside to hunt for mudfish, throwing out broken glass pieces, knotted plastic bags and the mud. They find one or two tiny, silvery fish, glistening like jewels.

This scene unfolds in Maner, on the outskirts of Patna, next to the rally ground where Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader and the chief ministerial face of the Mahagathbandhan, Tejashwi Yadav, is giving an election speech. Among other things, he says if he comes to power he will work to uplift the people of the Extremely Backward Castes (EBCs), to which those hunting for fish here belong. They form a considerable 36 per cent of the voters in these elections and are being wooed by all political parties. But the fact that none of the schemes designed for them by various governments through the years has reached this family in Maner is distressing.

It is this dismal life that the EBCs were fated to lead that made Mukesh Sahani, who belongs to the backward Nishad (boatmen) community, to join politics and start his own Vikassheel Insaan Party (VIP). Sahani, tall and well-built who is a great orator, had a successful career as a set designer in Bollywood, doing sets for hit films like the Shah Rukh Khan starrer *Devdas* and Salman Khan’s *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*. “When I ran away to Mumbai from my village about 20 years ago, I thought I will return when I make Rs 50,000. When I made that, I thought let me make one lakh. That became five lakhs, then ten lakhs. Then I realised there is not going to be any end to this. Finally, when I returned to my village in Darbhanga about 10 years ago, I noticed nothing had

changed. My Nishad community was facing the same kind of oppression they did in the 1990s,” he says.

Sahani’s VIP is now part of the Mahagathbandhan, but he started off by joining the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a tie-up which soon soured. He says Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah promised him reservation for his community if they came to power, but didn’t keep it. The RJD and the Congress have so far treated him with dignity and he has bargained the deputy chief minister’s position in case they form the government. But Sahani is pragmatic about their chances of winning. “Till about a month ago, it was 70:30 in favour of the Mahagathbandhan. But now with the announcement of the Rs 10,000 for women, the balance has tilted towards the NDA.” Sahani is referring to the big announcement by Modi just days before the Bihar election dates were announced, just before the model code of conduct could kick in, giving Rs 10,000 to one woman in a family through the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana, popularly called *Dus-Hazaari* by the people.

“This scheme is nothing but a direct bribe,” says Congress youth leader Kanhaiya Kumar. According to him, the NDA was facing anti-incumbency and they had to come out with something drastic. “More than political anti-incumbency, they were facing a social anti-incumbency. That is, dissatisfaction and disappointment among the marginalised classes in Bihar. There is a big churning going on there and the fight is about who will get the EBC vote-base. The BJP is seen as an upper-caste party in Bihar,” he says. The BJP dismisses the allegation that the scheme is a pay-off for votes. “There is nothing wrong in coming out with schemes aimed at helping the poor before the elections,” says a senior leader. According to him, the Rs 10,000 is to be used as seed money by women to get a bigger loan from banks to start businesses, like they do in Gujarat. He hopes that a few women will pool their resources and go to the bank collectively to get a loan of two lakhs or five lakhs and start businesses like

making incense sticks or egg farming.

“We only talk of development,” adds Samrat Choudhary, moustache, beard and thick dark hair combed back with a booming voice, who is deputy chief minister and BJP leader. “There was 8,000 kilometres (km) of roads in Bihar (when we took over), now it is 1.5 lakh km. There were 17 lakh electricity consumers in Bihar, now there are 2.14 crore consumers. Over 8,500 people get free medical treatment, about 10 crore people get free grains. Today, Bihar has four airports and there is work going on in 10 more. There are about 5,000 km of expressways and super-highways. So we have *vikas* (development) to show and on the other side, there is only *vinaash* (destruction),” he tells *Outlook*.

The alacrity with which the *Dus-Hazaari* scheme has been rolled out is stunning. As we move from a bustling Patna towards Darbhanga, driving alongside the majestic Ganga which appears vast as a sea rather than a river, many women in interior villages have already got the money. Sonam Rani Sardar in Triveniganj in Supaul district says she will buy a sewing machine from the money and will start a tailoring shop as she has learnt sewing and feels she has a knack for it. A few houses away, Malati Devi will buy two goats from the money. Her neighbour Sarita will use the money for tuition for her children. In our travel, we didn’t come across many women who said they will pool the money together and start a business.


There are also other issues regarding the scheme. As we travel towards Seemanchal, to Purnia there are some voices saying the scheme is discriminatory. Faringora in Kishanganj district is a mid-sized village with a population of around 3,000 to 4,000 people. The people have small farms, growing rice. The houses are bare-bricks, with polycarbonate sheets marking the boundaries. At the start of the village are people from the Yadav community. A few houses inside, the population is a mix of OBCs (Other Backward Castes). As the village road turns, beyond the overhead water tank, are the Muslim houses with a small mosque in the middle. The elders say that all the communities have lived peacefully for years. There are the usual tiffs of someone throwing garbage in front of another’s house, but nothing more than that. But some Muslim women allege the other communities in the village have got the Rs 10,000, but they haven’t. “The money is being delayed if the name on the form was Muslim,” says a middle-aged woman who preferred not to be named. They say they have been assured that they will get the Rs 10,000 in the second tranche, and are praying it would come.

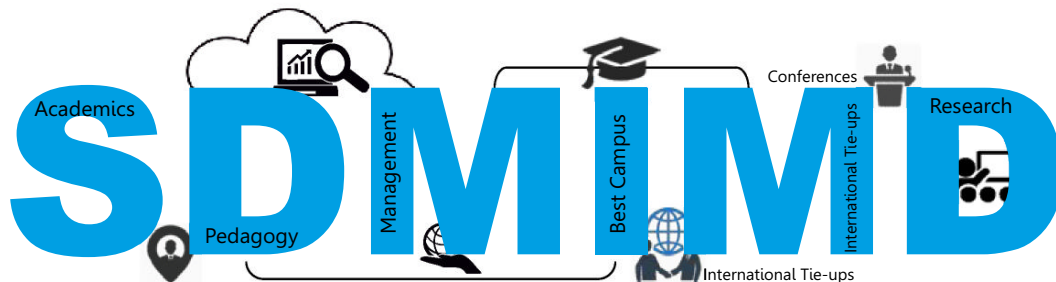
But the scheme has bolstered Nitish Kumar’s image of a women-oriented chief minister even more. The condition of his health—something debated ad nauseam in Delhi’s political circles—is not much of a concern on the ground. In fact, many voters are sympathetic towards their beloved chief minister’s falling health—perhaps a reason why the rivals don’t rake it up too much in their speeches. Only some youth say it’s time he stepped down and gave the reins to the younger blood. But Nitish Kumar’s much-touted

**A HIGH VOTER TURNOUT, LIKE IN THE FIRST PHASE OF POLLING, USUALLY INDICATES A DEMAND FOR CHANGE. BUT IN THIS CASE COULD IT BE A THUMBS UP FOR CONTINUITY?**

*sushasan sarkar* (disciplined government) still sits well with many voters, especially against the NDA’s diatribe of Jungle Raj of the RJD. “Magadh’s land has seen many ups and downs. I want to warn my young friends to be careful. Your grandparents saw the glorious days of Bihar. But your parent’s generation lost all the dreams of the earlier generation. Because by then, Jungle Raj had set its foot in Bihar,” thunders Modi at a rally in Nawada in the Magadh region, about 100 km from Patna, to a delirious crowd. “What was the identity of Jungle Raj? *Katta* (country-made guns), *kroortha* (cruelty), *katutha* (ill-behaviour), *kusanskar* (uncultured), *kushasan* (misgovernance)... and corruption. Those days, if an employee got a raise, he would get worried. Why? Because more salary meant more *rangdari* (extortion) by the RJD. Mothers would anxiously wait for the children to come back home at night. There were 37,000 kidnappings during that time,” Modi goes on.

Tejashwi Yadav, the chief ministerial candidate of the Mahagathbandhan and son of RJD supremo and former chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav, meets us at his office-cum-residence in Patna’s Polo Road. “Jungle Raj? It’s all propaganda. What happened in Mokama?” he asks, referring to the killing of Dular Chand Yadav in Mokama, for which the area’s *bahubali* or strongman Anant Singh has been arrested. He says if you have to debate law and order, then you have to do it with data. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data says crime has increased a lot since 2005 in Bihar. If you see the NCRB data for 2023, the top five states are ruled by the BJP, and among the worst states, the top two are Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. “Is Jungle Raj about crime or is it that some people didn’t like that social justice has been delivered? The poorest people were not allowed to go to temples, to wear slippers, to sit on a chair. After 1990, all this changed. Now people have their voice. But some people didn’t like the Dalits sitting next to them and called it Jungle Raj,” he tells *Outlook*.

The fight for Bihar is close. On the one side is Nitish Kumar with help from BJP’s meticulous election management machinery and on the other is the precarious Mahagathbandhan riding on hope. A high voter turnout, like in the first phase of polling, usually indicates a demand for change. But in this case could it be a thumbs up for continuity? 



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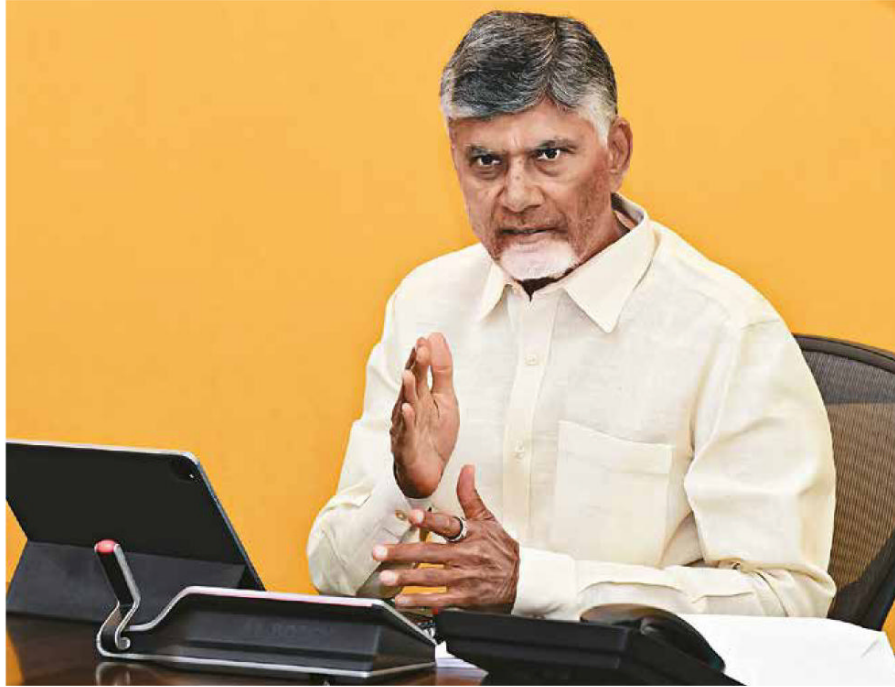


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**N. Chandrababu Naidu, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh**

# Investing in Tomorrow's Andhra Pradesh

Under Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's leadership, Andhra Pradesh is driving industrial transformation through bold policies, major investments, and innovation, emerging as India's next growth hub.

**Q Andhra Pradesh has set ambitious goals to become a leading investment destination in India.**

**What is your overarching vision for industrial and economic growth over the next five years?**

Andhra Pradesh has immense potential waiting to be tapped. It is India's Gateway to the East. Our goal over the next five years is to make Andhra Pradesh one of the most attractive destinations for investors in India and beyond. Under our new Industrial Development Policy 2024–29, we aim to attract ₹30 lakh crore in investments, create five lakh new manufacturing jobs, and double our exports to USD 40 billion.

Our results speak for themselves. In just one year, we have received investment commitments worth over

USD 117 billion, creating potential employment for more than 9 lakh people. This shows the growing trust of global investors in Andhra Pradesh.

With the third-longest coastline in India and three major industrial corridors, Andhra Pradesh is fast emerging as a logistics and manufacturing powerhouse. We are promoting both traditional sectors like textiles, automobiles, and pharmaceuticals, and sunrise sectors such as semiconductors, clean energy, aerospace, and AI.

We believe in not only ease of doing business but also speed of doing business. With digital approvals, transparent policies, and ready infrastructure, investors can move from intent to action faster than anywhere else in India.

**Q How is the state government addressing the development of industrial corridors, ports, logistics hubs, and connectivity to strengthen the industrial ecosystem?**

Industrial growth depends on strong connectivity. Andhra Pradesh is building world-class infrastructure that links our villages, cities, and ports seamlessly. We are the only state in India to have three national industrial corridors, Visakhapatnam–Chennai, Chennai–Bengaluru, and Hyderabad–Bengaluru. We have six operational ports. Nearly a third of the country's east coast cargo already flows through our ports. Beyond ports, we have invested in strong road, rail, inland waterways, warehousing capacities and cold storage units. We are connecting our villages to cities, our state to the nation, and our nation to the world. We want to make it easier for industries to move goods, reduce logistics costs, and scale faster, and become the most efficient manufacturing hub in India.

**Q Which key sectors are being prioritized for attracting both domestic and foreign investments—such as renewable energy, electronics, textiles, or IT?**

We are focusing on sectors that define the future: technology, manufacturing, renewable energy, logistics, and innovation. We have identified priority for our growth. These include renewable energy, electronics and semiconductors, aerospace and defence, technology, logistics and blue economy, food processing and agro-industry, tourism, textiles and minor minerals and rare earths. The Industrial Development Policy 4.0 gives every sector, from green hydrogen to tourism, its own playbook for success.

Clean energy is at the heart of our growth story. With our Integrated Clean Energy Policy, we are developing the Green Hydrogen Valley, targeting 160 GW of renewable power and 1.5 million tonnes of green hydrogen every year by 2030.



### **Q How is the government aligning skill development initiatives with the evolving needs of industries and ensuring employment generation for the local youth?**

Andhra Pradesh is a powerhouse of talent. You have seen during the IT revolution how Telugu youth took on the world with their skills, confidence, and determination. Andhra Pradesh has a young and energetic workforce of 38 million people, including 25 million in the 15–39 age group. Through Naipunyam Portal, we are training lakhs of young people in digital and technical skills with partners like Infosys, Cisco, and Microsoft. Our universities, ITIs, and polytechnics are being upgraded to match the needs of new industries. Skilling, upskilling and reskilling are continuous processes and we're making both online and offline opportunities available. These courses follow global standards so our youth can compete anywhere in the world.

Andhra Pradesh has been an early adopter of technology-driven governance. How is this approach being extended to promote startups, innovation, and digital industries?

Today, even people in the most remote villages of Andhra Pradesh can access more than 700 government services through our WhatsApp Governance platform. From welfare schemes to certificates, everything is now just a message away.

During Cyclone Montha, our Real Time Governance System helped save lives through timely monitoring and quick action. Andhra Pradesh has always led the way in using technology for good — and now, we are using it to make governance and business faster, simpler, and smarter.

We have built a system where approvals happen in days, not months. This is what we call the speed of doing business. Through the Single Desk Portal, investors get everything they need in one place, one login, one window, one timeline.

So far, more than two lakh applications have been processed with

99% on-time approvals. The portal offers 120 business services across 23 departments, fully integrated with the National Single Window System for state and central clearances.

Land approvals are automatic, property records are digital, and building plans are cleared quickly. In Andhra Pradesh, business really is at your fingertips.

### **Q With global emphasis on sustainability, what steps is the government taking to ensure that industrial growth in AP remains environmentally responsible and future-ready?**

Sustainability is not an option, it is the heart of our growth story. To achieve this, we have introduced the Industrial Development Policy 4.0, supported by 24 focused policies that drive green growth. Among them:

- The Integrated Clean Energy Policy, targeting 160 GW of renewable power by 2030 and 1.5 million tonnes of green hydrogen production.
- The Circular Economy Policy, which promotes recycling, waste-to-wealth projects, and resource efficiency.
- The Sustainable Electric Mobility Policy, which will set up 5,000 EV charging stations across the state.

Our Green Hydrogen Valley is one of India's most ambitious clean energy missions. With strong solar and wind potential, world-class ports, and investor-friendly policies, Andhra Pradesh is ready to become India's clean energy capital.

The new Amaravati Capital City will

**“WE WANT TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR INDUSTRIES TO MOVE GOODS, REDUCE LOGISTICS COSTS, AND SCALE FASTER, AND BECOME THE MOST EFFICIENT MANUFACTURING HUB IN INDIA”**

**N. Chandrababu Naidu**

also lead by example. It will be powered entirely by green energy and designed around the principles of net-zero emissions and intelligent urban living.

### **Q How is the government ensuring balanced industrial growth across various districts, especially in Tier-2 and Tier-3 regions?**

Every district has a role in our progress. We are developing three economic corridors — Visakhapatnam, Amaravati, and Tirupati — to connect Tier-2 and Tier-3 towns with major industries.

We are also building 175 MSME parks, one in every Assembly constituency. Work has already begun in 40 locations with ₹2,000 crore investment. By 2028, these parks will host 15,000 small industries and create over 2 lakh jobs.

Innovation is being taken to every region through the Ratan Tata Innovation Hub and its local centres. We are focusing on “One family – One Entrepreneur” which shows us that we have now focussed on maximum decentralisation right up to each family level.

### **Q In your view, how can partnerships between the government, industry leaders, and institutions be strengthened to accelerate Andhra Pradesh's industrial transformation?**

The future of growth lies in partnerships. Quantum Valley and the Ratan Tata Innovation Hub are examples of how we are working with global leaders to build a new generation of entrepreneurs.

In the 1990s, I gave the call for One Family, One IT Professional. As I said earlier – my new call now is — One Family, One Entrepreneur, One AI.

By 2030, we want every family in Andhra Pradesh to have at least one entrepreneur and one AI-literate person. Through incubators, labs, and mentorship, we are taking innovation to every home.

Andhra Pradesh is not just growing — it is inspiring India's next wave of progress.



# Speed-driven Companies Head to Andhra Pradesh

## From Ease to Speed of Doing Business, Where Investment Becomes a Shared Responsibility

**G**overnance, transparency, and an investor-friendly environment have earned Andhra Pradesh its reputation over the years. It is going beyond ease today into delivering speed: speed to set up, scale up, and succeed.

In Andhra Pradesh, under the farsighted leadership of Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri N. Chandrababu Naidu, the state has built a governance model where approvals are swift, infrastructure is ready, and every investor finds a proactive partner in the government. Once an investor commits to the state, it becomes a shared journey, one wherein the government co-creates success with the private sector.

From world-class connectivity to clean energy corridors and immersive tourism experiences, the development narrative of Andhra Pradesh reflects a common principle: speed with purpose and partnership with accountability.

### LOGISTICS:

#### Powering India's Supply Chain Revolution

Andhra Pradesh is fast emerging as

the logistics powerhouse of India, with its strategic location being transformed into a national competitive advantage. Its integrated multimodal network to connect ports, airports, roads, and railways ensures that goods move faster, smoother, and smarter than ever before.

The logistics backbone now stretches over a length of 1.6 lakh km of roads, including 8,360 km of national highways, with new upgrades worth ₹4,500 crore underway. Railway investments of ₹1.02 lakh crore bring in high-speed and freight corridors linking major southern and central markets.

On the maritime front, one major and five operational non-major ports already handle 182 million tonnes annually, while four new greenfield ports — Ramayapatnam, Machilipatnam, Mulapeta, and Kakinada Gateway — are adding another 100 million tonnes of capacity.

Having operationalized six airports and another nine at various stages of development, including Bhogapuram, which is set to become the Eastern Gateway Airport Hub, the state has redefined air connectivity in trade



and tourism alike.

This logistics surge isn't just about infrastructure; it's about jobs and human capital. With these advantages within the last 16 months the state has managed to attract investments worth Rs 10.7 lakh Crores with a potential of creating over 9 lakh jobs many of them have already seen the light of the day. Skilling, logistics universities, and drone training programs are preparing a workforce that is ready for Industry 4.0 logistics and aviation. Vertical and Horizontal integration are of utmost priority as the state understands that it needs to tick all boxes for achieving the speed of doing business it has been demonstrating in the last year and a half.

Connecting the dots of policy speed with physical connectivity, Andhra Pradesh is emerging as the natural gateway to India's next export-led growth story, one shipment, one opportunity at a time.

### TOURISM:

#### India's New Capital of Experiences

The state has reshaped tourism into an experience-based sector wherein culture, nature, spirituality, and modern hospitality combine to give scale and diversity that few states have matched. Ranked 4th in India for domestic tourist visits in 2023 with





over 254 million visits, the state's tourism appeal runs from the sacred hills of Tirumala to the serene beaches of Visakhapatnam and the canyons of Gandikota.

Andhra Pradesh Tourism Policy 2024–29 accorded full industry status to tourism. It aims to attract an investment of ₹25,000 crores in the private sector and create over 10,000 classified rooms by 2029. Investors are assured of speed through single-desk clearances, land bank access, and generous incentives such as 25% capital subsidy, SGST reimbursement up to 15 years, and 100% stamp duty waiver.

The spatial balance is being driven

by a hub-and-spoke model with seven Anchor Hubs (Visakhapatnam, Tirupati, Araku Valley, Rajahmundry, Amaravati, Srisailem, and Gandikota) and 25+ thematic circuits covering beaches, temples, river cruises, eco-tourism, and Buddhist heritage.

The new airport of Bhogapuram International Airport will change the face of coastal and international tourism with its handling capacity of 4.5 million passengers per year. River cruise networks on the Godavari and Krishna rivers are part of this growing portfolio, along with Buddhist interpretation centres, wellness resorts, and adventure parks.

Sustainability is at the center of AP's tourism blueprint: with focus on waste, water, energy management, EV mobility, and data-driven destination management through PPP-based Destination Management Organisations.

The Tourism Story of Andhra Pradesh is one of partnerships wherein every investor, operator, and community stakeholder contributes toward a common mission—to make Andhra Pradesh the Capital of Experiences.

### **ENERGY:**

#### **India's Clean Power Capital**

Andhra Pradesh is leading the way in energy transition, instead of following trends. The AP Integrated Clean Energy (ICE) Policy 2024 has positioned the state at the forefront of India's green revolution, with a roadmap to add 160 GW of renewable capacity, attract ₹10 lakh crore in investments, and generate 7.5 lakh jobs by 2030.

Already, projects worth ₹5.88 lakh crore and 4.29 lakh employment opportunities are at various stages of development. Nearly half of the state's 28.39 GW of power capacity already comes from non-fossil sources, placing it among the fastest clean energy transitions underway in India.

From the world's biggest hybrid

renewable complex at Pinnapuram to green hydrogen and pumped storage projects, Andhra Pradesh is home to India's largest renewable projects that ensure round-the-clock renewable reliability. The Pudimadaka Hydrogen Hub will produce 1.5 MTPA of green hydrogen, powered by 3 GW of electrolyser manufacturing capacity.

The AP ICE Policy offers unmatched incentives: capital subsidy up to 25%, SGST reimbursements, and concessional land allotments, among others, aimed at ensuring that clean energy projects are not just viable but fast-tracked.

More than just investment figures, the energy revolution in Andhra Pradesh is steered by commitment. The Green Hydrogen Valley Declaration aims at building 5 GW of electrolyser capacity, reducing hydrogen production costs, and training 2,000 specialists annually in emerging technologies.

As Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu says, "With our ports, policy vision, and skilled talent, we are building a future powered by sustainability and innovation."

With speed as its constant and sustainability as its compass, Andhra Pradesh is powering a future in which energy security meets economic opportunity — setting new benchmarks for a Viksit Bharat and Swarna Andhra @ 2047.

A State that "Runs with You" the immediate promise Andhra Pradesh makes to the world, especially to those who value agility, is quite simple: speed is built into the system. From single-window clearances to real-time project tracking, from investor support teams to high-speed logistics and energy reliability, the state doesn't just welcome investment; it accelerates it. Because in Andhra Pradesh, development is not a race between government and industry; it's a shared responsibility, shared success, and shared journey toward a smarter, faster, and more sustainable India.

# *Katta Culture*



Vikas Kumar Jha  
IS A JOURNALIST AND  
AN AUTHOR

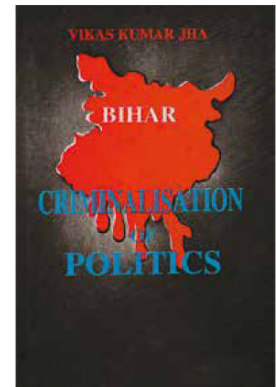
Voting in Bihar is never without bloodshed. The first phase of voting concluded on November 6. Just a week before that, 75-year-old Dular Chand Yadav, an old strongman of the Mokama Assembly constituency, was murdered on October 30 while he was campaigning in support of Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraj Party candidate Priyadarshi Piyush in Khushal Chak area under Bhadaur police station of Mokama Assembly constituency.

Yadav was never an MLA, but his status and fear were no less than that of any MLA. In this Assembly election, in the fierce battle between two powerful strongmen in Mokama—Anant Singh and Suraj Bhan—Yadav, the older strongman, was campaigning in support of the Jan Suraj candidate.

While Singh was the candidate from Janata Dal (United), former MP Suraj Bhan belongs to Lalu Yadav's party, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).



Yadav's murder became a turning point in the Bihar election. An FIR was filed based on the statement of Yadav's grandson. Five people, including two nephews of Singh, were named in it. It is clear that anger against Singh has erupted in the entire area. Enraged by the murder of Yadav, the Yadavs raised a furious slogan—"Until Anant's blood is shed, there will be no peace for the Yadavs". Amid widespread anger against Singh in the area, Patna police arrested him late at night on November 1. He was brought to Patna Police Lines under tight security. Political pundits were constantly predicting bloodshed in the run-up to the second phase of the Bihar Assembly elections on November 11. Bihar is a "soft state" when it comes to murder. This unfortunate state, which has been a victim of the culture of political murders since before independence, has not been able to free itself from the irony of the culture of murder till date.



**CRIMINALISATION OF POLITICS | Vikas Kumar Jha**

## **HISTORY**

is like a sleeping lion. It is dangerous to wake it up. But sometime or the other, it has to be awakened. To trace the history of criminalisation of politics is like waking up the sleeping, bloodthirsty lion.

When did criminalisation of politics start? After all, what was the need to criminalise politics at all? When will the general people be free from such criminalised politics? These and related questions have been raised for decades not only by the people of India but by the people all over the world. The fact is that since time immemorial, violence has been associated with power. Emperor Ashok the Great, the champion of Dhamma, ascended the throne after a bloodbath of his own brothers. It is another thing that history has been silent on Ashok's heinous crime. This is probably because the emperor's brothers were moral degenerates and hence unworthy of the throne. Similarly, king Ajatshatru of Magadh and Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb killed their respective fathers for power. History is replete with such examples. In ancient times, tribes also followed this system. Only a person with extraordinary striking capacity could become the chief of the tribe. Even after the advent of civilization, power and violence continued to be inter-linked. With modernisation came industrialisation and a systematic established form of education. It was then that violence for gaining power came in for strong condemnation. Growth of modern progressive ideologies, like the concept of equality, further discouraged violent politics. But the negative features of power kept on surfacing from time to time, revealing that the interdependent relation between violence and power remained unbroken. Critics and opponents of violent monopolisation of power were being silenced forever and it became an accepted fact that only those who had violent means at their disposal could afford to remain in power and politics. As a result, the idea of 'violence-free politics', which emerged sharply with the growth of modern education and industries, gradually vanished into thin air. This adversely affected both education and industrialisation, as these were the medium which were primarily responsible for creating a social awareness in the direction.

Eminent political leaders throughout the world have been falling victims to criminalised politics. In the nineteenth century, US President Abraham Lincoln was

brutally murdered at a theatre. In the twentieth century, another American President John F. Kennedy's sensational murder was followed by that of his younger brother Senator Robert Kennedy. Another heinous political murder in US was that of Martin Luther King, also known as the 'American Gandhi'.

In the past few years, murders of important world leaders in unusually daring manner has sent shockwaves. President of South Korea, Park Chung Hee; President of Afghanistan, Nur Mohammad Taraki; President of Egypt, Anwar Sadat; President of Bangladesh, Zia-Ur-Rahman; President of Lebanon, Bashir Gemayel; deposed Prime Minister of Grenada, Maurice Bishop, President of Sri Lanka, Ranasinghe Premadasa and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin were murdered and left a trail of questions.

In India, political murders began soon after Independence, throwing to the wind all the cherished values embodied in our Constitution. January 30, 1948 was one of the saddest days for the country when Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated. The murder of Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984, by her own bodyguards, had all the features of medieval cruelty. The assassination of another former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, on May 21, 1991, proved the extent to which Indian politics had become criminalised. Earlier in 1975, Railway Minister in Indira Gandhi's Cabinet, Lalit Narayan Mishra, was murdered. Besides this, many more politicians, social activists and others fell victim to armed politics.

Punjab's present politics of terrorism germinated in 1960s, when the state's powerful Chief Minister Pratap Singh Kairon was killed on February 6, 1965. After three decades, in 1995, another Chief Minister of Punjab, Beant Singh, was done to death by terrorists. Across the border, in Pakistan, it's the same story. Liaquat Ali Khan, the first Pakistani Prime Minister, was murdered in full view of the public during a rally. Similarly, in Bangladesh, the leader of the Liberation Movement and the first President, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and his entire family was done to death. In the last few decades, the process of criminalisation of politics has been so galvanic that it has sent shockwaves all over. In various states of India, the naked dance of criminalised politics went a pace. Politics in Uttar Pradesh has been under the way of ace criminals and history sheeters. As a result, it is a much-discussed state for its political crimes. Gorakhpur, one of the important districts of the state, has carved notoriety as 'Chicago of India'. The BBC has described it so because of the unending political crimes here. Gorakhpur was panic-stricken due to the bloody confrontation between the two leading mafia dons—Harishankar Tiwari and Birendra Pratap Shahi. This battle of the mafia groups has taken the lives of more than two hundred people. This criminal confrontation took the life of Ravindra Singh, a member of the UP Vidhan Sabha. He had won from the Kauriram Vidhan Sabha constituency on the Janta Party ticket in 1977. Later, these two underworld kingpins became respected members of the UP Vidhan Sabha. The UP Vidhan Sabha saw a number of criminal politicians of dubious reputation as its honourable members. UP Vidhan Sabha members Nazir Ali, Laturi Singh, Ramakant Yadav and others figured prominently in police

files because of their criminal activities. Ramakant Yadav, a prominent MLA, figured in the controversy surrounding the death of Jungli Prasad Bharti, an engineer of Jaunpur. Rizwan Zaheer, an independent MLA from Tulsipur in Gonda, was also involved in several criminal cases. Same was the case with Doodhnath Yadav, an MLA from Madiahu in Jaunpur. Similarly, Durga Yadav, an MLA from urban constituency of Azamgarh, Omprakash Gupta, MLA from a Vidhan Sabha constituency in Sitapur, Shamiullah Khan, MLA from one of the constituencies in Gonda district, Krishna Kinkar Singh, MLA from Captainganj in Basti district, well-known strong arm tactician, MLA D. P. Yadav, Rampal Verma, Babulal Tiwari and many other highly controversial politicians with dubious records filled the UP Assembly. Mitra Sen Yadav, the Communist member of Parliament from Faizabad, had a string of crimes of his credit. Etawah is probably most notorious for political crimes. This place has been the battleground of two political heavyweights—Mulayam Singh Yadav, a former Chief Minister of the state, and Congress stalwart Balram Singh Yadav. The warring leaders have made Etawah a haven for criminals.

Some famous political families of Uttar Pradesh have figured prominently in shady political deals. In Lucknow, Mangalapati Tripathi, the youngest son of Pandit Kamalapati Tripathi, was involved in the mysterious death of a forty-two-year-old Lady Vimla Rastogi. On October 25, 1987, Saroj Verma, the daughter of former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh and a Lok Dal MLA, committed suicide. On July 28, 1988, famous badminton player Syed Modi was shot dead in broad daylight. The prime suspect was Sanjay Singh, related to V. P. Singh, former Prime Minister, through marriage and was active in UP politics for long. He was a minister in Chandra Shekhar government at the Centre. Balai Singh, the main co-accused in the Modi murder case, died under mysterious circumstances on February 27, 1991. Many members of UP Legislative Assembly were murdered one after another. Some prominent Legislators to lose their lives at the altar of political crime were Bilayati Ram Katyal of Congress (I), Bhopal Singh of Janta Dal (S) from Meerut, Sharda Prasad Rawat, and others. The high speed of criminalisation transcended political barriers and affected even the state's bureaucracy. B. B. Singh of the Indian Civil Services was involved in the murder of his Nepali maid, Bilasiya. The case went up to the Privy Council where he was acquitted but committed suicide later. Even small states like Haryana and Tripura could not evade the inevitable grip of criminalised politics. Choudhury Devi Lal, former deputy prime minister and patriarch of Haryana politics, along with his notorious sons, brought politics to an all-time low level. Even the home of the Choudhury was not free from crime. On November 11, 1988, his (Devi Lal's) grandson Abhay Singh's wife Supriya died of shots fired from her own revolver. In Tripura, former Chief Minister Sudhir Ranjan Mazumdar has been accused of openly harbouring criminals like Madhusudan Saha, alias Bhola.

The political crime graph of Madhya Pradesh shows that the state is not lagging behind. On December 28, 1991, the famous trade union leader Shankar Guha Niyogi was

brutally murdered. The murder of Vijay Tandon, the son of Chandranarayan Tandon, MLA representing Damoh (M. P.), had created a lot of political controversies. In 1988, Balendu Shukul, Law Minister in the Congress government, was involved in the murder of a political activist Captain Singh Solanki in the Gwalior district. In Indore, one of the famous cities of MP, the murder of a Congress leader Mohan Balliwal created a furore and quite a few BJP stalwarts were linked to it. In Bundelkhand, another MP, Kunwar Ashok Vir Vikram Singh, alias Bhaiaraja, who was quite a political heavyweight, was known as the 'terror of Bundelkhand'. Even the Home Minister of MP, Jaipal Singh, was terrorised by Bhaiaraja. Apart from murders, politicians have been often accused of rape and physical assault too in Madhya Pradesh. A Congress MLA, Ganpat Rao Dhurve, was accused of violating the honour of a certain Malti Shrivastava in the Legislators retiring room in Bhopal. Dhurve and his friends were conducting a drinking party there. Even Chief Ministers have not been free of such accusations. Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Vir Bhadra Singh was also in the net. His intimate relation with Rani Bhagyawati was a much-discussed affair. In Rajasthan, a Lok Dal MLA, Jagmal Singh, was found guilty of raping a Harijan girl. Swati Lodha accused Raj Kumar Jaipal, a Congress MLA from Ajmer, of sexual assault. In 1985, the murder of Raja Man Singh, a one-time MLA from Bharatpur, had created prolonged political controversy.

In Andhra Pradesh, during the Late N. T. Ramarao government, the killing of B. Mohan Ranga Rao, a Congress legislator, had raised a lot of controversial political dust. Apart from individual murders, mass scale killing of innocent people by political-extremist groups were on the rise. Extremist outfits like the ULFA in Assam and the People's War Group in Andhra Pradesh and others, have unleashed virtually a reign of terror in these states. In recent years, communalisation has also abetted criminalisation of politics. The state of Gujarat is a burning example of how politicians with proven communal activities have been accommodated in politics. The reference is to the riot-prone city of Ahmadabad and its communal politician, the infamous Abdul Latif, who's involvement in the city's riots is well known. Yet, in the Municipal Corporation elections, Latif filed his nomination for five seats and won all of them. In Karnataka, the involvement of minister C.M. Ibrahim in communal riots is well known. Political violence spread to the cultural sphere too, and quite a few artists with different branches of art became victims of criminalised politics. The brutal murder of Safdar Hashmi on January 1, 1989, is well known. Even Journalism has been dragged into the orbit of political crimes. Clearly, criminalised politics has penetrated every nook and corner of our society. The list is too long and the details too nauseating.

When the idea of writing a book on such a burning topic struck me, I wanted to limit myself to my own country. As I progressed in my work, the entire picture gradually became crystal clear. It was then that I realised that a microscopic study would be more meaningful. Therefore, I decided to confine my study to one state only. The choice was naturally Bihar as for almost one-and-a-half decades, I have been

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## EVERYTHING IS FOR SALE IN BIHAR. EVEN INTEGRITY. AGES BACK, BUDDHA HAD SAID BIHAR IS THREATENED BY THREE THINGS—FIRE, WATER & INTERNAL STRIFE. TODAY, THE LAND IS THREATENED BY ITS VERY OWN.

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associated with journalism in this state. Moreover, Bihar has been in the thick of political crimes and has gained notoriety on account of it. Be it politics, bureaucracy, education or daily needs of the people, everywhere the rot is clearly visible. Everything is for sale in Bihar. Even integrity. Ages back, Buddha had said that Bihar is threatened by three things—fire, water and internal strife. Today, the land is threatened by its very own. While writing this book, I was most positively influenced by a very down-to-earth remark of T. L. Venkat Ram Aiyar. Aiyar is best-known for heading the Aiyar Commission, enquiring into corruption charges against ministers of Bihar. Aiyar, at the beginning of his report, remarked: "I have conducted this enquiry not out of fear of any man but out of fear of God". How well I have been able to deal with a serious topic like criminalisation of politics in Bihar is for the readers to judge. However, I must admit that while writing this book, I was immensely influenced by Aiyar's remarks. In my own word: "I have written this book not out of fear of man but out of fear of God." Actually, it is the 'fear of man', which is responsible for the utter misfortune and abject misery of Bihar.

Many people have helped me in my venture. Without their constant co-operation and encouragement, this book would not have seen the light of the day. Thanks are due to many. I would particularly like to thank Sri Alope Mitra, Chief Editor, of 'Maya', a pillar of Hindi Journalism. It is he who taught me to be a God-fearing journalist. I would like to thank specially Shri Babulal Sharma, the joint editor of Maya, who has been more of an elder brother than a professional colleague and tirelessly goaded me to sharpen my journalistic writing. Among my colleagues, I cannot help thanking profusely Ratindra Nath, who helped me to take note of every minute detail. I am thankful to my colleague Prashant also. Thanks are due to Gautam Adhikari, Sanjeev Banerjee and Santosh Kumar for their valuable contributions. Finally, I am greatly indebted to Sunil Jha, who is like a younger brother, for carefully going through the manuscript and sharing with me the pangs of anxiety and joy while writing this book. While submitting this book to my readers, I am unable to decide whether this is really an occasion for rejoicing? To be honest, such moments bring joy and satisfaction to a writer. But to write such crude facts about one's motherland is a calamitous task. May God protect all creative writers from it. ☐  
*(An excerpt from Criminalisation of Politics, by Vikas Kumar Jha)*



# Devbhoomi *Uttarakhand*

A Destination of  
Peace, Adventure,  
and Faith



“There are two main pillars for the creation of a developed India in the 21st century – pride in our heritage and making every possible effort for development. Today, Uttarakhand is strengthening both these pillars. This decade will be the decade of Uttarakhand.”

**Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister



“Under the guidance of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Uttarakhand is progressing steadily on the path of development. The state government is taking necessary steps to encourage tourists to visit not only for tourism but also to experience the holy shrines. This will allow tourists to enjoy the spiritual and touristic experiences, especially during the winter season.”

**Pushkar Singh Dhami**  
Chief Minister, Uttarakhand



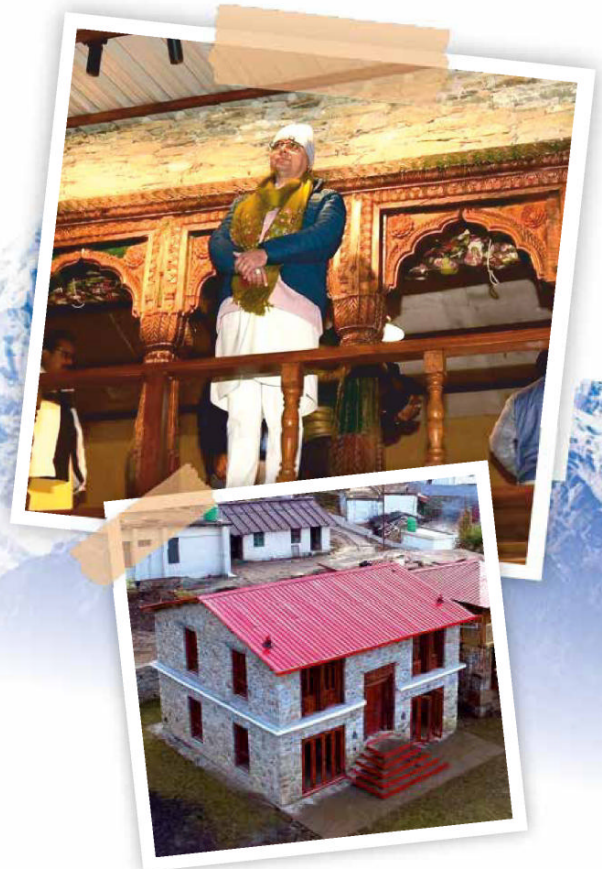
# Home Stays Boost Rural Tourism

**5,703+ Home Stays Registered in Uttarakhand Under the Scheme**

Away from the hustle and bustle of city life, tourists are appreciating Uttarakhand's home stays, enjoying warm hospitality in small villages nestled in the beautiful valleys of the mountains. Home stays are now giving rural tourism in Uttarakhand a new identity.

To develop livelihood opportunities in villages affected by migration, the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Griha Aawas (Home Stay) Scheme has emerged as a success story. The aim of the scheme is to attract domestic and international tourists to rural areas of Uttarakhand, familiarize them with the state's rich culture and cuisine, and simultaneously strengthen the rural economy. Under this scheme, over 5,703 home stays have been registered across the state. Additionally, under the Tracking Traction Centre Home Stay Grant Scheme, grants are being provided for the construction of home stays in villages located within a 2 km radius of identified tracking traction centers. So far, 101 villages across 6 districts have been notified, and over 500 individuals have been identified under this initiative. Furthermore, under the Virchandra Singh Garhwali Tourism Self-Employment Scheme, grants are provided for vehicles and the construction of tourism units, benefiting over 7,300 people to date.

**Uttarakhand tourism is a divine blend of natural beauty and spiritual significance. The famous destinations nestled in the lap of the Himalayas attract visitors, while trekking, river rafting, and wildlife sanctuaries serve as major attractions for adventure enthusiasts.**



# Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2023

## Ensures Financial Inclusion, Environmental Sustainability, & Investor Friendliness

The objective of the Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2023 is to establish the state as a leading sustainable and investor-friendly tourism destination

Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2023 presents a comprehensive and transformative approach to establishing the state as a globally recognized tourism hub. The policy will remain effective until 31 March 2030 and is designed to accelerate tourism-led development while ensuring economic inclusion, environmental sustainability, and investor-friendliness.

### **Institutional Framework and Policy Priorities**

The policy focuses on enabling Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and attracting

investments across diverse sectors such as hospitality, wellness, adventure, heritage, and rural tourism.

For policy implementation, the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB) has been designated as the nodal agency. A State-Level Empowered Committee (SLEC) has been constituted for projects exceeding INR 50 crore. For MSME projects up to INR 50 crore, District-Level Empowered Committees (DLEC) have been set up. Additionally, District-Level Tourism Committees (DLTC) have been established for the physical inspection and verification of projects.



## ELIGIBLE PROJECTS AND INVESTMENT INCENTIVES

Under this policy, various types of tourism units are considered eligible, including hotels, resorts, heritage buildings, ropeways, eco-lodges, yoga and wellness centers, amusement parks, and adventure tourism facilities. Minimum investment and infrastructure requirements have been defined for each category to ensure quality and encourage investment. All units are also required to adhere to national safety standards.



## CAPITAL AND NON-CAPITAL INCENTIVES

Investors will receive incentives under two categories: capital investment subsidy and additional reimbursements. For example, units established in backward and remote areas will be eligible for up to 50% subsidy on the cost of capital assets, helping to reduce regional disparities.

**Single Window Portal**

**Ease of Doing Business**

**Hospitality & Wellness**

**Yoga & Wellness Centre**

**Adventure Tourism**

**Ropeway & Eco-Lodges**

**Adventure & Heritage**

**Rural Tourism**



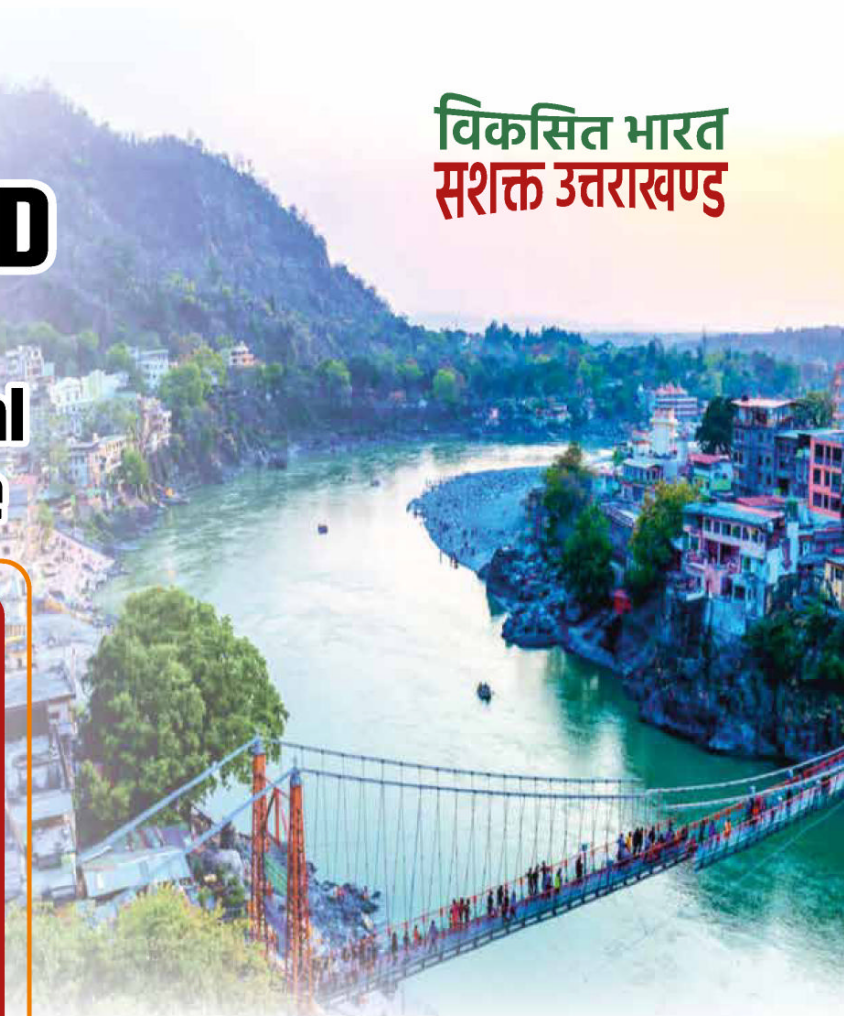
# DEVBHOOMI UTTARAKHAND

## A Marvelous Confluence of Natural Beauty & Adventure

- Uttarakhand's villages—Jakhol, Supi, Harsil, and Gunji—have been awarded by the Government of India as the Best Tourism Villages.
- Under the Vibrant Village Program, 51 border villages have been selected for planned development.
- Efficient management led to a record number of devotees visiting the Char Dham Yatra.
- For the first time in the state, the winter pilgrimage season was inaugurated.
- Under the Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission, work is underway to connect 48 temples and other religious sites into a structured circuit.
- Approval has been granted for the master plan of Mahasu Temple in Hanol.

Whether it is eco-tourism, wildlife tourism, or the thrill of unexplored snow-capped peaks, skiing, mountain biking, paragliding, and trekking trails, Uttarakhand offers everything that might otherwise require traveling to multiple

विकसित भारत  
सशक्त उत्तराखण्ड



countries. The state is now recognized for green tourism, mindful travel, wildlife excursions, and nature-based tourism. Owing to improved tourism policies and high potential, the state has witnessed significant investments in the tourism sector over recent years. Moreover, several major investors are exploring further opportunities in the industry. With its adventurous offerings, Uttarakhand is emerging as a prominent destination for adventure tourism.



# Uttarakhand Tourism:

## Enjoy the Himalayan Journey Even in Winters



Uttarakhand is home to many beautiful and serene places to visit during the winter season, from Auli to Chopta, and from Khirsu to Triyuginarayan Temple.

When winter embraces Uttarakhand, the entire state presents a stunning spectacle adorned with the colors of snow, peace, and spirituality. Along with the grandeur of the temples, the hills here offer endless opportunities for both adventure and introspection.

### Key Winter Destinations:

#### **AULI: The Skiing Capital of India**

With snow-covered peaks and a world-class ropeway starting from Joshimath, Auli is a paradise for adventure lovers. Skiing, cable car rides, and the mesmerizing view of the sunset attract tourists repeatedly.

#### **CHOPTA: The Mini Switzerland of India**

Chopta, a serene village nestled in the Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary, is the base camp for Tungnath, the highest Shiva temple in the world. Its snow-covered trekking trails in winter offer a divine and ethereal beauty.

#### **KHIRSU: The Hidden Gem Located in Pauri Garhwal,**

Khirsu is known for its pine-scented air and a magnificent view of 300 Himalayan peaks. It is an ideal spot for solitary travelers and nature-loving photographers.

#### **KARTIK SWAMI TEMPLE: Nature's Unique Beauty**

Situated at an altitude of 3050 meters in Rudraprayag, this temple is dedicated to Lord Kartikeya. It is accessible even in winter, and the snow-covered views of the Chaukhamba mountain range are captivating.

#### **CHAUBATTIA AND RANIKHET: The Queen's Resting Place**

Adorned with apple orchards and pine forests, Chaubattia becomes even more beautiful in winter in Ranikhet. Trekking, birdwatching, and heritage walks here provide a peaceful experience for travelers.

#### **TRIYUGINARAYAN TEMPLE: The Eternal Flame of Love**

The holy place where Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati were married has now become a global wedding destination. Its indestructible flame burns continuously even in the harsh cold of winter.



AULI



CHOPTA



KHIRSU

KARTIK SWAMI  
TEMPLECHAUBATTIA  
AND RANIKHETTRIYUGI NARAYAN  
TEMPLE

# Adi Kailash:

## The sacred peak of Mansarovar

**Adi Kailash and Parvati Kund located in Pithoragarh are now becoming popular as serene and spiritual destinations in the high Himalayas.**

Located near the India-Tibet border in Pithoragarh district, Adi Kailash and Parvati Kund symbolize eternal faith and nature's grandeur. Often called the sacred twin peaks of Mount Kailash, Adi Kailash represents a divine reflection of the abode of Lord Shiva. At its base, Parvati Kund is a serene lake, shimmering with mythological significance. Devotees believe that a glimpse of its waters bestows spiritual merit equivalent to a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the region in 2023 brought it to national attention and made it a symbol of sustainable and spiritual tourism. Uttarakhand

The century-old Jauljibi Fair celebrates India-Nepal friendship, celebrating it through trade, culture, and tradition. Held under the banner of Utsav Uttarakhand, the fair unites diverse communities through exhibitions of folk art, handicrafts, and border region art.



The Tourism Development Board is now making the area eco-sensitive. developing infrastructure, including solar lighting, Includes improved trails and homestay-based accommodation, to preserve

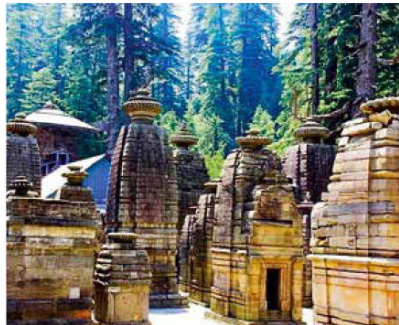
its fragile ecology Can go.

Visitors can experience both divinity and adventure, trekking through the serene valleys, gazing at the stars in the crystal-clear skies, and connecting with Himalayan communities. More than just a pilgrimage site, Adi Kailash has today become a symbol of Uttarakhand's harmonious approach to faith, nature, and progress, a destination where the soul truly finds its resonance among the mountains.

# Manaskhand Mandir Mala Yojana

## A Lifeline for Ancient Temples

Under the Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission, the state government is carrying out infrastructure-related development work around 48 ancient temples in the Kumaon region. In the first phase, 16 temples have been selected. These include Jageshwar Temple, Golu Devta Temple, Katarmal Sun Temple, Kasar Devi, Nanda Devi, Patal Bhuvaneshwari Cave, Hat Kalika, Purnagiri, Naina Devi, Baleshwar, Kainchi Dham, Varahi Devi, Baijnath, Bagnath, and Chaiti



Bala Sundari Temple.

In addition, the selected temples include Jhankar Sam, Naithna Devi, Vindhyavasini, Mallika Devi, and Syahi Devi in Almora; Mostmanu, Berinag, Malaynath, Thalkedar, and Kotgiri

temples in Pithoragarh; Atariya Temple, Nanakmatta, Moteshwar Mahadev, and Vankhandi Mahadev in Udham Singh Nagar; Meetha Reetha Sahib, Guru Gorakhnath Temple, Maneshwar Temple, Baleshwar, and Devidhar in Champawat; Kot Bhramari, Shikhar Bhanar in Bageshwar district; and Golu Devta, Girija Devi Temple, Hanuman Temple, Somwari Mahadev, Devguru Brihaspatidham, and Hanuman Garhi Temple in Nainital district.

## Yoga Capital Rishikesh

Nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, Rishikesh has long been known as the Yoga Capital of the World. Every year, thousands of yoga enthusiasts, spiritual seekers, and wellness travelers from across the globe visit this serene city to deepen their practice, participate in renowned yoga festivals, and pursue yoga training.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has played a significant role in giving Rishikesh global recognition as a premier yoga destination. He has himself practiced yoga in UK on several occasions, underscoring the importance of yoga in achieving a healthy lifestyle.

## Rising Paragliding Tourism Uttarakhand's Youth Soaring High

Tourism in Uttarakhand had so far remained largely limited to sightseeing, but now Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami's govt. is adding new dimensions to it through adventure tourism. For this, the Tourism Department is providing free paragliding courses to more than 700 youths. Paragliding tourism is growing at certain locations such as Bhimtal in Nainital district and Maldevta in Dehradun. Considering the new possibilities, the Tourism Department is not only



identifying new spots for paragliding but also offering free training to local youth. In this way, with their skills in adventure tourism, young people will not only be able to secure jobs or start self-employment but will also help promote tourism in Uttarakhand.

In continuation of this effort, the government is conducting five different courses, ranging from basic to guided paragliding, in Tehri for youth across 15 batches.



**A Strong Presence** CPI(M)(Liberation) supporters on the march in rural Bihar

# How the BJP's Rise Changed Bihar's Left

The Left parties, once influential and then marginal, are now a catalyst of opposition unity in Bihar. Siwan shows how they have changed



Snigdhendu Bhattacharya

IS A JOURNALIST, AUTHOR  
AND RESEARCHER

**O**N November 3, three days before the first phase of polling in Bihar, former Uttar Pradesh chief minister and Samajwadi Party supremo Akhilesh Yadav came to Raghunathpur assembly constituency in Siwan district to campaign for the INDIA bloc candidate, Osama Shahab. To get a former chief minister from another state to campaign for a poll debutant takes something special. In this case, it was Shahab's identity—his late father was the gangster-turned-politician Mohammad Shahabuddin. The son is contesting on a Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) ticket, the party his father represented.

Standing next to Shahabuddin's son on the dais and holding his hand in a show of unity was Amarjeet Kushwaha, a leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (Liberation) who represents the neighbouring Jiradei constituency in the assembly and is defending his seat in the election. The CPI(ML) (Liberation) has always held Shahabuddin to be the "real culprit" behind the 1997 murder of Chandrasekhar, better known as Comrade Chandu, a former student leader from Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University who became a CPI(ML) organiser in the gangster's stronghold. For over a decade from the early 1990s to around 2005, the CPI(ML) (Liberation) had a series of conflicts, often bloody, with the gangs of Shahabuddin, whose writ then ran across and beyond Siwan. Chandrasekhar's photos still adorn the walls of every Liberation office, but the days of the party's bitter and bloody rivalries with Shahabuddin's men seem to have long gone.

Meanwhile, the RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, the chief ministerial face of the opposition alliance in Bihar, did not make it to Jiradei for a rally scheduled on November 1 as his helicopter could not take off due to bad weather. In a video message addressing the voters of Jiradei, Tejashwi apologised for his absence and urged them to ensure Kushwaha's victory. Indeed, Siwan's political alignments have changed unrecognisably in three decades.

During the 1990s, when Tejashwi's father, Lalu Prasad, helmed Bihar, criminalisation of politics, especially in

Siwan, had become a matter of national debate. While the landed class in the Shahabad (Bhojpur) and Magadh region were backing the Ranvir Sena, the notorious private army, against the movement for land redistribution to poor and landless peasants organised by Naxalite parties, including the CPI(ML) (Liberation), in Siwan, Shahabuddin had openly provided "a political umbrella to those upper castes (landlords)" who wanted to fight the Naxalites.

The old wounds seem to have healed, while the CPI(ML) (Liberation's) alliance with the RJD and the Congress has only become stronger since 2020. In 2016, coming out of jail after 11 years, Shahabuddin had lamented that those whom he used to protect had all shifted allegiance to the BJP. And there lies the key to the smoothening of the Liberation-RJD relations—the landed gentry are standing strong with the saffron party. "The reality has changed significantly with the rise of the BJP, a feudal, communal and undemocratic force," Kushwaha argues. "As alliance partners, we are all working towards the same goal of ensuring a clean sweep of Siwan district and toppling the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government."

Satyadeo Ram, a four-time CPI(ML) (Liberation) MLA and the contender from Darauli, echoes Kushwaha. "Many things have changed since the BJP came to power in India in 2014," he says. Ram handled many conflicts with Shahabuddin's men during the 1990s and fought them out to win in 1990, in 2000 and in the February 2005 election from Mairwa, before losing the October 2005 election by a narrow margin of 380 votes. That election gave Bihar a new chief minister, Nitish Kumar of the Janata Dal (United), whose rule has continued ever since.

Ram does not seem to bear any grudge against the RJD or Shahabuddin. Removing the BJP-JD(U) government from power tops the party's immediate agenda, he says, and highlights the rising crime graph in recent years and the BJP's "anti-people policies".

"We fought Shahabuddin tooth and nail when the feudal forces used him as their henchmen. Now, the feudal forces use the BJP. In fact, they are the BJP. Our chief opponent

was the feudal forces then and now as well,” says Ram, one of the founders of the CPI(ML) in Siwan in the late 1980s.

Jiradei was Shahabuddin’s original fortress, where he stunned local politicians in 1990 as a 23-year-old debutant winning the seat as an Independent candidate. He soon joined the Janata Dal, got re-elected from Jiradei in 1995 on the party’s ticket, and then made it to Parliament in 1996 by winning the Siwan Lok Sabha seat. After Lalu Prasad formed the RJD in 1997, Shahabuddin chose to side with him and became the ‘boss’ of Siwan.

Alongside his rise was that of the CPI(ML)(Liberation) in Siwan, with movements focussed on seizing land in excess of the legal ceiling from the big landlords for distribution among the landless. The CPI(ML)’s base was mostly among the backward castes, who owned little or no land, and their arch rivals were the landed gentry from the dominant castes, mostly Rajputs and Bhumihars. The Yadavs, the key social base of Lalu’s party, were on both sides—some in the landless camp, some among the landed. The CPI(ML)(Liberation) won Jiradei’s neighbouring Darauli and Mairwa constituencies in the 1995 assembly election, and by the 1999 parliamentary election emerged as Shahabuddin’s chief rival in Siwan.

It was a decade when the left parties in Bihar recorded their electoral peak. Of the 243 seats of the Bihar part of the then-undivided Bihar assembly, 34 seats were held among the CPI (24), the CPI(M) (5) and the CPI(ML)(Liberation) (5) in 1995. However, the emergence of caste-based electoral politics following the Mandal Commission report of 1992, on the one hand, and the Ram Temple-oriented Hindutva politics, on the other, ate into the traditional left electoral space of the CPI and the CPI(M).

Through the 1990s, the CPI(ML)(Liberation), besides having elected representatives, also had armed squads to take on the private armies of the landlords, as well as to fight the rival Naxalite parties. By the turn of the new century, the CPI(ML)(Liberation) had overtaken the CPI as the state’s key left force, not so much for its own growth as for the CPI’s steep decline. All left parties suffered a setback during the 2010s—only CPI won one seat in 2010 and only the CPI(ML)(Liberation) won three seats in 2015.

In Siwan, Nitish’s JD(U) emerged as the RJD’s key opponent in the new century and the Liberation’s influence waned, but not so much as to be ignored. That is why the RJD-Congress alliance gave three seats in the district to the CPI(ML)(Liberation) in the 2020 election—Darauli, Jiradei and Daraunda. The party won the first two. Now, winning all three is the target.

The left parties’ alliance with the RJD and the Congress in 2020 turned out to be mutually beneficial, especially for the RJD and the CPI(ML) in the Bhojpur and Magadh regions. The CPI(ML) won 12 seats, while the CPI and the CPI(M) won two each. The Liberation vote share helped the RJD sail through in several seats.

During the 1970s, ’80s and the ’90s, several thousand marginalised people gained their socio-economic rights by fighting oppression based on caste and land ownership due

## AMID THIS ELECTORAL ENTHUSIASM AND PRAGMATISM, WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE CPI(ML)'S CORE ISSUE—LAND REDISTRIBUTION?

to the movements led by the CPI(ML)(Liberation), first as an underground force and then overground, especially in the Bhojpur and Magadh regions. Once rooted among the landless peasantry, the party has, over time, also focussed on building a base among the middle class, including small traders, workers in the unorganised sector and the urban poor.

Political observers mostly see its role in alliance building after the Narendra Modi government’s return to power in 2019 as a key catalyst behind the party’s growth since 2020—winning 12 assembly seats in 2020 and two Lok Sabha seats in 2024. Identifying the BJP as the biggest danger, the CPI(ML) looked to forge the broadest possible alliance against the BJP and its allies, and its leaders are even believed to have played mediators between the Congress and the RJD when the alliance faced internal conflicts.

In this election, the party is raising general issues regarding the Nitish government’s “misrule”, including lack of employment generation leading to widespread job-related migration, unstable law and order, divisive politics and poor services. The alleged connivance between the BJP and the Election Commission of India has emerged as one of the focus issues.

Amid this electoral enthusiasm and pragmatism, what has happened to the CPI(ML)’s core issue—land redistribution? Divya Gautam, a 34-year-old academic and social activist who contested the election on a CPI(ML)(Liberation) ticket from Digha constituency in Patna district, doesn’t think the party has abandoned the issue. “Land redistribution is part of our manifesto,” she says. “It remains very much central to the party’s agenda. We have only broadened our approach, appealing to a wider section of the masses who have suffered from the NDA’s misrule.”

Gautam affirms there is no discomfort with the RJD or the Congress at the grassroots level, and highlights how Lalu, the RJD founder-helmsman, invited her to the alliance’s joint programmes. Party general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya says alliance partners opposed inclusion of land redistribution in accordance with the Bandyopadhyay Commission’s recommendations in their common agenda, arguing the commission’s report is nearly two decades old and that there should be a fresh survey on landholding. That, nevertheless, leaves the question of land redistribution—a central agenda of the party—as unresolved as it has been over the past two decades. □



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# Theatre of Promises

Bihar's electorate watches the great auction of hope



Mohammad Ali

IS AN AWARD-WINNING JOURNALIST, BASED IN DELHI. HE IS SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR WITH *OUTLOOK*



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**A**S dusk falls over Tajpur in Samastipur district, the marketplace close to the highway glows under a mix of fairy lights and flickering bulbs. The air smells of fried *litti* (baked dough balls) and election dust. During the first phase of the election here, people voted in large numbers. But the discussion about who should come to power lingers on, albeit with a bit of scepticism about the past.

“Nitishji (incumbent Chief Minister Nitish Kumar) gave ten thousand (rupees) to women,” said Ranjit Kumar, a 37-year-old peon in a government-run school in Tajpur, stirring his tea slowly. “In response, Tejashwi said, he’ll give thirty thousand (rupees). The BJP also talked about new youth schemes. People got dizzy keeping count. Nobody knew what was (really) new and what (was) just another announcement.”

He smiled wryly. “Every day, a new promise landed on our heads. We just wanted to know which one would actually change something on the ground. According to me, the time has come for a change in the regime.”

Many voters were left confused by the many promises made throughout the campaign, right up to the final day on November 4. Across Bihar, from the bazaars of Sheikhpura in Patna district to the sugarcane fields of Champaran, the sentiment was similar. Competing pledges from both alliances blurred the line between policy and bribery, leaving voters torn between gratitude and doubt.

“The talk everywhere was who will give more—not who will govern better,” said Sanjay Singh, a schoolteacher in Arrah. “It felt like an auction, not an election.”

### Season of Announcements

The election, now at its fever pitch, has turned Bihar into a theatre of competing arithmetic. Nitish Kumar’s Janata Dal (United) rolled out its Rs 10,000 assistance plan for women, calling it a “direct boost to dignity”.

Within days, Rashtriya Janata Dal’s (RJD) Tejashwi Yadav announced a grant of Rs 30,000. Posters sprouted overnight. WhatsApp groups buzzed with debates. And yet, on the ground, few seemed convinced.

While incumbents and hopefuls make promises galore at election rallies, one issue remains relevant across the state, affecting every family, every village, and every voter: unemployment.

“Even for Rs 10,000, the government will ask for 10 documents and make you go 10 times to the block office,” said Sunil Yadav, 22, a jobless graduate in Sheikhpura. “It is time for change. Twenty years of Nitish Raj was okay. But a lot needs to be done. People need to give opportunities to the other alliance as well.”

Asked if RJD rule would lead to “Jungle Raj”, as Nitish

### Waiting for Change

A Mahagathbandhan election rally in Dharhara village in Bihar

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## THIS DIVIDE—BETWEEN OLDER WOMEN'S GRATITUDE AND YOUNGER WOMEN'S ASPIRATIONS—COULD PLAY A ROLE IN SHAPING BIHAR'S ELECTORAL MATH IN UNEXPECTED WAYS.

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Kumar proclaims, Yadav said, “By that standard we are (already) living in jungle raj. All the data shows that crime has gone up. It is time people need to stop demonising Lalu Yadav’s rule. Yes, mistakes were made, but RJD knows better than to repeat the same mistakes. Today’s voter is quite aware.”

In Darbhanga’s Alinagar, where BJP candidate Maithili Thakur’s campaign added a fresh cultural flavour, the reactions were similar. “We are not calculators,” said Rohit Jha, a student at C. M. Science College.

“We want sincerity, not sums. I think instead of announcing more freebies, Nitish Kumar should have given a plan for how he will do things he didn’t do in the last 20 years.” Despite being a Brahmin, Jha supports Tejashwi Yadav’s promise of one job per family over the NDA.

### The Mirage of Jobs and Industry

Unemployment remains one of Bihar’s biggest political concerns. Lokniti-CSDS surveys show it was the top issue for 9.1 per cent of voters in 2015, rising to 21 per cent by 2020, and is expected to dominate voter priorities again this election.

The Periodic Labour Force Survey shows Bihar’s youth unemployment (ages 15-29) fell from 30.9 per cent in 2018-19 to 9.9 per cent in 2023-24. Despite the improvement, nearly one in 10 young people in the state remain unemployed.

Every conversation about Bihar’s politics eventually circles back to a haunting question: Where are the jobs? At Patna junction, under the yellow glow of tube lights, dozens of young men waited for the night train to leave for industrial cities across the country. Each carried a small backpack and a quiet sense of resignation.

“I have an ITI diploma,” said Amit Ranjan, 25. “I work at a private factory in Noida. I came home to vote, but honestly I’m not sure why. They talk about Rs 10,000, Rs 30,000—but we just want a chance to earn.”

He pointed at the platform. “Half the train will be filled with people from Bihar. If there were factories here, who would leave?”

With more than seven per cent of its population migrating for jobs, *palayan* is one of the top poll planks in Bihar. Data shows poll-bound Bihar ranks second to Uttar Pradesh in out-migration for jobs and has the highest multidimensional poverty rate in the country.

## The Forgotten Constituencies

But it's not just the numbers that bother voters—it's the faces behind them. In nearly every district, an undercurrent of anger simmers against ruling party MLAs who, locals say, "vanished" after the last election.

In Gaya city, Shagufta Khatoon, a 62-year-old former school clerk, who runs a grocery shop, didn't mince words. "We see them only on TV or hoardings. For five years, not one visit, not one meeting. Now suddenly they come with folded hands and promises."

In Lahariyasarai in Darbhanga, 35-year-old Babloo Paswan did the math out loud. "Rs 10,000 or Rs 30,000—that's one or two months' survival. Then what? There are no industries, no jobs. These promises are like band-aids on a bullet wound."

## Nitish's Women Card

And yet, amid the chorus of scepticism, one segment of voters continues to express guarded faith—women.

In rural Patna, 38-year-old Rekha Devi spoke softly but with conviction. "Nitishji gave us respect," she said, referring to the liquor-prohibition policy enacted in 2016. "Men may curse it, but for us, it brought peace. My husband stopped drinking. The fights at home reduced. My children study better now."

Nearby, Asha Kumari, an *anganwadi* worker, nodded. "He gave cycles to girls, toilets, electricity and reservations in panchayats. We may not have everything, but we got dignity."

This trust, analysts say, is Nitish Kumar's most enduring political achievement. Over two decades, he has carefully nurtured a loyal base of women—across caste-lines—through targeted welfare schemes: free bicycles for schoolgirls, uniforms, cash-transfers for toilets, and a sense of safety that many say didn't exist before.

In Darbhanga, a group of women at a self-help-group meeting echoed this pragmatism. "We know everyone makes promises," said Sita Devi, 45. "But Nitishji keeps some of them. He doesn't talk big, but he does something. That's enough for us."

Still, not all women agree.

In Patna city, 19-year-old Anjali Kumari, a first-time voter, said prohibition has hurt families like hers economically. "My father was arrested for selling liquor. We are poor. He had no choice. I like Tejashwi because he talks about jobs, not bans."

This divide—between older women's gratitude and younger women's aspirations—could play a role in shaping Bihar's electoral math in unexpected ways.

## Disillusionment and the Desire for Dignity

In countless small conversations, a deeper yearning becomes clear—not just for employment or cash, but for dignity.

"People want to feel seen," said Ravi Prakash, 27, who works in Noida. "We don't expect miracles. Just recognition that our lives matter beyond elections."

Even Tejashwi Yadav's young supporters, while admiring his energy, express caution. "We like his style," said Saba Parveen, a student of Patna College. "But words are easy. Our generation has grown up on promises. We are looking for proof now. But I think we need to give him an opportunity."

In Arrah, teacher Sanjay Singh summed it up bluntly:

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## EVERY CONVERSATION ABOUT BIHAR'S POLITICS EVENTUALLY CIRCLES BACK TO A HAUNTING QUESTION: WHERE ARE THE JOBS?

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"Announcements are not employment. Until factories come, until migration stops, these numbers—ten thousand or thirty thousand—mean little. Bihar doesn't need more promises. It needs delivery."

## A Fear of Election "Chori"


A quieter anxiety circulates among opposition party workers. In several constituencies where contests are expected to be close, RJD and Congress workers whisper of a different kind of fear—not of losing, but of being declared losers.

"Wherever margins are tight, we are worried," said Sanjay Yadav, a local RJD leader in Samastipur. "People have voted, and voted in large numbers. If our candidate leads by a few hundred votes, who knows what will happen during the final rounds of counting? We just hope the results reflect what people have actually voted."

"We have fought this election with heart. The record number of voter turnout shows that," he said. "But till the last EVM is opened, nobody will relax here."

Such apprehensions, though unsubstantiated, reveal a telling truth about Bihar's political moment—that even as people debate promises and personalities, trust in institutions feels stretched thin. Yet it is precisely this mix of suspicion and hope that has driven people to participate more actively than before.

As the dust settles on Bihar's highways and campaign songs fade into silence, one truth endures: the people here have mastered the art of waiting. They have waited for roads, jobs and justice—yet still turn up at polling booths with the patience of those who believe democracy, however frayed, can deliver. In a land where politics often feels like theatre, the audience now watches with sharper eyes. This time, Bihar's voters seem determined to decide not by applause, but by accountability.

Whatever the verdict, the high voter turnout shows that Bihar's electorate, despite fatigue and mistrust, continues to invest faith in the democratic process. The women who lined up before dawn, the youth who travelled home from cities to vote, the workers who still hope for jobs—together they have turned cynicism into participation. Between Nitish's promises of dignity, Tejashwi's call for jobs, and the murmurs of mistrust in the system, voters have cast their ballots with quiet determination in the first phase of polls. Whether those votes bring change or continuity, the message is unmistakable: people are listening to every promise, but this time they expect delivery, not drama. 





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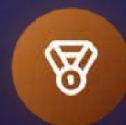
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# A Morass of Lies, Deceit and Red Tape

The state of affairs in Bihar today is such that the state will have to wait for a very long time before any semblance and safety can be delivered to its people

IMAGO/HINDUSTAN TIMES



**Land of the gangster-legislator** RJD MLA Anant Singh being detained by a police official on November 25, 2020, in Patna

**IN** the 2025 Bihar assembly election, the incumbent National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is seeking re-election by building a narrative of “Jungle Raj” around the Lalu Yadav-Rabri era (1990-2005). This time, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led NDA hasn’t been able to project its own chief ministerial face. Their incumbent chief minister, Nitish Kumar of the Janata Dal-United (JD-U), is evidently not keeping well, in terms of health. It is largely believed that Nitish is suffering from dementia. For the first time, Nitish has been reciting brief written texts during public meetings.

Conversations and discussions with the electorate from across castes and classes and across the sub-regional and (dialect-based) variations in the poll-bound provinces clearly suggest that the upper castes, more importantly the Rajputs and Bhumihaar-Brahmins (Babhans), are more desperate to bring back a regime led, dominated and hegemonised by the BJP with an upper caste chief minister. However, they don’t feel it electorally prudent and wise to be explicit about replacing Nitish Kumar, still a formidable vote-catcher, prior to the polls. Overall, it seems that the NDA will get its votes and support from across castes and communities. Of course, it is also quite visible that the Yadav and Muslim (M-Y) votes would go to the NDA, but in a very small measure. Significantly, Nitish Kumar is cultivating a support base among the women and his cash transfer scheme of Rs 10,000 to women seems to be working in his favour. Overall, the saffronisation of the socio-political and administrative spaces and the rising anti-Muslim hatred are another electoral advantage for the NDA.

The cash transfer scheme was announced just a few days—the proverbial 11<sup>th</sup> hour—before the enforcement of the electoral code of conduct. The Election Commission of India has been facing charges of being partisan towards the NDA, even in terms of the chosen dates of enforcing such codes. Nevertheless, I, as someone who has been teaching postgraduate students on the history of post-Independent India, would like to draw the reader’s attention to a fact that a marked degeneration in this regard began from the Local Area Development Scheme (LADS) funds given to the legislators. This scheme was an immoral, unjustifiable but a legalised version of bribery to the legislators. This policy had found its way against the backdrop of horse-trading of parliamentarians done by the minority government of P. V. Narasimha Rao (1991-96). This has turned the legislators into executives who entrench their clout by awarding contracts of developmental works to their workers. This is a legalised subversion of the separation of power between the legislature and the executive. Conceiving, drafting and debating bills to enact laws today no longer remains the priority of a large number of legislators, nor is this role expected much by a large number of the electorate. These schemes—engraving names of the legislators in stones and plaques and displaying these across buildings, roads and streets—have become obnoxious obsessions. This has also helped create personality cults, thereby subverting the process of democratisation.

Fear of the hegemony of the Yadavs among the Economically Backward Classes (EBCs/*Ati-Pichhdas*), non-Yadava Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and the Dalits has not abated. Nitish Kumar’s visibly deteriorating health is a cause for worry for the EBCs. They have sympathy for Nitish who has done a lot for them in his earlier stints. That the Muslim electorate didn’t stay with him for long is another story. Even more important, but less articulated and least appreciated aspect is: Nitish has been the only force standing between Muslims and a complete saffron hegemony over Bihar’s administration. Academically and otherwise, this will remain an arguable point as to whether Nitish’s politics would be seen more as an enabler of Hindutva or as a thin, fragile wall between the Muslims and Hindutva? Arguably, it is a bit like the ‘half-filled or half-empty glass of water’.

Tejashwi Yadav’s hugely attended, vocal and assertive mega rallies have further created a scare among some sections of the EBCs and Mahadalits. So they are silently rallying behind the NDA. Why silently? Bihar demography is unique in the sense that most of the constituencies have a sizeable population of the M-Y. A considerable number of the seats have got a minimum of 30-40 per cent of M-Y. They make Tejashwi’s rallies demonstrably spectacular. The M-Y has got a good proportion of panchayat representatives due to reservations for the EBCs and a chunk of Muslims comprise the EBCs. They are upwardly mobile, “neo-rich”, and aspirational. Hence, they have become campaigners, slogan shouters, political workers and booth managers. Remittance money

**THE SAFFRONISATION  
OF THE SOCIO-  
POLITICAL AND  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
SPACES AND THE  
RISING ANTI-  
MUSLIM HATRED  
ARE ELECTORAL  
ADVANTAGES FOR  
THE NDA.**

## THE LALU-RABRI REGIME ONLY CHANGED THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE GANGSTERS. THEIR REGIME ADDED SOME SUBALTERN CASTES INTO THE WORLD OF THE GANGSTERS AND POLITICIANS.

from West Asian countries and a growing affluence of a segment of Muslim artisans and skilled workers—motor and puncture mechanics, electricians, masons, plumbers, taxi drivers—in the post-liberalised era has created a new scenario. They are more vocal than their predecessors. They have an urge for announcing their arrival in terms of their newly-acquired economic status. In order to show it, they demonstrate their identity and prosperity through bigger, brighter mosques with taller spires (*minaar*) and bigger domes (*gunbad*) in their villages and *mohallas*. In graded South Asian societies, when the poor and the subjugated become affluent and powerful, it is resented even more by the historically dominant classes. There is a popular saying in Hindi-Urdu: *log apney dukh se kam dukhi hotey han; doosron ke such se zyadah dukhi hotey hain* (People are less troubled by their own privations, they are more troubled when others, hitherto poor-disadvantaged, become happier).

These upwardly mobile Muslim subalterns—vis-à-vis their corresponding Hindu counterparts—also offer economic rivalries in *mohalla*-based local trading as much as in funding and affording the election expense for local bodies. This makes communalisation of electoral politics much easier and helps the saffron outfits build a narrative among the subaltern Hindu communities: “Look! How the Islamic countries of the Middle East have worked towards the economic upliftment of the Indian Muslims, the *mlechhas* or *yavanas* (non-Hindu foreign descents).” This strikes a chord with the subaltern Hindu communities and the saffron politics thrives on it. This helps gloss over the deprivation, subjugation and marginalisation of these communities. It dispenses with making the ruling dispensation accountable to the subaltern Hindu communities on the front of development (*vikas*) and good governance (*sushasan*).

In such a scenario, the once aspirational Muslim youth have become more vocal towards narrativising *iqtidaar mein hisseydaari, apni qayadat* (proportionate share in power, our own leadership), so the saffron task of consolidating Hindus has become much easier. Of course, the scary stories of Muslim repression from states such as Assam, Uttar Pradesh

and Uttarakhand, have created a wider disjunct between the common Muslim electorate and the aspirational, upwardly mobile youth narrative-makers on social media. Common Muslim voters are less likely to get swayed by such slogans of their aspirational youth. In such a scenario, a legitimate aspiration will not be disapproved by the common Muslim electorate, yet a majority of them will decide their electoral preferences much more cautiously. Thus, even though Asaduddin Owaisi’s oratory finds a nod and approval from a section of the Muslims, a chunk of them choose not to endorse and articulate it through their votes. Such “minoritarian” politics—from Seemanchal (Kishanganj, Purnea, Araria, Katihar) in east Bihar to Jalle (in Darbhanga, the Tirhut-Mithila sub-region of north Bihar)—of mobilising Muslim votes more explicitly in campaign speeches has its own immediate and long-term implications.

Liberalised economy, growing inequality and social tension, and the resultant identity politics remains an academic debate even while it is playing out in the starkest ways on the ground today. Nevertheless, it warrants a deeper attention of the pollsters and social scientists alike as to why is the Bihar regime incumbent since 2005, mobilising on vilifying (or villainising) a regime which has been non-existent for the last 20 years? Doesn’t the incumbent NDA regime have something more concretely positive as its performance to showcase than the crassest and possibly short-lived populist welfarism to contest this election?

In a curious mix or cocktail of crime and communal mobilisation, the NDA campaigners have been harping on Osama Shahab, the son of a deceased gangster-politician, Mohammad Shahabuddin (1967-2021). In September 2016, while articulating my outrage against treating gangsters as role models by the aspirational youth of the respective castes-communities, I had written, in a column, “*The Cost of Worshipping Gangster*”: “Adulation of goons by their community is a manifestation of despondency as fans have nothing more to look forward to as symbols of their pride. The moot point is whether the common Muslim of Siwan has started identifying himself with the goon as this would make them vulnerable not only to crime, but possibly also to violent religious extremism.”

But the point here is, is it a Muslim-exclusive phenomena? Certainly not! This was/is certainly not only a Muslim phenomenon. At least since the 1970s, every other dominant

caste/community has got its own “dons” and outlaws to worship and to elect them to enact laws for the land and its people. For instance, since the 1970s and the 1980s, Muzaffarpur was lorded over by many gangsters and warlords. Stories about them need to be explored deeply, and told widely. One such ‘don’, Raghunath Pandey (1922-2002), went on to become a minister in the cabinet of Satyendra Sinha (1917-2005) in the late 1980s, about whom, he later recorded, in his Hindi memoir, *Meri Yaadein, Meri Bhoolein*, that morally this was one of the most unpleasant decision he had to take. Mainstreaming political criminals is a story that is more than half a century old in Bihar.

In the Bihar Election 2025, even within the opposition RJD, Osama Shahab (Raghunathpur, Siwan) and Shivani Shukla (Lalganj, Vaishali) are contesting from their respective seats with the same symbol. (Please don’t miss the irony that Vaishali is touted as the birthplace of proto-republicanism in the ancient period). The social media narratives, the socio-political narrative-making elites and the electoral gossip of the pro-NDA electorate have varied responses. Their narratives burden Osama with the misdeeds of his deceased father. The same is not the case when they discuss about Shivani Shukla, the UK-educated daughter of a convicted gangster, Munna Shukla, now serving a life sentence. This in itself reveals a lot about the duplicity of the pro-NDA electorate and their narrative makers.

Moreover, the “amnesty” granted to the convicted gangster, Anand Mohan Singh, by the Nitish-led administration, in a clearly dubious manner, and nominating his son, Chetan Anand, as JD-U’s candidate, too is not a concern for the pro-NDA electorate. Shukla and Singh are convicts of spectacular murders, respectively, of high-profile people such as a Dalit IAS officer-cum-DM of Gopalganj, G Krishnaiah (1957-1994), and a gangster-turned-minister, Brij Bihari, whose widow Rama Devi has been a BJP parliamentarian from Sheohar Lok Sabha constituency more than once. Of course, a spectacular broad daylight murder of Dularchand Yadav in Mokama, on October, 30, 2025, allegedly by the JD-U nominee and infamous gangster-legislator, Anant Singh, is not outraging the NDA supporters. The fact that Prashant Kishor Pandey and the cadres of the Jan Suraj Party are not expressing adequate outrage over the murder of its supporter, a Yadav, also says a lot about casteist prejudices in general, and the anti-Yadav sentiments of the Bhumihars in particular.

Such religious and caste-based partisan response to gangster politics tells unfortunate stories about our society and polity. Thus, communalisation of crime, or the four Cs—communalism, casteism, crime and corruption—continue to be the four banes of Indian society and polity. Ever since Bihar was declared a dry state by Nitish Kumar, almost every panchayat of Bihar has propped up a hoodlum or a criminal linked to the liquor mafia with vicious protection and patronage from legislator-politicians and the police.

This corrosive phenomenon remains awfully underexplored by the academia and the media alike. This has led to a more dangerous nexus between the police-liquor mafia and politicians. Right now, this is the biggest problem of Bihar, but no one is paying adequate attention to this gravest of problems.


The criminal justice system that manifests itself by the willful failure of the police in preventing crime; in finding and producing evidence before the judiciary to book the culprits; and, in not protecting witnesses, is a perennial failure of Indian democracy. With communal hatred peaking to an unprecedented scale, along with the complicity of the police with the criminals who are aligned with the ruling dispensation, the social fabric is in tatters.

In communalised and casteist narratives of electoral campaigns (and of the “everyday communalism”, as put by Sudha Pai-Sajjan Kumar, a professor), there is a willful and selective amnesia on the part of the pro-NDA narrative-makers. The pre-1990 or pre-Lalu Bihar was no heaven. The US-based political scientist, Harry W. Balir, has written unambiguously in one of his academic essays that the Bihar Legislative Assembly may have been captured at gun point by gangsters had it been an independent country. Needless to add, Blair talked of the pre-Lalu Bihar. So, what did the Lalu-Rabri regime do? They only changed the social composition of the gangsters. Their regime added some subaltern castes into the world of the gangsters and politicians.

Sample this quote from Arvind N. Das’ (1949-2000), *The Republic of Bihar* (1992):

*...The state has been carved out into zones of influence of local ‘leaders’, mostly with daunting criminal records. Many of them are MLAs: some are ministers. From Mohammed Suleiman’s territory in Kishanganj through Pappu Yadav’s domain in Purnea-Madhepura, one can cross Bihar by passing through Anand Mohan Singh’s area and then into the realm of Raghunath Pandey and ‘Samrat’ Ashok and further into the Gopalganj belt of Salaluddin and the Wild West of Champaran. Alternatively, one can go through Makhi Paswan’s Khagaria, Kailu Yadav’s region, into the Dularchand tal and then through Dilip Singh’s land and on to the lawless Kaimur ranges crossing the realm of Surendra Yadav. Other routes are equally dominated...”*

All this could sound hackneyed to anyone who knows a bit about Bihar. The 2025 election has not been able to project any leadership or a chief ministerial face who could be looked upon to take the benighted land of Bihar out of its morass. There’s also the Jan Suraj of Prashant Kishor, which can be an effective spoiler—possibly damaging the RJD and the JD-U more than the BJP. This resource-rich new political formation might emerge in the near future as a short-lived force in Bihar, just like Arvind Kejriwal, who had a brief stint in Delhi.

To people like us, sadly, the polity of the “Internal Colony”—that is Bihar—therefore, still has a long time to wait before any good can be ushered to its people. 

*(Views expressed are personal)*

# Outlook I-CARE B-School Ranking-2026

## PRIVATE STANDALONE INSTITUTIONS

| RANK 2026 | INSTITUTION  | STATE          | FACULTY STUDENT RATIO WEIGHTAGE | RESEARCH WEIGHTAGE | EMPLOYABILITY WEIGHTAGE | FACULTY QUALITY WEIGHTAGE | INCLUSIVENESS & DIVERSITY WEIGHTAGE | OVERALL SCORE |
|-----------|--|----------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|
|           |  |                | 25%                             | 20%                | 25%                     | 20%                       | 10%                                 | 100%          |
| 1         | XLRI-XAVIER SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, JAMSHEDPUR   | Jharkhand      | 100                             | 79.2               | 100                     | 91.56                     | 96.66                               | 93.82         |
| 2         | MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE, GURGAON  | Haryana        | 100                             | 74.3               | 95.83                   | 96.12                     | 95.28                               | 92.57         |
| 3         | GREAT LAKES INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT, CHENNAI   | Tamil Nadu     | 98.62                           | 73.22              | 96.36                   | 90.14                     | 100                                 | 91.42         |
| 4         | INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY, GHAZIABAD  | Uttar Pradesh  | 95.48                           | 72.04              | 98.94                   | 91.6                      | 98.54                               | 91.19         |
| 5         | T. A. PAI MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE, MANIPAL  | Karnataka      | 100                             | 67.9               | 97.8                    | 87.67                     | 96.93                               | 90.26         |
| 6         | LIBA (LOYOLA INSTITUTE OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION), CHENNAI                              | Tamil Nadu     | 100                             | 68.38              | 95.45                   | 95.18                     | 81.49                               | 89.72         |
| 7         | LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT, NEW DELHI                                   | Delhi          | 96.41                           | 49.48              | 91.97                   | 92.29                     | 58.32                               | 81.28         |
| 8         | SHRI DHARMASTHALA MANJUNATHESHWARA INSTITUTE FOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT (SDMIMD), MYSORE | Karnataka      | 100                             | 47.08              | 93.23                   | 87.75                     | 56.13                               | 80.89         |
| 9         | INSTITUTE OF RURAL MANAGEMENT, ANAND   | Gujarat        | 99.6                            | 77.08              | 84.87                   | 65.14                     | 54.28                               | 79.99         |
| 10        | XAVIER INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP (XIME), BENGALURU                    | Karnataka      | 95.09                           | 48.23              | 84.44                   | 92.46                     | 59.23                               | 78.94         |
| 11        | INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ENTERPRISE (IPE), HYDERABAD  | Telangana      | 100                             | 47.02              | 86.75                   | 82.61                     | 35.09                               | 76.12         |
| 12        | JAGAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES (JIMS), NEW DELHI                                  | Delhi          | 97.35                           | 41.44              | 82.78                   | 85.77                     | 40.17                               | 74.49         |
| 13        | INDUS BUSINESS ACADEMY (IBA), BENGALURU  | Karnataka      | 97.93                           | 44.73              | 76.46                   | 84.43                     | 50.49                               | 74.48         |
| 14        | RAJAGIRI CENTRE FOR BUSINESS STUDIES, KOCHI  | Kerala         | 100                             | 45.63              | 80.07                   | 83.65                     | 30.96                               | 73.97         |
| 15        | SIVA SIVANI INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT, HYDERABAD   | Telangana      | 95.06                           | 38.21              | 81.43                   | 86.3                      | 32.28                               | 72.25         |
| 16        | XAVIER INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SERVICE (XISS), RANCHI  | Jharkhand      | 100                             | 38.26              | 73.75                   | 80.66                     | 29.65                               | 70.19         |
| 17        | SCMS COCHIN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, KOCHI  | Kerala         | 98.04                           | 39.62              | 72.68                   | 77.63                     | 38.03                               | 69.93         |
| 18        | SHANTI BUSINESS SCHOOL, AHMEDABAD  | Gujarat        | 100                             | 39.98              | 71.24                   | 76.76                     | 35.73                               | 69.73         |
| 19        | INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES, GHAZIABAD   | Uttar Pradesh  | 100                             | 33.81              | 65.18                   | 82.18                     | 30.1                                | 67.5          |
| 20        | LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT, INDORE                       | Madhya Pradesh | 100                             | 27.12              | 66.65                   | 83.27                     | 25.24                               | 66.26         |
| 21        | FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES, INSTITUTE OF RURAL MANAGEMENT, JAIPUR                     | Rajasthan      | 100                             | 26.91              | 58.67                   | 80.6                      | 30.05                               | 64.17         |

## PRIVATE STANDALONE INSTITUTIONS

| RANK 2026 | INSTITUTION  | STATE       | FACULTY STUDENT RATIO WEIGHTAGE | RESEARCH WEIGHTAGE | EMPLOYABILITY WEIGHTAGE | FACULTY QUALITY WEIGHTAGE | INCLUSIVENESS & DIVERSITY WEIGHTAGE | OVERALL SCORE |
|-----------|--|-------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|
|           |  |             | 25%                             | 20%                | 25%                     | 20%                       | 10%                                 | 100%          |
| 22        | VISHWA VISHWANI INSTITUTE OF SYSTEMS & MANAGEMENT, HYDERABAD                                   | Telangana   | 94                              | 26.94              | 62.7                    | 82.28                     | 29.84                               | 64            |
| 23        | INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND MEDIA (ISB&M), PUNE                                       | Maharashtra | 99.88                           | 26.51              | 59.95                   | 77.25                     | 25.25                               | 63.23         |
| 24        | XAVIER INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT & ENTREPRENEURSHIP, KOCHI                                       | Kerala      | 100                             | 27.08              | 54.81                   | 76.27                     | 26.57                               | 62.03         |
| 25        | DELHI SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, NEW DELHI  | Delhi       | 98                              | 14.17              | 55.25                   | 75.72                     | 21.34                               | 58.42         |
| 26        | INSTITUTE OF HEALTH MANAGEMENT RESEARCH (IHM Bengaluru), BENGALURU                             | Karnataka   | 98.88                           | 20.69              | 51.32                   | 71                        | 19.32                               | 57.82         |
| 27        | INSTITUTE FOR TECHNOLOGY & MANAGEMENT, CHENNAI   | Tamil Nadu  | 94.18                           | 14.77              | 49.78                   | 71.87                     | 13.3                                | 54.65         |
| 28        | PUNE INSTITUTE OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT, PUNE  | Maharashtra | 99.65                           | 14.49              | 49.1                    | 68.07                     | 9.09                                | 54.61         |
| 29        | IIEBM INDUS BUSINESS SCHOOL, PUNE  | Maharashtra | 96.05                           | 10.23              | 34.9                    | 62.49                     | 22.27                               | 49.51         |
| 30        | ITM BUSINESS SCHOOL, BENGALURU   | Karnataka   | 95.06                           | 6.82               | 35.33                   | 66.77                     | 18.7                                | 49.19         |
| 31        | ADITYA SCHOOL OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT, MUMBAI   | Maharashtra | 98.17                           | 5.46               | 31.89                   | 61.44                     | 16.6                                | 47.56         |
| 32        | INDIRA SCHOOL OF BUSINESS STUDIES, PUNE  | Maharashtra | 96.13                           | 10.05              | 27.14                   | 63.79                     | 15.51                               | 47.14         |
| 33        | MIMA INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT, PUNE   | Maharashtra | 100                             | 6.09               | 30.84                   | 58.73                     | 12.47                               | 46.92         |
| 34        | INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND MEDIA, BENGALURU  | Karnataka   | 94.32                           | 7.7                | 29.53                   | 63.7                      | 15.06                               | 46.75         |
| 35        | INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND MEDIA, KOLKATA  | West Bengal | 96.94                           | 5.06               | 27.56                   | 63.64                     | 18.38                               | 46.7          |
| 36        | VIGNANA JYOTHI INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT, HYDERABAD  | Telangana   | 95.33                           | 8.86               | 30.85                   | 58.87                     | 15.59                               | 46.65         |
| 37        | ICBM SCHOOL OF BUSINESS EXCELLENCE, HYDERABAD  | Telangana   | 100                             | 8.37               | 27.32                   | 57.84                     | 13.77                               | 46.45         |
| 38        | FORTUNE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS, NEW DELHI   | Delhi       | 100                             | 4.32               | 29.12                   | 56.21                     | 17.71                               | 46.16         |
| 39        | KIRLOSKAR INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED MANAGEMENT STUDIES, HARIHAR                                    | Karnataka   | 99.87                           | 9.57               | 25.3                    | 56.16                     | 13.95                               | 45.83         |
| 40        | ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE OF INDIA, BHAT  | Gujarat     | 100                             | 6.63               | 28.15                   | 53.49                     | 14.83                               | 45.54         |
| 41        | FORE SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, NEW DELHI   | Delhi       | 92.6                            | 5.86               | 20.82                   | 64.42                     | 15.29                               | 43.94         |
| 42        | FOSIIMA BUSINESS SCHOOL, DWARKA  | Delhi       | 91.97                           | 9.51               | 21.44                   | 60.02                     | 15.05                               | 43.76         |
| 43        | UNIVERSAL BUSINESS SCHOOL, KARJAT  | Maharashtra | 99.82                           | 2.04               | 16.22                   | 58.26                     | 17.67                               | 42.84         |
| 44        | PODDAR MANAGEMENT AND TECHNICAL CAMPUS, JAIPUR   | Rajasthan   | 92.32                           | 6.79               | 17.51                   | 49.72                     | 10.66                               | 39.83         |
| 45        | DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS, COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT, MARTIN LUTHER CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY, SHILLONG | Meghalaya   | 100                             | 2.15               | 8.04                    | 53.89                     | 11.67                               | 39.39         |



# Once, There Were Mills

Bihar's manufacturing deficit is as much a political phenomenon as an economic one



Umesh Kumar Ray  
IS A BIHAR-BASED  
INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST

**FROM**

a distance, the abandoned Marhowrah sugar mill in south Bihar's Saran district looks like an installation of abstract art. It wears the theme of desolation on its rust-covered pipes and long-defunct boilers left exposed to the elements by the wide cracks in the old walls that have collapsed at many places, letting the wilderness outside seep in and spread all over.

Chatting with customers at his *paan* and cigarette stall half a kilometre away, 75-year-old Awadesh Thakur seems quite disappointed with Amit Shah, who recently blamed "scarcity of land in Bihar" for the lack of big industries in the state. "As there is difficulty in acquiring land for big factories, we should bring those industries here that need less land," the Union Home Minister had told a news channel on October 18 in Patna. "How can he say this? If Bihar has no land, then how did the Britishers establish so many industries here? It is not about whether Bihar has enough land or not. It's about the intention," says Thakur.

Pointing towards the old mill's tall tower that still stands at its place, 36-year-old Ram Babu Ram, a customer at Thakur's stall, remembers the days when this space was teeming with activity. "When the siren wailed, it could be heard from six or seven



UMESH KUMAR RAY

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**"LABOUR OUT-MIGRATION FROM BIHAR IS SIGNIFICANTLY HIGH, WHICH IS ATTRIBUTED TO POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND HIGH DEPENDENCY ON AGRICULTURE."**

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#### **Ghosts of the Past**

There are many abandoned industries across Bihar

kilometres away. We could tell the time by the sound," recalls Ram, who is now a migrant worker in Andhra Pradesh. "If there were factories in my home district, then I would not have needed to move to another state in search of livelihood. Even if no factory here employed me, I could have still opened a small eatery near one and earned a decent living."

Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar, too, has argued that the state's geographical location as a landlocked state with no sea ports makes it difficult for large industries to develop here. However, Bihar has a long history of industrialisation, with its sugar mills dating back to the late 18th century when the British East India Company was asked to meet the rising demand for sugar in Britain. In March 1792, a company officer in Bengal proposed that good-quality sugarcane could be cheaply cultivated in Bihar. In 1904, the first sugar mill was set up in Marhowrah by Kanpur Sugar Works to process the sugarcane grown in the farms to manufacture sugar mainly for the British market. Its campus, spread over 1,250 acres, was shared by three more factories—Saran Engineering, Morton confectionery and a liquor manufacturing unit. Morton's chocolate became a household name in Bihar.

By the time British rule ended in 1947, 28 sugar mills were flourishing in the state. In 2023-24, according to Bihar government data, eight were still operating. The Marhowrah mill was shut down in 1998, when it employed around 1,200 workers.

All of them suddenly found themselves without a job and among the burgeoning ranks of the unemployed. The closure came as a disaster for Thakur, who had joined the power generation unit of the sugar mill in 1980 as an apprentice before being offered a permanent position. "*Jab mill chalu tha toh lagta tha ki yahan aathon pahar sona barasta hai* (When the mill was running, it looked as if it was raining gold here all the time). All of us used to take pride in our work. Such was the reputation of the mill that many even quit jobs in the railways to join us."

After the Marhowrah mill was closed, Thakur went to Gorakhpur in UP to work in another sugar mill that paid 30 per cent lower wages. He couldn't stick around and worked in different cities for six-seven years, but none of the various jobs brought him enough income to cover his family's needs. He eventually returned to Marhowrah and set up his *paan* stall in the vicinity of his former workplace—a reminder of better times.

Besides sugar mills, Bihar was also home to many paper mills and Bhagalpur district was a major centre for the manufacture of silk textiles and garments. In the early 1930s, businessman Ramkrishna Dalmia started developing 3,000 acres of land in Shahabad (now in Rohtas district), on the banks of the Sone river, along the lines of the steel city Jamshedpur founded by Jamsetji Tata around 370 km to the southeast a few years earlier. This became the Dalmianagar industrial city, where Dalmia established several industrial units, schools, colleges, a railway

line and an airport, making it one of the biggest townships then.

After 1970, however, the bad days began, with one factory closing down after another. On September 9, 1984, the smoke stopped billowing from the chimneys of the last factories that were shut down. Just a couple months earlier, as per records of July 8, 12,629 people, including officers and workers, worked in these units. All were left jobless with the closures. The company declared itself bankrupt and filed a petition in the Patna High Court to wind up its operations in Dalmianagar.

On May 22, 1986, the Patna High Court appointed a provisional liquidator to sell the company's assets under their supervision and repay its outstanding loans. Legal battles dragged on for years. The state government tried to rescue the company a couple times, but without much success. "A few factories were reopened in 1986, then closed down again in 1990," says Shiv Gandhi, a Dalmianagar resident who has been advocating for the revival of industries in the township. "It is sad that Nitish has never visited Dalmianagar."

During his tenure as railway minister, Lalu Prasad Yadav acquired land in Dalmianagar to build a railway factory on the site of a closed factory, but the project never took off. Once known as a township with all the necessary facilities, Dalmianagar today looks like a ghost city.

"There is a historical background to Bihar's backwardness in industrial development that is often ignored by economists," says Awanish Kumar, an associate professor at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. "Industrial development in India took a specific and deliberate trajectory in the post-Independence period, while agriculture was treated like a bargain sector with the understanding that little to no investment could produce positive results. Eastern India and Bihar already suffered from the feudal *zamindari* system and deep socio-economic inequality. With its neglect of agriculture, post-Independence policy worsened this situation. The current industrial deadlock in Bihar must be understood in this context."

As the industrial policy in post-Independence India focused on heavy industry, it concentrated more investment in already advantaged areas, especially states with metropolitan centres. "Capital has a natural tendency towards spatial conglomeration," explains Kumar. "The only way to bypass this is strong policy intervention, but that was lacking from Delhi. After the liberalisation of the economy in the 1990s, this process of uneven regional concentration of industry turned even stronger."

Not all the industrial units had shut down before Nitish became CM in 2005; many downed their shutters during his tenure. Mokama's Bata factory, a leather manufacturing unit established five years before Independence across 14 acres, was shut down in 2014 and there has been no effort so far to reopen it. Besides this unit of the 250-year-old Czech-origin corporation, almost synonymous with footwear all over India until liberalisation, the town was home to at least half a dozen factories, including a thread-making unit, a liquor-manufacturing unit of McDowell's, and a railway wagon manufacture and maintenance unit. All these units, too, have shut down. The Bata motto—'*Uttam kharidiye, Bata kharidiye*'—is still legible. "We were paid our wages every Friday," recalls Dev Kumar Paswan, 60, one of the 700 contractual labourers who toiled at the Bata factory alongside an equal number of permanent workers. "On that day the hawkers would throng outside the factory gate, turning the

place into a *meena bazaar* (mini market)."


Paswan says 1,800 pieces of leather would be prepared every day and sent to footwear manufacturing units located at other places. "Raw skin even came from foreign countries and the polished leather was also exported to units abroad for making footwear," he says. As people from the other castes would not touch raw skin, most of the workers were from the Scheduled Castes, mostly Chamar and Dusadh. The handful of managerial posts were held mostly by people from the elite castes. The company pays him Rs 1,000 every month as pension. "We are merely surviving. We heard the Narendra Modi government will increase our pension but it has not been done yet," adds Paswan.

The closure of factories affects not just workers but the entire economy of the surrounding localities that sees a fall in people's buying capacity as a result. Manoj Mahto, 62, who has been running a tea stall in front of the Bata factory for the past four decades, remembers the days when it was running to full capacity. "I needed 200 litres of milk daily to make the tea I used to sell," Mahto recalls. Today, it's a Sunday morning but, unlike the old days, there is no crowd here.

Not long after the Bata factory, the Bharat Wagon and Engineering Company Limited, too, was shut down around 2017. Spread across 5,560 acres near the 90-year-old railway station in Mokama, the company used to employ 1,200 workers. "Wagons were made for freight trains here and old wagons were also repaired," says 70-year-old Ramnath Saw, who lives in a temple near the closed factory. "There used to be two shifts and the whole place looked like a fairground teeming with people. We heard the unit was closed as it was running at a loss."

Mokama was known as an industrial hub until the 1970s. "Then it became infamous for its *Bahubalis* (strongmen)," says Saw. Many industrial units were shut down in the past 10 years. According to the Annual Survey of Industries, Bihar had 3,420 factories in 2013-14, which decreased to 3,307 in 2022-23. Only 2,782 are operational now. Though the state's per capita income rose marginally from Rs 22,776 in 2013-14 to Rs 32,227 in 2023-24, it is still the lowest among all states.

"Bihar does have a very useful industry, one that produces cheap labour for places like Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kochi and Chennai," says Kumar, the associate professor, who believes industrialisation in Bihar is as much a political question as an economic one. Thakur, the *paan*-seller in Marhowrah, agrees with the logic. "If factories are set up in Bihar, then our people would not go to work in the factories in Gujarat, Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru... Those factories will have to be shut down. That is why factories are not set up here," he says.

According to a research paper published in the *Management Journal for Advanced Research* in April, Bihar has the second-highest rate of out-of-state migration after Uttar Pradesh. "Labour out-migration from Bihar is significantly high, which is attributed to poverty, inequality and high dependency on agriculture. The prime factor for labour migration is the backwardness of Bihar's economy," the paper reads. Despite the grim data, though, Mahto is optimistic. "The roads are smooth, electricity supply is regular, and now I hope the government will establish small-scale industries here," says the *chaiwala* in Mokama. Just then an e-rickshaw stops at his stall and the driver orders a *kadak chai*. Mahto pours milk into the tea pan and starts fanning the earthen stove under it to light the fire. 

# Forging Knowledge Bridges

Prof Dr Jerzy Lis speaks of a shared future vision burgeoning into a partnership between Małopolska and India in conversation with Aditi Chakraborty



**Prof Dr Jerzy Lis**  
Rektor, AGH University of Krakow, Poland

## How would you describe the core strengths and philosophy of AGH University?

Founded in 1919, AGH University stands as one of Central Europe's most respected centres of science and technology, evolving into a hub of innovation that bridges the legacy of Europe's industrial past with an emerging digital future. We see knowledge as something beyond laboratories, a force that shapes the public, industry, and governance. For us, technology transfer is beyond innovation; it is about civilisational exchange.

AGH forged its identity over a hundred years ago through excellence in mining, metallurgy, and heavy industrial applications. Today, it integrates legacy with emerging domains like AI, climate technology, green engineering, and space sciences.

## How can India and Central Europe collaborate in this area and how do you perceive your collaboration with GGSIPU?

Central and Eastern Europe are rich in critical minerals and industrial expertise. India, with its expanding renewable energy and electric mobility sectors, can be a strategic partner in developing sustainable supply chains and green industrial technologies. I believe India and Europe share a common destiny in knowledge creation and sustainable growth. Cooperation in science, energy, and technology is strategic, ethical, and developmental.

At AGH, we have even established a space programme in collaboration with ISRO, NASA, and ESA—from “underground to sky”, as I like to say. Such initiatives reflect how technology and sustainability can converge beyond boundaries.

Through the AGH University and GGSIPU partnership, we realised that there is an enormous scope for collaboration between India and Poland. Our partnership must be built on mutual learning, combining Europe's legacy in industrial research with India's dynamism, youth, and digital leadership. Rather than merely establishing a branch campus, we prefer co-created innovation hubs — where Indian and Polish students, researchers, and startups can work together on applied challenges in energy, digital systems, and climate resilience. We are developing models based on three primary goals:

First, create a high-level knowledge exchange platform through joint diploma and staff training programs, followed by university-level research collaborations.

Second, through the establishment of contact and research centres connecting Krakow and Delhi, we endeavour to link industry, academia, and business ecosystems with the plan of hosting Poland–India conferences.

Third, building a strong India–Europe bridge by leveraging Poland's role within the European Union to create pathways for Indian students, researchers, and startups and vice versa.

## What are the specific areas for collaboration between Krakow's Małopolska region and Delhi?

Both regions are knowledge-driven and entrepreneurial. I see potential in smart city design, circular economy initiatives, and startup ecosystems. We plan to establish centres of excellence at AGH and GGSIPU to facilitate student and faculty exchanges and industry partnerships, facilitating urban innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship.

Starting with management studies, we will implement mechanical engineering, biotechnology, materials science, and biomedical technology through joint research, exchange programmes, and technology transfer mechanisms. Government support, both in India and Poland, will be crucial in scaling these efforts. It's a value-based partnership—one built not just on institutional agreements, but on trust and shared purpose.



SANDIPAN CHATTERJEE

# The Vote Didis

Despite the challenges of patriarchy and low representation in party nominations, women have consistently outvoted men in recent elections in Bihar



Ashwani Kumar

IS A POET, POLITICAL SCIENTIST AND THE AUTHOR OF *COMMUNITY WARRIORS: STATE, PEASANTS AND CASTE ARMIES IN BIHAR*

**THE** first phase of the 2025 Bihar Assembly elections recorded an unprecedented voter turnout of 64.66 per cent across 121 constituencies—the highest in the state’s history—stunning analysts who had anticipated signs of “voter fatigue”. The previous record of 62.57 per cent was set during the 2000 Assembly elections, while for the Lok Sabha, Bihar had registered a maximum turnout of 64.6 per cent in 1998. Districts such as Muzaffarpur (70.96 per cent), Samastipur (70.63 per cent), Saharsa (66.84 per cent) and Khagaria (66.36 per cent) reflected exceptional participation in the first phase. Patna, typically lagging, also reached 57.93 per cent, bolstered by the administration’s voter outreach

## The She Factor

Idols of *chhathi maiyya* and other goddesses in Siwan, in the backdrop of a political banner

campaign, *Mission 60 percent*.

Indeed, this extraordinary turnout carries a striking political message for both the incumbent and the challengers, but more profoundly, it signifies a gender-feminist surge in Bihar's democratic landscape. The state has around 3.50 crore women voters out of a total electorate of 7.43 crore. Despite the challenges of patriarchy and low representation in party nominations, women have consistently outvoted men in recent elections.

In 2020, female turnout stood at 59.7 per cent compared to 54.6 per cent for men, while in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, it was 59.4 per cent versus 53.28 per cent. These figures confirm that women are the single most decisive voting bloc in Bihar.

Some may legitimately attribute the surge in participation in the first phase of 2025 to rising voter awareness around issues of *rozgar* (employment) and *palayan* (migration). Yet, in a fundamental sense, it appears to have been led by women, reflecting the long-term impact of Nitish Kumar's women-centred welfare architecture—from improved governance and the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana, known as the Dashazari Yojana, to 50 per cent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, horizontal job reservations for women and the empowerment of 1.14 million Jeevika self-help groups. Nearly 90,000 Jeevika Didis (female volunteers) are deployed for election supervision, consolidating women's participation and translating welfare engagement into active political citizenship.

Also, youth voters—many of them women—have emerged as a vital element of aspirational Bihar. Those aged 18-29 appear to have contributed substantially to the Phase 1 turnout, drawn by employment-linked promises, local developmental initiatives and an evolving pan-Bihari identity. Bihar's high participation also reflects voter confidence in the institutional process of electoral management in a region notorious for booth capturing and electoral violence in the past. The Election Commission's capping of 1,200 voters per booth, full live webcasting of polling, facilitation for elderly citizens, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and service electors also enhanced voter efficacy by reducing transaction costs and increasing trust in the electoral process.

Conventional interpretations of Indian voting behaviour often equate high turnout with anti-incumbency. Yet experience across states demonstrates that this association is inconsistent. Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and even national elections show that higher participation does not automatically disadvantage incumbents. In fact, incumbents who combine welfare delivery, governance credibility and mobilisation can benefit from high turnout. Though it's not predictive of final results, Bihar's 2025 Phase I turnout suggest precisely this dynamic: the Nitish Kumar-led government, through a "maternal welfare state" model and consistent developmental governance, has converted electoral participation into a pro-incumbency advantage. Far from signalling dissatisfaction or voter disaffection, the turnout indicates a consolidation of political legitimacy and voter trust.

Comparable experiences aboard also challenge the anti-incumbency-turnout thesis. In South Africa, high turnout throughout the 2000s consolidated the African National Congress's dominance, built on social protection and liberation-era legitimacy. In the United States, the record turnout of 66.8 per cent was bipartisan; both sides mobilised intensely, showing that turnout measures political intensity rather than direction. High participation, in short, may be a symptom of democratic vitality, not necessarily of regime change.

Political behaviour theory supports this interpretation. Voter efficacy models, refined by political scientist John Aldrich (1993), argue that participation rises when citizens perceive elections as fair, credible, accessible and also resulting into expected benefits. Mobilisation models, as emphasised by Rosenstone and Hansen (1993), suggest that parties, candidates and organisations increase turnout by lowering participation costs through logistic support, persuasion and emotional engagement. Expressive and group-identity models, articulated by Sidney Verba and Norman Nie (1972) in their influential book *Participation in America*, show that voters act to signal belonging to communities, caste, gender, or ideology, even if individual votes are unlikely to determine outcomes. Bihar's women, youth and marginalised voters exemplify this behaviour: their participation is both expressive and strategic, rooted in identification with a welfare-led state rather than protest against it. Taken together, the 2025 Bihar elections are not routine. Rather, they exhibit characteristics that scholars classify as a 'critical election', but with a distinctive Bihari template; one consolidating women's agency, lower-caste empowerment, developmental consociationalism (power-sharing arrangements), while simultaneously restructuring social cleavages and fuelling demands for next-generation economic reforms.

Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraj Party's grassroots initiative, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)-led Mahagathbandhan cadre, and the BJP's extensive migrant voters outreach programmes seem to have collectively heightened visibility and energised sections of the electorate that might otherwise have remained passive. While the organisational reach of these efforts varies across constituencies, their presence has intensified engagement and added complexity to the democratic exercise in Bihar.

The final phase of voting is scheduled for November 11, but the first phase has already revealed the heightened stakes of Bihar's democratic contest. The historic turnout—driven in no small measure by Jeevika Didis and other historically marginalised, once underrepresented groups—signals a deepening of democratic maturity. This evolving dynamic may reshape not only the immediate electoral balance but also potentially alter patriarchal political culture in the state. The 2025 elections thus stand as a vivid demonstration of democratic vitality—whatever the eventual outcome, the women of Bihar have already emerged as its true winners. ◻

*(Views expressed are personal)*

# THE SPIRITUAL HEART OF MAHARASHTRA

From Jyotirlingas to Shakti Peethas, Maharashtra's sacred geography is dotted with temples that draw millions of devotees every year

**M**aharashtra is one of India's most visited states for religious tourism, drawing millions of pilgrims annually. According to state tourism data, faith-based travel accounts for a large share of domestic tourist movement, with temples such as Shirdi Sai Baba, Pandharpur's Vitthal Rukmini Temple, and Siddhivinayak in Mumbai attracting lakhs of devotees each year. The state is home to two of the 12 Jyotirlingas of Lord Shiva and one of the 51 Shakti Peethas. Alongside these ancient shrines are revered centres like Dagdusheth Ganpati in Pune and Tulja



Siddhivinayak Temple in Mumbai is dedicated to Lord Ganesha

Bhavani in Tuljapur, making Maharashtra a diverse and significant pilgrimage hub.

## **SIDDHIVINAYAK TEMPLE, MUMBAI**

Located in Mumbai's Prabhadevi area, Siddhivinayak Temple is dedicated to Lord Ganesha, the remover of obstacles. Built in 1801 by Laxman Vitlu and Deubai Patil, the temple is renowned for its gold-plated dome and black stone Ganesha

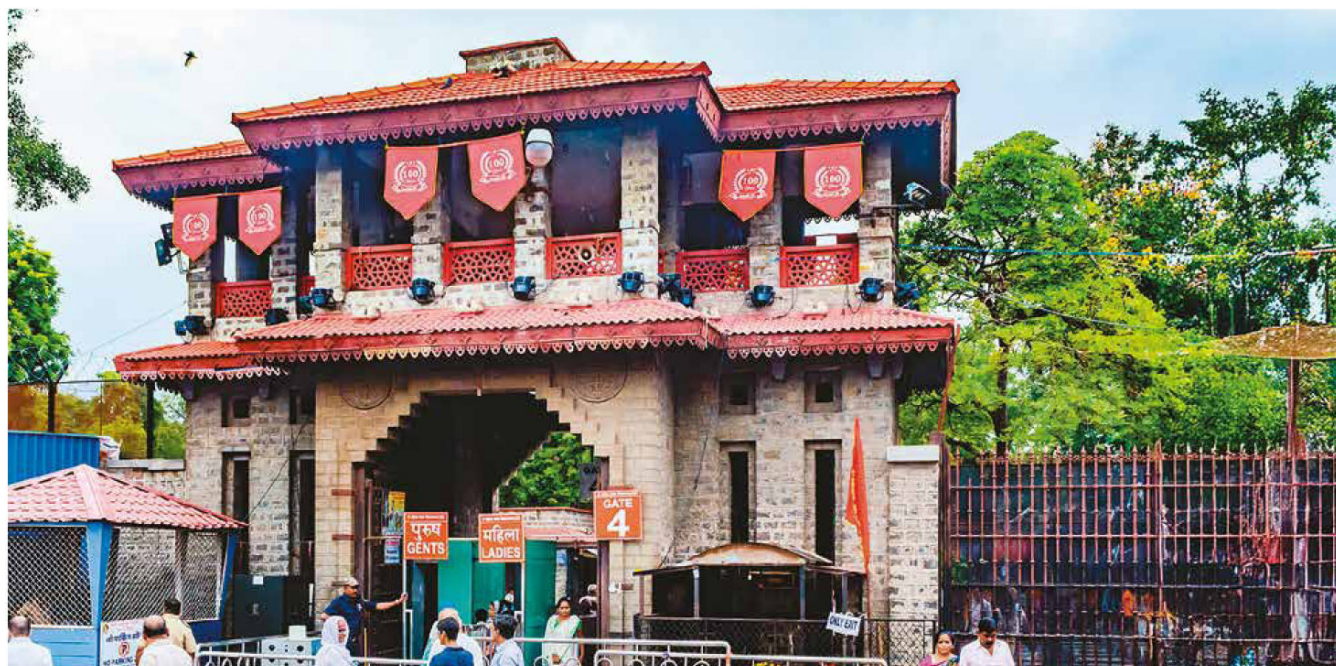
idol. It attracts millions seeking blessings for success and prosperity, especially during Ganesh Chaturthi. Facilities include cloakrooms, *prasad* counters, and VIP *darshan* options.

## **SHIRDI SAI BABA TEMPLE, SHIRDI**

Situated in Ahmednagar district, this temple honours Sai Baba, a revered saint who lived here in the late 19th century. The temple's focal point is the marble Samadhi Mandir containing Sai Baba's tomb. Open daily from early morning till late evening, it welcomes millions of devotees, especially during Sai Jayanti and Mahasamadhi festivals. The complex offers accommodation, free meals, and medical facilities.

## **BHIMASHANKAR TEMPLE, PUNE**

Nestled in the Sahyadri hills near Pune, Bhimashankar is one of the 12 Jyotirlinga shrines dedicated to Lord Shiva. Believed to date back to the 13th century under the Yadava dynasty, it features traditional Nagara architecture and a serene natural



Shirdi Sai Baba Temple honours Sai Baba, a revered saint who lived here in the late 19th century



Trimbakeshwar Temple, Nashik



Vitthal Rukmini Temple, Pandharpur



Kolhapur Mahalakshmi Temple



Dagdusheth Halwai Ganpati Temple, Pune

setting within a wildlife sanctuary. The temple is popular during Mahashivaratri and offers trekking opportunities in the picturesque surroundings.

**TRIMBAKESHWAR TEMPLE, NASHIK**

Located 28 km from Nashik, Trimbakeshwar is a significant Jyotirlinga temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. Known for its unique three-faced *lingam* symbolising creation, preservation, and destruction, the temple integrates a sacred pond, Kushavarta Kund, believed to cleanse sins. It celebrates festivals like Mahashivaratri and Kartik Purnima and provides restrooms, shops, and accommodations.

**KOLHAPUR MAHALAKSHMI TEMPLE (AMBABAI MANDIR)**

This temple is dedicated to Goddess Mahalakshmi, the revered deity of wealth and prosperity. Believed to have originated in the 7th century, the shrine flourished under the patronage of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, reflecting his devotion and support for regional temples. Showcasing traditional Hindu

architecture, it houses a beautifully adorned idol of the goddess. The temple celebrates Navratri and Dussehra in a grand and magnificent manner, drawing devotees from far and wide.

**VITTHAL RUKMINI TEMPLE, PANDHARPUR**

Among Maharashtra's most revered pilgrimage sites, the Vitthal Rukmini Temple is dedicated to Lord Vitthal, a manifestation of Lord Krishna. Believed to date back to the 12th century, it draws millions of devotees, especially during the grand Ashadi Ekadashi celebrations. The temple's modest architecture enshrines the distinctive idol of Lord Vitthal, depicted standing on a brick.

**TULJA BHAVANI TEMPLE, TULJAPUR**

This temple is dedicated to Goddess Bhavani, a fierce manifestation of Parvati symbolising strength and protection. Believed to have been established around the 12th century, the shrine gained prominence under the patronage of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, a devout follower of the goddess. Its architecture

features a spire-crowned sanctum surrounded by several subsidiary shrines. The temple celebrates Navratri with great devotion and grandeur, drawing countless pilgrims seeking the goddess's blessings.

**DAGDUSHETH HALWAI GANPATI TEMPLE, PUNE**

Located centrally in Pune, this temple was founded in the late 19th century by Shri Dagdusheth Halwai, a devout sweet seller. Renowned for its ornate idol of Lord Ganesh adorned with jewels, it is a focal point during Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations, attracting thousands. Besides worship, the temple is active in charity, offering food, education, and medical assistance to the needy.

**Official Resources:**

- Visit [maharashtratourism.gov.in](http://maharashtratourism.gov.in) for detailed information.
- Plan your trip at [mahabooking.com](http://mahabooking.com).
- Need help? Reach out via chatbot (+91 94038 78864) for quick assistance.

# A Mountain to Break

The stories of Dashrath Manjhi and Laungi Bhuiyan reveal a deeper pattern of how Bihar's Dalits remain confined to announcements and symbolism rather than tangible progress

RANJAN RAHI



Md Asghar Khan

IS SENIOR CORRESPONDENT  
FROM JHARKHAND

## Far from Development

Inside view of a house in Dashrath Manjhi's village

**F**OR over two decades, Bihar's political class has borrowed the legacy of Dashrath Manjhi, the "Mountain Man" who literally carved through a mountain of stone with a hammer and chisel to mine votes from memory. The name of the man who inspired the Bollywood film *Manjhi—The Mountain Man*, is invoked at rallies, his image is flashed on banners and promises are made in his honour. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar once claimed to be so moved by Manjhi's feat that he offered him his own chair, a gesture meant to bridge the symbolic distance between ruler and ruled. Union Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi, from the same community, went even further, calling Dashrath his "relative". But when the Mountain Man died in 2008 and his son asked for nothing more than a small permanent home, the responses from both leaders revealed what truly lies beneath the surface of Bihar's politics: empathy that ends at the microphone.

When Bhagirath Manjhi, Dashrath's son, appealed to Nitish, saying: "You've glorified my father's name across Bihar; at least help us build a house to live in," Nitish replied dryly, "Did you not get an Indira Awas (a housing grant)?" Later, Bhagirath approached Jitan Ram with the same plea, "Please help build us a two-room house." The response was equally telling: "You already have a mud house, don't you? What's the problem living in that?"

Back in 1992–93, Dashrath Manjhi received Rs 15,000–Rs 20,000 under the Indira Awas Yojana. With that, he built a mud house that soon collapsed during the monsoon. He continued to live amid the ruins for years, as did his son Bhagirath, his daughter-in-law and five grandchildren until just a few months ago. But it raises the question, why did this recognition come only during election season, even though Dashrath's feat had been celebrated worldwide more than a decade earlier?

This story reveals a deeper pattern of how Bihar's Dalits remain confined to announcements and symbolism rather than tangible progress. When Nitish came to power in 2005, he reclassified Dalit castes (except the Paswans) as Mahadalits, promising targeted upliftment. Yet among these groups, the Manjhi community continues to wait endlessly for change.

Two days before the first phase of voting, when we reached Dashrath Manjhi's village around 8 pm, his granddaughter Anshu Kumari, 30, sat outside under a thatched verandah with her five children. Some wore torn clothes; others had none. "I studied up to intermediate (level)," Anshu said. "Because of my grandfather, the whole world knows Gahlour Hill. He cut through a mountain to build a road; the government collects tax from that road but gives nothing to the man who built it." She went on: "Hospitals, roads and memorials are named after my grandfather, but our family got nothing."

Dashrath Manjhi's tale begins with love and loss. Born on January 14, 1934, in Gahlour village, Gaya district, he was neither educated nor wealthy. But when his wife, Falguni Devi, fell ill and died because the nearest hospital lay beyond a mountain, something inside him ignited. He vowed to carve a path through the mountain so that no one else would suffer as he did. For 22 years (1960–1982), armed only with a hammer and chisel, he toiled day after day. Villagers mocked him, but he would simply smile and say: "The mountain will fall one day." Eventually, he carved a 110-metre-long, 9-metre-wide, 7.6-metre-deep road, connecting Gahlour to the outside world.

When Nitish Kumar heard of his feat, he personally visited Gahlour, sat beside Dashrath and even made him sit briefly in the Chief Minister's chair—a symbolic gesture of reverence. The state covered his medical expenses and, upon his death on August 17, 2007, accorded him a state funeral. Later, a hospital, road and memorial were built in his name. But symbolism could not feed his family. "If the government couldn't do anything for his family, imagine what it has done for the Manjhi community at large." In Manjhi's case, Bhagirath did receive four bighas of land from the government, but it was barren. "Not a single grain grows," he says.

### Another Hero, Same Neglect

Like Dashrath, Laungi Bhuiyan, another member of the Manjhi community, earned fame for his grit. Over thirty years, he carved a canal through rocky terrain to channel rainwater into ponds and fields across eight to ten villages in Gaya's Kothilwa village, once a Naxal stronghold.

His story went viral and was celebrated in national and international media. Yet when we visited his home, it found a story much like Dashrath's—fame without fortune. His mud house still crumbled. Ministers, including Jitan Ram Manjhi, his son Santosh and daughter-in-law Deepa, had all visited, each promising a new home but none delivering.


Laungi says: "They all come, see, promise us a house and a job for my son, then leave. I only ask that one son be given a job and a home to live in." He has four sons; the youngest, Lalu, aged 28, stays with him, while the others work as migrant labourers. A private tractor company once gifted him a tractor, which Lalu now drives to support the family—a private gesture filling the gap left by public apathy.

The Manjhi and Bhuiyan mirror Bihar's Dalits, who make up 19 per cent of the population, yet over 84 per cent of their households remain landless, according to the Bihar caste survey. A Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Mumbai researcher, Krishna Mohan Lal, attributes the Manjhi community's backwardness to the absence of a traditional occupation. "Among Dalits, those with stable professions like tanning (Chamars), toddy-tapping (Pasis) or pig-rearing (Dusadhs, Paswans) had some economic base. But the Manjhis, historically known as Musahars—rat-catchers—never had a structured livelihood." He adds that merely having a few leaders or ministers from the community does not transform their condition. "Policies need both intent and execution, something successive governments have failed to ensure."

Before the 1970s, Dalit voters largely supported the Congress. Later, they shifted toward regional and caste-based parties, first aligning with Lalu Prasad Yadav in the 1990s and then with Ram Vilas Paswan. When Nitish came to power in 2005, he fragmented Dalits further by carving out the Mahadalit category to politically consolidate the most marginalised castes, including the Manjhis.

By appointing Jitan Ram Manjhi as Chief Minister in 2014, Nitish sought to strengthen his appeal among them. For a while, it worked. But within nine months, Manjhi was removed, prompting him to form his own party, HAM (Hindustani Awam Morcha), in 2015. Today, the Manjhis, 3.5 per cent of Bihar's population, stand behind a divided leadership: Chirag Paswan on one side and Jitan Ram Manjhi on the other, both now allies within the NDA.

Sociologically, the Manjhi (Musahar/Bhuiyan) community represents one of Bihar's most marginalised groups—landless, poorly educated and excluded from formal employment. Their inclusion in the Mahadalit category was meant to prioritise their development, yet in practice, benefits have seldom reached them. Manjhi's rise from daily-wage labourer to Chief Minister was a historic moment, but critics say it remained symbolic rather than structural. Even during his tenure, community upliftment was minimal. His party's recent ticket distribution, giving most seats to relatives or upper-caste allies, has further deepened that perception.

A visit to Manjhi's village, Mahakar in Gaya district, tells the story of two worlds. The approach road lies in disrepair, but once inside the village boundary, the landscape changes—there's a middle and higher secondary school, a residential Ambedkar school, an ITI college, a power station, a police post, a hospital, a helipad, a bank and paved roads. Yet barely a kilometre and a half away, in Sapaneri, a Dalit hamlet still waits for clean water, a proper road and steady work. Local resident Aklu Manjhi says: "We've seen Jitan Ram Manjhi win since our childhood. He developed his own village but not ours." 

*(For full version of this article, go to [www.outlookindia.com](http://www.outlookindia.com))*



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# Perform, Not Purchase

The high turnout in Bihar reflects that women want to ensure that their “exceptional” progress continues under the NDA



Surjit S. Bhalla

IS CHAIRPERSON OF THE  
TECHNICAL EXPERT GROUP FOR  
THE FIRST OFFICIAL HOUSEHOLD  
INCOME SURVEY FOR INDIA

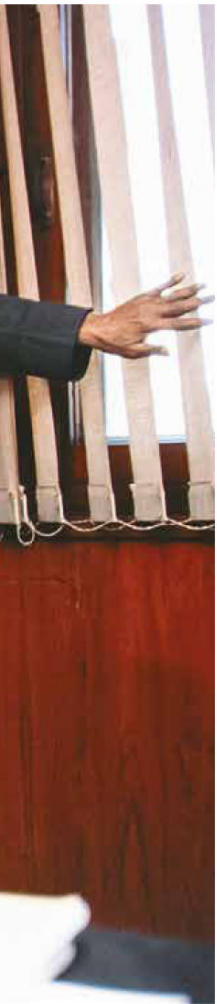
## NITISH

Kumar has had a 20 year run as Chief Minister of Bihar. He was an early (first?) champion of women’s empowerment in India, as was Prime Minister Narendra

Modi, and hence their strong bond, despite important differences in party affiliation, and outlook.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Janata Dal-United (JD-U) form a formidable team in Bihar, especially since the concentration, and campaign, is around delivery of living standards. As we will show below, the performance record of Nitish Kumar is more than enough for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to romp home with a two-thirds majority. Some experts believe that the Rs 10,000 dole per eligible poor woman—in the guise of a to-be-returned investment loan—is a game changer for Nitish and the NDA. Data suggests that this dole—even the BJP campaigners believe, and advocate, that this is a grant, and not a loan—was completely unnecessary for a comprehensive NDA victory. Please look at the data presented below before jumping to conclusions of dole game changers.

Bihar has been at the bottom of the per capita income ladder, forever. In 1980, the per capita GDP of Bihar was 62 per cent of Uttar Pradesh (UP). When Nitish became CM in



JITENDER GUPTA

**VOTE CHORI IS A STANDARD COMPLAINT IN PRACTICALLY ALL ELECTIONS ACROSS THE WORLD. THAT IS NOT TO EXCUSE ITS PREVALENCE, BUT RATHER TO WARN THE READER THAT THERE IS NOTHING NEW IN THIS ALLEGATION.**

**Sitting Pretty** Nitish Kumar is a champion of women's empowerment

2005, Bihar had fallen further behind, with per capita income only 56 per cent of second-place (from bottom) UP. In 2023-24, Bihar's per capita income was 66 per cent of UP. The

separate but parallel development of Bihar and UP deserves a detailed analysis, but for the record, and for this election, it is important to note that Bihar has done better than its poorer neighbours, and the national average. Between 2004-5 and 2023-24, the state's per capita income increased at a rate of 4.3 per cent; Bihar grew at a 1.1 per cent higher rate of 5.4 per cent per annum!

The record on living standards is even better for Bihar. Girl's education has been a primary focus of Nitish. In 2004-5, the average educational attainment of women aged 15-24 was 3.9 years compared to the national average of 6.5 years. Data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) in 2023-24 shows that young women in Bihar attained 8.8 years of education, compared to the national average of 10 years. This is one of the most impressive increases in educational attainment in the world, let alone India. It is very likely that soon we will see the same average educational attainment levels for both men and women in Bihar. At an all-India level,

gender parity in youth education was achieved in 2023-24—both men and women at 10 years. An important caveat—this statistic does not account for the quality of education.


There are two important planks of the opposition in the Bihar election—Vote Chori, led by the junior dynast partner Rahul Gandhi, and jobs led by the senior partner (and dynast) Tejashwi Yadav. Vote Chori is a standard complaint in practically all elections across the world. That is not to excuse its prevalence, but rather to warn the reader that there is nothing new in this allegation. In *How We Vote*—a book co-authored by me and Abhinav Motheram—we examine the detailed and sophisticated Vote Chori allegations made by Sabyasachi Das for the BJP's win in 2019. Our conclusion, the same as @Saiarav, is that statistically speaking, there was no Vote Chori in close contests.

The allegation of lack of jobs made by the RJD supremo Tejashwi Yadav, if true, can be a game changer for the opposition. Unfortunately (for them), there is little evidence to support the claim that Bihar is in a particularly adverse situation compared to the rest of India (and the world). Worldwide youth unemployment rates were particularly low in 2004-5, and particularly high in 2023-24. Note that China has stopped releasing youth unemployment rates!

Youth unemployment rates for India increased from seven per cent in 2004-5 to 12.8 per cent in 2023-24—for Bihar, there has been a parallel increase of 6.1 ppt (percentage points) usual status definition. But the true colours of women first model of Nitish are revealed by the data on youth female unemployment rates. Nationally, the increase is of 5.9 ppt (from 6.9 per cent in 2004-5 to 12.8 per cent in 2023-24). In Bihar, the increase is of only 3.5 ppt—to a low level of 6.1 per cent in 2023-24, i.e. less than half the all-India rate.

We have not discussed the large improvements in law and order in Bihar. Indeed, other than manufacturing—an area where the lack of improvement is a national shame—Bihar is doing particularly well with the entry of Nitish Kumar in governance. There is legitimate discussion about the Bidenesque state of Nitish. Hence, the argument goes that notwithstanding his stellar record—as documented above—in performance and longevity, the NDA alliance could face turbulence in Bihar.

Amongst election experts, this forecast has been bolstered by the turn-out data for phase I—a record high of 64.5 per cent. Normally, high turnout is good for the opposition i.e. there is greater support for the slogan “throw the rascals out” than “stick with the good guys”. My forecast, based on the data presented above, is that high turnout reflects women wanting to ensure that their “exceptional” progress continues; hence, the forecast that the NDA will likely achieve a higher than two-thirds majority.

Election forecasts are hazardous. I concur. If it is a close election, there is good news for India. Politicians will be less prone to indulge in fancy and fiscally destructive gimmicks like Rs 10,000 per “eligible” woman, and more prone to invest in investment. 

*(Views expressed are personal)*



Tanvir Aeijaz

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# Bullets Over Bihar

Why has violence been a routine way of practising politics in this state?

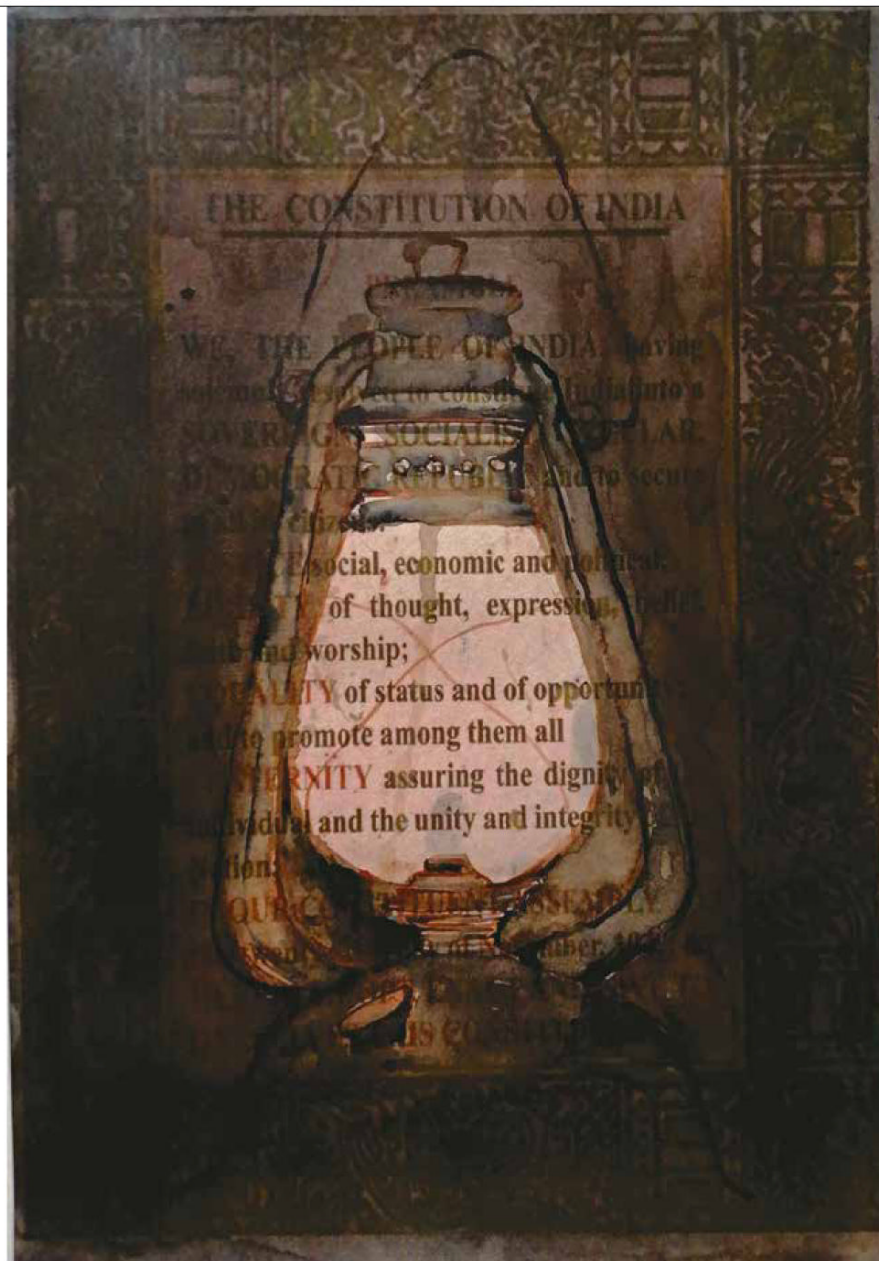
**I**n the realm of politics and violence it is commonly assumed that where politics ends is where violence begins. That politics and violence are opposites, because violence is sheerly instrumental and politics in a democracy is, so to say, tasked to deal, dialogically, to keep violence at bay. Hannah Arendt's essay 'On Violence' makes explicit that the violence is practiced through instruments—atom bombs, guns, machines and so on—and is directed against the 'others', not as subjects, but as objects, who can be manipulated by its use or threat. The very idea of violence, for her, goes against the very grain of communicative and interactive politics, against the participatory role of citizens in common life, and against the formation of public good. Good democracies, therefore, experience less political violence than autocracies or bad democracies.

Political violence in Bihar has been instrumental in nature, particularly during the run-up to elections, and in the electoral campaigns for political mobilisations. Where politics and

violence are seen, not as opposites, but as part of the continuing political processes. In the land of Buddha, we have witnessed perhaps one of the worst caste and communal violence, both in terms of scale and intensity. And, of course, there is this regular supply of everyday forms of violence rooted in patriarchy, poverty and pelf. What seems to be in short supply is justice, social-justice. Why is it that violence has been a routine way of practising politics in Bihar? Why is it that Bihar is replete with the stories of violence, tyranny amidst hope?

## The Surrealistic Tales of Violence

During the colonial period, the decades of the 1930s and 1940s, Bihar was rife with the popular peasant protests (as Kisan Sabhas), led by the impressive leader Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, against the powerful *zamindars* (landlords), mainly to address the agrarian grievances. The peasants, majorly the lower castes, wanted two things, their land back from upper-caste zamindars which they had lost due to non-



**Justice in Short Supply** Artwork from the series 'Preamble' by Ranjeeta Kumari

payment of rent and the abolition of the *zamindari* system. The Mokama region of Bihar was the centre of the movement which still reverberates with the stories of violence perpetrated by the colonial-state and the landlords on the Kisan Sabha's peasants. Interestingly, the tales also remind us as to how both the power elites in the Congress and big *zamindars* appropriated the movements and prevented any major land distribution to landless labourers and sharecroppers. The dominant upper castes, majorly Bhumihars, swayed their control over the political and economic resources, particularly land, and maintained their superiority through violent assertions, up till the announcement of land reforms, post-independence.

One other case of violence, popularly known as the *Janeu* (sacred thread) movement, erupted during the colonial period (1920s). This was demonstratively an assertion by the backward castes—mainly Yadavs, Koeris and Kurmis—to upgrade and equalise their position to that of the Brahmins in the caste hierarchy simply by wearing a *janeu*. This enraged the upper castes, particularly the Brahmins, and led to violent backlash against the backward castes.

Both the cases have an uncanny resemblance in the usage of violence as an instrument, in Arendtian sense, to control the political, economic and social power embedded in the State, caste and class.

In post-independent India, Bihar is imbued with three kinds of violence, though not mutually exclusive: Naxal violence; caste violence and Bahubali (big goon/gangster) violence. These types of violence are political in nature, in a sense that we see the complicity of the State and its institutions neck-deep into the social dynamics of caste and class. Bihar being essentially an agrarian society (80 per cent rural), the questions of land and land reforms are central to all kinds of political violence. Despite Bihar enacting the Bihar Abolition of Zamindari Act (1950), the first state to do so, and a few more Land Reforms Acts, and despite its *Bhoodan Andolan* (land donation movement, late 1950s), it could not resolve the basics of agrarian crisis related to land, wages and oppression of landless castes. The introduction of the so-called 'Green Revolution' in Bihar (1960s-1970s), further exacerbated the existing gaps, tensions, and conflicts between the big landlords and the smaller tenant farmers, sharecroppers and landless labourers. Such a condition of hopelessness led to a 'radical politics of dissent' by the Naxalites. The Naxal uprising, quite distinct from the earlier agrarian struggles, consisting mainly landless labours and poor sharecroppers, targeted its violence against the Kulaks—rich landlords from the Bhumihar, Rajput, Yadav and Kurmi castes. Their aim was to violently dissolve the vestiges of feudalism and capture political power. The Naxalite movement, however, produced an equally violent backlash from both the upper-caste landlords and their armies. 'Operation Thunder' (1976) by the state police, and killings by the upper-caste armies—for instance, Bhoomi Sena, Kuer Sena, Brahmarsi Sena, Savarna Liberation Front, Sunlight Sena and Ranvir Sena—were the counter-violence against Naxalites, which explains what I call Bihar's 'circularity of caste-class violence'. For the brutal violence by the Ranvir Sena, Ashwini Kumar, in his doctoral dissertation *Peasant Unrest, Community Warriors, and State Power in India: The Case of Private Caste Senas (Armies) in Bihar*, notes what the ex-commander of the Ranvir Sena had said,

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## THERE IS A REGULAR SUPPLY OF EVERYDAY FORMS OF VIOLENCE ROOTED IN PATRIARCHY, POVERTY AND PELF.

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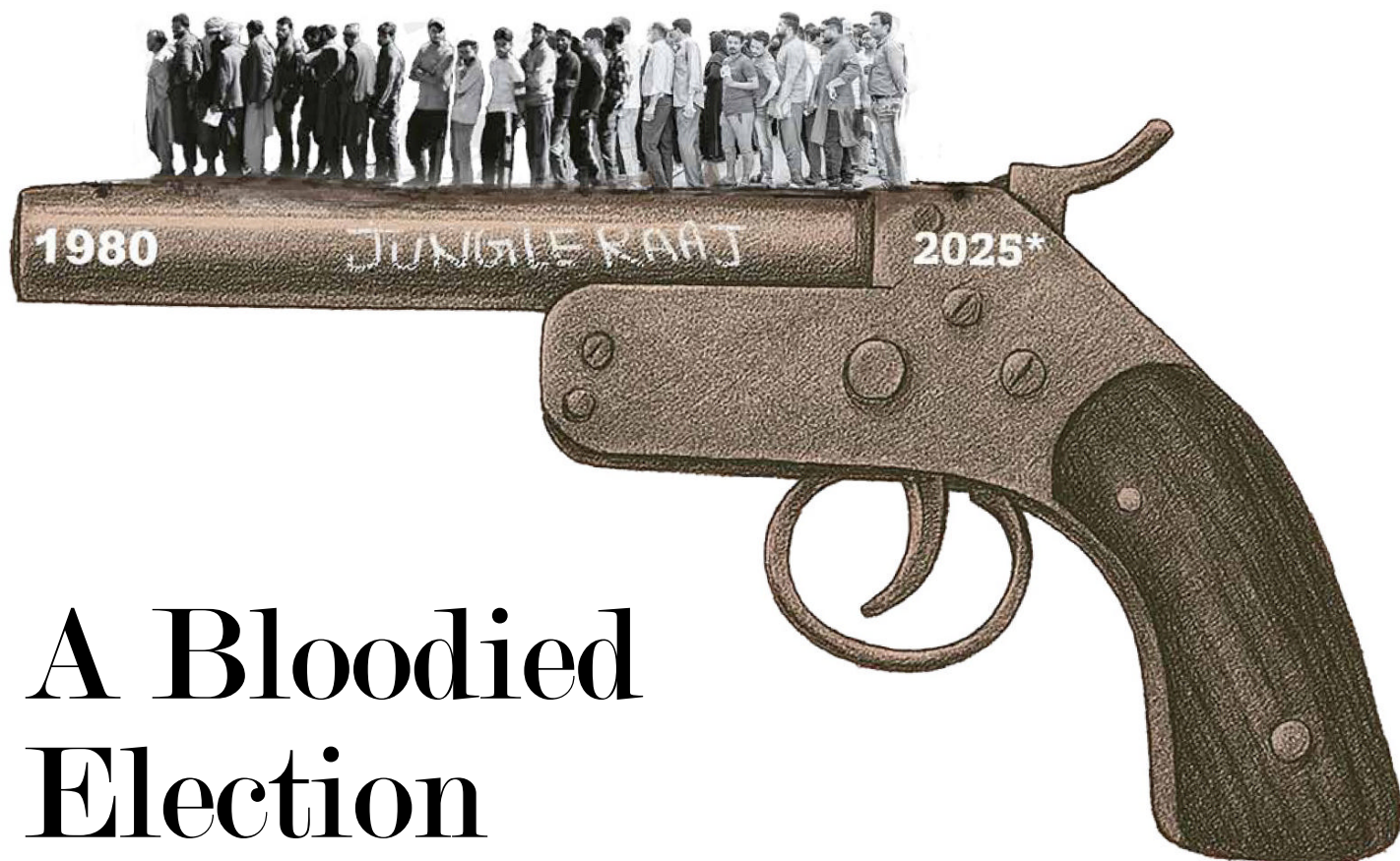
"Yes, we kill the women because they give birth to Naxalites; when the children grow up they become Naxalites and kill us. They (the lower-caste people) give shelter to the Naxalites. We are farmers but we have decided that if they kill two of us, we will ruin their whole *khandan* (clan); we will kill all of them".

In the 1990s, Lalu Prasad Yadav, supposedly the protégé of Karpooori Thakur, tried to reinvent a new Bihar by giving voice and dignity to backward castes and claimed to 'annihilate' the traditionally Sanskritised feudal power structures and caste hierarchies. The two events, the halting of Advani's *Rathyatra* and his arrest, and the quelling of the anti-Mandal agitation in central Bihar, led to the sharpening of the deep divisions, both physically and psychologically, between the backward castes and the upper castes. It also led to Lalu's famous Muslim-Yadav (MY) politics predicated on the non-Brahminical, vernacular and popular-political messaging. During Lalu's tenure (including that of his wife, Rabri Devi's, tenure), law and order deteriorated and the fragmentation of upper backward caste accelerated, that propped up Nitish Kumar as his competitor. When Rabri Devi became CM for the third time (2000), we saw 'Yadavisation of state power' in Bihar—commonly referred to as 'Jungle Raj' by Lalu's opponents. This period was also marked with the Bahubalis' rule. These Bahubalis were openly supported by one political party or the other. The gangsters used to get replaced by the changing state power dynamics, for instance upper-caste gangsters—Chhotan Shukla, Bhutkun Shukla, Devendra Shukla, Devendra Dubey and Samrat Choudhary—were being replaced with the new backward caste gangsters—Pappu Yadav, Surendra Yadav, Dularchand Yadav—during Lalu's regime, who were then countered by the mafia-politicians such as Suraj Bhan, Ranjan Tiwari, Anand Mohan Singh, Aditya Singh and Sunil Pandey with their private caste armies.

The internecine caste war combined with mafia politicians and their big goons gives a curious amalgam, a broad landscape, of political violence, privatisation of state power and near complete absence of governance in Bihar.

The 2025 elections in Bihar reverberates with three things: one, the long history of unbridled power conflicts imbued with political violence; two, the inherent contradictions between the emergent social order laced with Hindutva politics with the continuing culture of everyday violence against Dalits, Muslims and the poor; and three, the possibilities of the impossibilities. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged the voters in his campaigns to keep away 'Jungle Raj', reminding them of the rule of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Congress. He tends to forget that 'Jungle Raj' is one small period in the history of political violence in Bihar since colonial times. The real question is how to dismantle this 'circularity of caste-class violence' and rescue Bihar from the socio-economic and political morass. 🚩

(Views expressed are personal)



# A Bloodied Election

Bihar's enduring legacy of political violence is intertwined with caste politics, where assertions of the dominated sections carved out a political space for the strongmen deployed to suppress them



Md Asghar Khan

IS SENIOR CORRESPONDENT  
FROM JHARKHAND

**T**HE murder of a Jan Suraj Party campaigner during a rally on October 30 in Mokama, in Bihar's Patna district, six days ahead of the first phase of assembly polls has brought the spotlight back on the violence that has long dogged electoral politics in the state, where stories of gang rivalries, caste feuds and political vendetta resurface every election season. The police investigation after Dularchand Yadav was run over and killed while campaigning for his party's candidate revealed that the motive stemmed from a local rivalry with the Janata Dal (United) candidate and influential strongman Anant Singh, who was named along with several others as the accused in the first information report (FIR).

Four days later, just 48 hours before polling, Naveen Kushwaha, the elder brother of a local JD(U) leader, Niranjana, was found dead with his wife and daughter under mysterious circumstances in their home in Purnea in north Bihar's Seemanchal region. Naveen had run for the Lok Sabha in 2009 on a Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) ticket. Investigating the possibility of accidental death, suicide or triple murder, the police questioned several people, but no murder charge has yet been established.

Politics in these parts has always smelled of gunpowder, and the recent incidents have only reopened old wounds as a reminder that violence remains the accepted grammar of politics. The blood shed here continues a political tradition in which caste equations, rival ideologies and electoral interests converge to legitimise violence, giving the region its lasting reputation for a "gun culture". What were once decided in the caste-based panchayats of the past are now fought as battles for political dominance, also on social media.

Between 1980 and 2000, Purnea became synonymous with brutal political killings. On June 14, 1998, the Communist Party of India (CPI) legislator Ajit Sarkar, who was widely respected for standing with poor and landless peasants, was gunned down in broad daylight with his driver and bodyguard while returning from a public meeting. They were ambushed by AK-47-wielding assassins who came on motorcycles.

The murder sent shockwaves across Bihar. The FIR named strongmen Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav, Rajan Tiwari and Avdhesh Mandal, among others. The case was handed to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which filed its chargesheet in 1999. In 2008, a CBI court in Delhi sentenced Pappu Yadav to life imprisonment, but the Delhi High Court acquitted him in 2013 for lack of evidence.

Just two days after the CPI MLA's assassination, another high-profile murder shook the state. On June 16, 1998, motorcycle-borne gunmen killed Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) minister Brij Bhari Prasad, a close aide of Lalu Prasad Yadav, while he was being treated at a Patna hospital under police protection. The assassination was allegedly orchestrated by Munna Shukla and Rajan Tiwari, both powerful legislators locked in a long-standing turf war with Prasad. The killing symbolised the fusion of politics, crime and power that defined Bihar in the 1990s, when brute force became the ultimate currency of influence.

As the politics of social justice intertwined with criminal networks, many strongmen built parallel power structures in their regions. In Mokama, Anant Singh became the unchallenged "Chhote Sarkar". In the Magadh region (Nawada, Jehanabad, Gaya), Ashok Mahto, from the Kurmi caste, gained notoriety for brutal massacres and clashes with the dominant-caste Ranvir Sena. Anand Mohan Singh, a Rajput leader from the Kosi region (Saharsa, Madhepura, Supaul), rose through the Samata Party ranks and became a Member of Parliament before being convicted for the 1994 murder of Gopalganj district magistrate M.G. Krishnaiah.

In Siwan, Mohammad Shahabuddin built a formidable Muslim power base under the RJD's patronage, and his reign later inspired films and books. In the Seemanchal region, Taslimuddin emerged as another strongman and a prominent minority leader. Meanwhile, in Muzaffarpur and Vaishali, the caste rivalry between Munna Shukla and Brij Bhari Prasad deepened the violent polarisation between the Bhumihars and the backward castes.

Cinematic portrayals of Bihar's Bahubalis (strongmen) further cemented the image of a state trapped in crime and fear. Many critics dubbed the 1990s under Lalu as "*Jungle Raj*", a term his opponents still invoke to describe that period.

"The surge in political killings after 1990 is undeniable, but blaming Lalu's regime alone is historically inaccurate," says Supriy Ranjan, a PhD scholar at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University researching the nexus of crime and politics in Bihar. Ranjan points out that when Nitish Kumar briefly became chief minister for seven days in 2000, jailed Bahubalis like Surajbhan Singh and Munna Shukla were released to attend the assembly and support his government, showing bipartisan complicity.


Ranjan argues that the politicisation of crime began in the 1980s under the Congress. In 1980, five Bahubalis were elected as MLAs, most with Congress tickets. The then CM Jagannath Mishra, he notes, was infamously called "the tormentor of Bihar" for presiding over the breakdown of state machinery and the rise of violence. In his research, Ranjan finds that about 60 per cent of Bihar's Bahubali

politicians hail from the dominant castes—Bhumihars, Rajputs and Brahmins—followed by 22-25 per cent Yadavs and five per cent Muslims. Among Dalits, only Suresh Pasi is seen as having any comparable influence.

In short, Bihar's strongman culture has historically been dominated by the dominant-caste elites. Backward-caste leaders began entering this space in the 1980s, and expanded rapidly in the 1990s as their political assertion grew through universal suffrage and economic shifts.

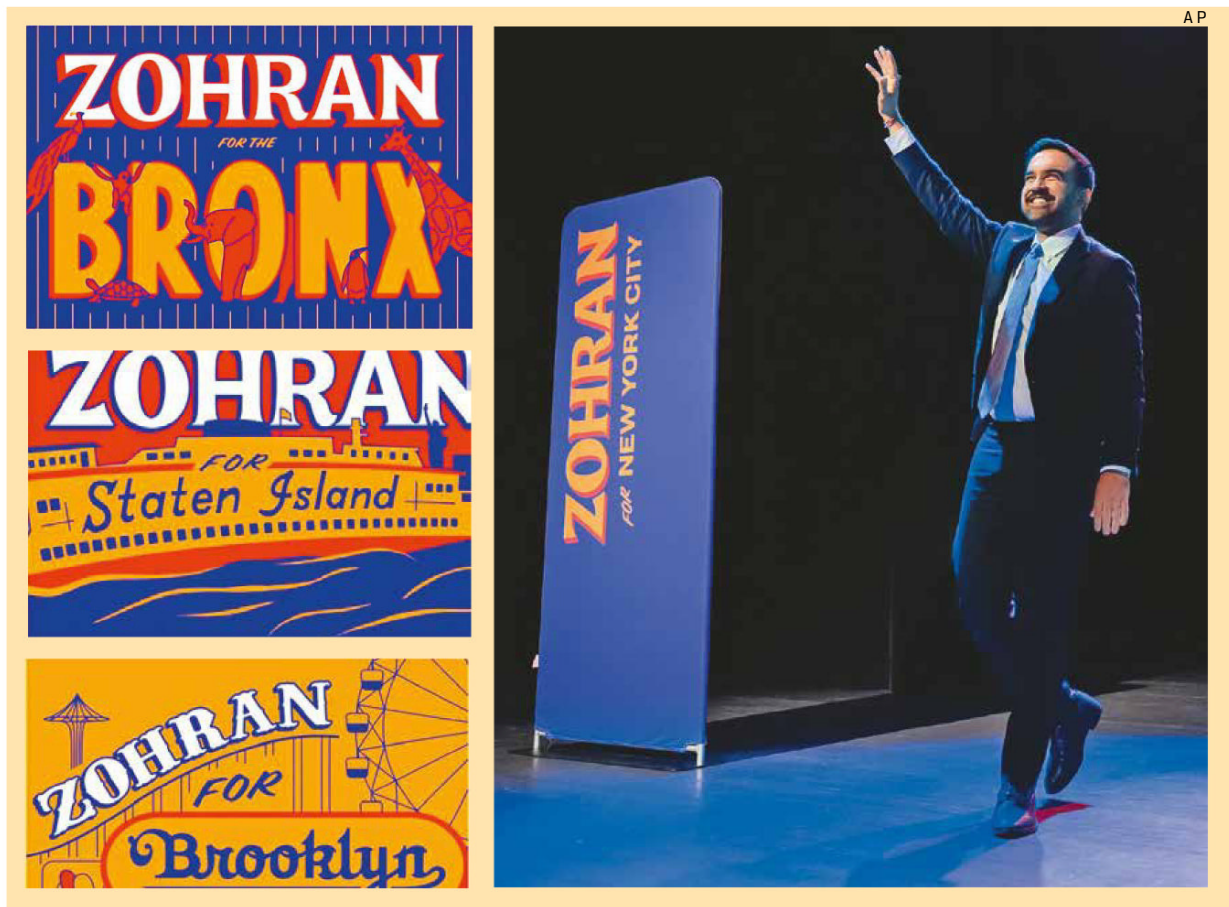
Meanwhile, between 1976 and 2001, around 100 caste-based massacres claimed 850 lives, according to one study. The bloodshed particularly scarred the central districts like Gaya, Bhojpur, Jehanabad, Aurangabad and Arwal. At Belchi in 1977, Dalits and backward-caste villagers were killed. At Dalaelchak-Bhagora in 1987, the Maoist Communist Centre [MCC, which merged with the CPI(ML) (People's War) in 2004 to form the outlawed CPI (Maoist)] massacred over 50 dominant-caste villagers. At Bara in 1992, the MCC killed 35 Bhumihars. At Bathani Tola in 1996, the dominant-caste Ranvir Sena slaughtered 21 Dalit labourers, including women and children. At Laxmanpur-Bathe in 1997, this private army of landlords killed over 50 Dalits. At Rampur Chauram in 1998, the MCC killed nine Bhumihars. At Shankar Bigha in 1999, the Ranvir Sena killed 23 Dalits. At Senari in 1999, the MCC massacred 34 Bhumihars. At Miyanpur in 2000, the Ranvir Sena slaughtered 35 Dalits and backward-caste peasants. These massacres were part of a cycle of caste retribution, where dominant-caste landlord militias and Naxalite parties waged a bloody war of vengeance.

Veteran journalist Manikant Thakur, who has reported on Bihar's politics since the 1970s, observes that the massacres peaked in the Magadh region after the 1990s. "Bihar was synonymous with mass killings," he recalls. "During the ballot-paper era, booth capturing was rampant, blurring the line between politics and organised crime. The roots of political violence go back to the panchayat elections of the late 1970s, when the measure of each election's success was not the turnout, but how many killings took place compared to the last one." Bihar, among all the states, needed the largest deployment of paramilitary forces during polls and soon the violence spilled into everyday life.

Citing a documented case in Begusarai, where supporters of the then CM Sri Krishna Singh brutally assaulted his CPI opponent in 1952, nearly killing him, Ranjan's research traces the violence back to India's first general election. By 1957, the first recorded instance of booth capturing took place in Begusarai's Rachiyahi village, allegedly orchestrated by Kamdev Singh, known as the "Godfather of Booth Capturing". "Today's Bahubalis were once known as 'booth managers'," says Ranjan. "They were local musclemen, often dominant-caste landlords, hired by political parties, mostly the Congress, to secure votes by force. These men eventually began contesting elections themselves." Thakur says they realised the leaders depended on them for victory. "The parties reluctantly gave them tickets, thereby institutionalising the criminalisation of politics." Every election since has revived the question: can democracy in Bihar ever escape the shadow of the gun? 

# OVERLAP

*Political*



**Questioning the Status Quo** (Left) Campaign posters of Zohran Mamdani; (right) Mamdani at an election party in New York

## ***Dhoom Macha Le***

Zohran Mamdani's victory will have reverberations  
beyond New York and beyond America

**JUST**

when we were being made to believe that the future belongs to autocrats and authoritarian demagogues, there is cheerful news from New York City: democracy has not exhausted its potential for enlightened change and for moral refurbishing.

Democrats and otherwise sober men and women across the world have every reason to be humming Liza Minnelli's ode to that city:

*Start spreading the news,  
I'm leaving today,  
I want to be a part of it,  
New York, New York*

Just a little over two decades ago, the city was the site of a horrendous terrorist act; the iconic Twin Towers got gutted as evil men drove two hijacked aeroplanes into them; thousands died; "9/11" changed the way the world thought about its values and beliefs and priorities; warmongers manufactured a narrative that took us away from basic democratic principles; that cataclysmic event set the stage for over-use of military power, state terror, Islamophobia, and the eruption of a very ugly nationalism. Legitimacy and acceptability accrued to any demagogue who could use the pulpit to talk the language of bigotry and hate. Religious fanaticism all over the world found new voices and new adherents and partisans.

Now the same city has elected a 34-year-old man with a Muslim name as its mayor. His rivals sought to make much of his religion and his ethnic background, but the city voters refused to be scared into favouring those who prosper by mongering distrust and divisiveness. Instead, the voters chose to back a man who was offering hope and togetherness.

Zohran Mamdani's victory has been cheered across the world because it was as much a triumph of a new kind of politics as it is a rebuff to President Donald Trump and his politics of intimidation and invective, at home and abroad. Trump had, needlessly but unsurprisingly, injected himself into the New York mayoral contest by backroom quarterbacking of Mamdani's rivals, as also by threatening to slash federal funds for the city should this challenger of status quo get elected.

It is necessary to note that both Mamdani and Trump are quintessential products of that great city. A town of hustlers, swindlers, conmen, creative geniuses, ethnic vibrancy; a city that favours men and women of elegance, style, fashion, wit, imagination, optimism, and sheer perseverance. It refuses to be a settled down place; always willing to engage with one more experiment in social arrangements. Both Trump and Mamdani are New Yorkers at the core. On November 4, the city created a new narrative for itself and it will be decoded and deciphered around the world—for inspiration and for replication. Just as Liza Minnelli sang: *"If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere."*

Since his second presidential innings began in January, 2025, Trump has relentlessly devalued the idea of American democracy in the eyes of millions and millions of Americans, and, in the process, has sent out an unhappy message to the world that looked upon the US as an ideal democracy, worthy of emulation. The maximalist interpretation that Trump has put on his presidential powers—and has been allowed to get away with it—has given heart to all the "strongmen" across the world who use the paraphernalia of elective democracy to hollow out the very concept of democracy. In the Trumpian theocracy, authority is not to be questioned; 'obedience must be rendered to the Caesar'. The very idea of dissent has been reduced to a dirty concept.

Now, a Mamdani victory has not only dented the Trump Supremacy, it has also proved that there is nothing inevitable about Trump and Trumpism. A veritable bonfire of the Trumpian vanities has become the most pleasing spectacle. For one shining moment, New York City has reaffirmed its romantic streak and has given hope to millions and millions, way beyond that exotic metropolitan.

Mamdani was wilfully not a part of the establishment; he wormed his way into the affection of the New Yorkers by questioning the status quo, challenging the political priorities, and the governing protocol of an establishment that is firmly in the grip of oligarchs and other power brokers. Mamdani reminded the city's voters of the harshness of life behind all the glitter and the shimmer of the Manhattan skyline. And then, he promised to make life for the average voter less harsh



Harish Khare  
IS A DELHI-BASED SENIOR  
JOURNALIST AND PUBLIC  
COMMENTATOR

and less dehumanising. He invoked the curative power of inclusion, without brandishing the animosities of politics of exclusion that has cast a mesmerising spell on so many Americans. He invited opposition and hostility from every established site of traditional power.


The Mamdani victory will have reverberations beyond New York and beyond America. Because this man, with a very un-American name, has shown how a politician can rekindle a society's

conscience and how he or she can summon the faithful and the hopeful to defiance and resistance to callous authority, and, can enthuse a community to reach out to its inner resources and resilience to forge a higher collective nobility. A seductive moment in history.

The world will watch with attention how Mamdani will defuse and defang the entrenched interests in America's greatest city and how he will cope with militant non-cooperation, even hostility, from the Trump White House. And, as the older Cuomo, Mario, once remarked that while "you campaign in poetry, you govern in prose". Governance is a tricky affair; it requires competence, passion, commitment, and conviction to exhort citizens and followers to rise above personal and petty interests. Aspirant political leaders across the world would very much want a Mamdani City Hall to set an example as to how to govern in prose without losing the imagination of a poet.

It is not easy to pigeonhole Mamdani and his fellow-travellers in any recognised political category, but they do constitute a "new" urge and a "new" insistence that the operating principles of governance must be aligned with the needs and requirements and hopes of a majority, rather than being the handmaiden of the dozen-odd billionaires and political honchos.

The progressive, liberal, and other democratic souls around the world would observe how creative and adept Mamdani turns out in using the mandate of the crowds through the existing political institutions; how he would avoid the pitfalls of impatience and righteousness; and, how he would not let his rivals' viciousness define him. A Mamdani mayoralty in the world's most global city has a tantalising cachet to it. From the dark days of "9/11" New York moved back, on "11/4" to its old *zeitgeist*. All is not lost.

Many in India would feel entitled to think of Mamdani's triumph as a reaffirmation of the intrinsic validity of our own democratic values. That his mother is an Indian, that he would quote Jawaharlal Nehru in his victory oration, that he did not shy away from his Muslim identity are enormously satisfying to our liberal and republican votaries. More than the elevation of a Rishi Sunak as the prime minister of England, a Zohran Mamdani as the Mayor of New York somehow is a pleasing development. In this age of inter-connectedness, a Mamdani victory in New York will give hope to the dispirited democrats call over the world. India will not remain untouched. Some would hope for a similar de-contamination. Never underestimate a democracy's potential for undertaking course-correction and other similar miracles. 

*(Views expressed are personal)*

# Glamour or Poison?

## The Hidden Peril in Fairness Creams

Toxic mercury-laden skin-lightening creams and cosmetic products continue to flood Indian e-commerce platforms and over-the-counter markets, posing serious health risks including skin damage, kidney injury, and neurological disorders.



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A combination of weak regulation, unchecked online availability, and society's enduring fixation with “fairness” continues to fuel the rampant use of these hazardous products

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Dermatologists, gynaecologists and nephrologists besides green activists across India are raising red flags. A new investigation has revealed that products marketed as “fairness creams” contain mercury in concentrations thousands of times above the legally permissible limits.

The Zero Mercury Working Group (ZMWG), a coalition of over 100 environmental and health organisations from more than 55 countries, in its report highlighted the alarming global scale of the problem. The report found that 25 of 31 creams tested contained mercury far exceeding the legal limit of 1 part per million (ppm), which is the standard set both by national regulations and the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

In India, the advocacy group Toxics Link found mercury levels ranging from 7,331 ppm to 27,431 ppm in seven out of eight creams purchased online—thousands of times higher than the safe limit.

Satish Sinha, Associate Director at Toxics Link, said, “This

**By Archana Jyoti**

“I just wanted to look fairer, but now my skin itches, and my kidneys hurt,” says Riya (24) from Delhi, holding a half-used jar of a popular online fairness cream. Like many across India, she ordered online these creams seeking beauty, unaware that they were laced with mercury—sometimes thousands of times above safe limits.

In a society long obsessed with fair skin, the pursuit of lighter

complexion has become a lucrative market—and a dangerous one.

Despite international regulations banning mercury in cosmetics, skin-lightening creams and beauty products containing this toxic metal continue to be sold widely online, putting millions of unsuspecting consumers at risk.

The problem is not only about dermatological harm but also about systemic health hazards, including kidney and nervous system damage, and in severe cases, irreversible harm to unborn children.

is a flagrant violation of national safety laws. E-commerce platforms must take immediate steps to enforce prohibited product policies rigorously.

Allowing such products to reach consumers is putting lives at risk.”

The investigation also revealed a disturbing pattern: while mercury-laced creams are largely absent from online stores targeting the US and European markets, they remain widely available on Indian platforms and sites serving other developing countries.

Michael Bender, co-coordinator of ZMWG, emphasised the need for uniform enforcement of safety standards worldwide. “If these companies can enforce mercury bans in developed countries, they must do the same globally. Online marketplaces must test products before listing and take full legal responsibility for public health compliance,” he said.

Dermatologists caution that prolonged exposure of mercury on skin can lead to serious skin and systemic health problems. “Mercury in any form is harmful to the skin, and anything above 1 ppm is unsafe,” said Dr. Rashmi Sarkar, Director-Professor of Dermatology at Lady Hardinge Medical College, Delhi, and Regional Director for the International League of Dermatological Societies in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

She noted that many OTC and online-sold fairness creams and cosmetic products contain not only mercury but also high-potency steroids. “These products can cause skin thinning, hypersensitivity reactions, and paradoxical darkening.”

Lethal mercury doesn't spare the kidney also. Dr. Vinod Kumar K, Consultant-Nephrology at Manipal Hospitals, explained in a recent blog that “mercury poisoning from skin creams can cause membranous glomerulopathy,

nephrotic syndrome, proteinuria, and generalized swelling. Immediate cessation of exposure is crucial, and some patients require chelation therapy or immunosuppressants to manage kidney inflammation.”

Demand for dangerous fairness creams is deeply rooted in social attitudes. Cultural prejudice favouring lighter skin drives this market, Dr. Sarkar said. “As long as this bias persists, hazardous products will continue to flourish.”

Dr. Diksha Agrawal Kesarwani, Consultant Dermatologist at Ghaziabad Dermatology Centre, said, compounds like ammoniated mercury and mercuric chloride are deliberately used for their melanin-suppressing properties.

“Mercury penetrates the skin easily, enters the bloodstream, and disrupts enzymatic activity,” she said. “Chronic exposure can cause tremors, mood disorders, nephrotic syndrome, immune dysfunction, and long-term kidney damage.”

Dr. Tripti Sharan, Director, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at BLK-Max Hospital, Delhi talked about impact of cosmetic products containing mercury and other harmful chemicals on pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and young children.

“We strongly advise expectant mothers to avoid using any chemical-laced cosmetics, including those containing mercury, especially during the first trimester of pregnancy,” Dr. Sharan said, explaining that mercury can cross

the placental barrier, potentially affecting the developing brain and nervous system of unborn babies.

India's legal framework—under the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules (1945) and Bureau of Indian Standards (IS 4707, Part 1)—prohibits mercury above a certain limit in cosmetics. However, enforcement has been weak.

The rise of online commerce has made it easier than ever for toxic creams to reach even remote regions, bypassing traditional regulatory oversight, added Dr Kesarwani. Attractive discounts, misleading packaging, and counterfeit products often fool consumers into purchasing these hazardous creams.

Medicos stress that public education is central to curbing the crisis. “We need to shift the narrative from fairness to healthy skin,” said Dr. Sarkar. “Only by addressing both the cultural obsession with light skin and the chemical dangers can we prevent this public health hazard.”

Experts also urged both policymakers and e-commerce platforms to step up enforcement. Recommendations include mandatory mercury testing before listing products, immediate removal of non-compliant creams, and stricter oversight of sellers.

At the same time, advocacy groups have emphasized the need for widespread public awareness campaigns to educate consumers on the importance of carefully reading product labels and avoiding hidden risks in seemingly harmless cosmetic products.

“Stopping mercury exposure is non-negotiable,” said Dr. Vinod Kumar K. “Platforms, regulators, and consumers all have a role to play in ensuring that these dangerous creams never reach the market.”

Until then, the pursuit of fair skin may well turn into a lifelong health burden.

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**Attractive discounts,  
misleading packaging,  
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purchasing these  
hazardous creams**

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**A Violent Ecosystem** Funeral of 58 Dalits massacred by the upper-caste militia, the Ranvir Sena, at Laxmanpur-Bathe village in Bihar in 1997

**MarginSpeak**



Anand Teltumbde  
IS AN INDIAN SCHOLAR,  
WRITER AND HUMAN  
RIGHTS ACTIVIST

# Crime Without Punishment

The system protects those who commit caste violence  
while blaming victims for asserting dignity

## WITHIN

the span of days, two incidents have laid bare the entrenched caste realities of contemporary India and the impunity that the Hindutva regime has institutionalised. On October 6, 2025 a 71-year-old lawyer hurled a shoe at Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai, a Dalit, inside the Supreme Court, defiantly shouting “*Sanatan ka apmaan nahi sahega Hindustan*” (India will not tolerate insult to Sanatan Dharma). He was released without charges, his shoe returned, facing no consequences for attacking the country’s highest judicial authority. The very next day, October 7, Additional Director General of Police Y. Puran Kumar, also a Dalit, died by suicide at his Chandigarh residence, leaving an eight-page note describing years of caste humiliation and harassment by senior officers. Despite huge public outrage, nothing has been done to the perpetrators.

These two events, occurring within 24 hours, are not aberrations but revelations of a deeper malaise—the normalisation of caste violence and Brahminical supremacy under a majoritarian Hindutva order that has erased accountability for crimes committed in the name of Sanatan Dharma or Hindu honour. One incident reflects physical assault on a Dalit constitutional authority without reprisal; the other, psychological persecution that drove a senior officer to death. Together, they expose an ecosystem where Dalits—irrespective of office, achievement, or rank—remain vulnerable to humiliation and violence sanctioned by ideological impunity.

These are not isolated tragedies but logical outcomes of the Hindutva project that the ruling regime has consolidated over the past decade—an order that weaponises religion to defend caste and punishes dignity itself.

### The Shoe That Revealed Everything

The attack on Chief Justice B.R. Gavai was unprecedented in audacity and deeply revealing in consequence. In a packed Supreme Court room, a lawyer hurled his shoe at the bench headed by CJI Gavai, defiantly shouting a slogan sourced from the Hindutva playbook. He later claimed he was enraged by the CJI’s quip—“ask the deity itself to do something”—while dismissing a frivolous plea to restore a Vishnu idol at Khajuraho. Such verbal retorts by judges, right or wrong, are not uncommon. However, the Hindutva networks seized on the remark as an “insult to Sanatan Dharma”, manufacturing the outrage that fuelled the assault.

What followed laid bare the regime’s moral collapse. The assailant was released within hours. He boasted to the press, “I have no regrets...I was hurt.” The Prime Minister’s bland condemnation avoided any commitment to legal action. The Bar remained silent; the media soon moved on. By contrast, when a Mumbai lawyer threw a shoe at CJI A.S. Anand in 1999, aggrieved by the verdict in his property matter, he was convicted of contempt and sentenced to four months imprisonment and a fine.

Kishore’s act was graver because it was ideological. His slogan

invoked Sanatan Dharma—a euphemism for Brahminism that sanctifies caste hierarchy—asserting that religious sentiment trumps constitutional authority. It claimed the right to assault a Dalit Chief Justice in defence of “Hindu honour,” confident that society would understand, perhaps even celebrate, the act.

This confidence of impunity is no accident. It is the product of a decade-long Hindutva campaign that has normalised upper-caste violence under the banner of faith. When cow vigilantes lynch Muslims, interfaith couples are attacked, or homes are bulldozed without due process, the same message resounds: violence in the name of Sanatan Dharma enjoys state protection.

The online abuse of CJI Gavai was overtly casteist, mocking his intelligence and legitimacy. The hate spewed against him as a Dalit on social media is criminal, but the entire state machinery has been silent. The outrage over “insult to Sanatan” was merely a polite mask for fury at a Dalit occupying the highest judicial office and dismissing an upper-caste petitioner. In the Brahminical logic encoded in Sanatan Dharma, a Dalit exercising authority represents an inversion of the natural order that must be violently corrected. Kishore’s attack—and the regime’s indulgence—thus revealed everything about Hindutva’s compact with caste: that in the new India, *religious offence* is punishable, but *caste violence* is not.

### The Suicide Note That Indicts a System

On October 7, 2025, Additional Director General of Police Y. Puran Kumar, a 2001-batch Dalit IPS officer from Andhra Pradesh serving in Haryana, shot himself at his Chandigarh residence. In his suicide note, he named several IPS and IAS officers, accusing them of sustained mental harassment, humiliation, and caste-based discrimination.

Kumar detailed how he was sidelined despite seniority, denied postings he deserved, and targeted through fabricated charges. His note spoke of a systematic campaign of humiliation, including attempts to implicate him in a fake bribery case. His wife, Amneet Kumar, an IAS officer, filed a complaint holding the named officials responsible for his death and demanding their suspension and arrest. What has emerged from Kumar’s note reveals the pervasive caste bias that Dalit officers continue to face in “meritocratic” institutions. Kumar wrote of years of “mental harassment and humiliation”, of being denied recognition and opportunities his upper-caste peers enjoyed. His decision to end his life after naming his tormentors was both an act of despair and an indictment—a demand that the system confront its casteist rot.

Kumar’s death demolishes the myth that rank or merit protects Dalits from caste oppression. Here was an officer one step below the state’s top cop, yet, even his uniform and authority could not shield him from institutionalised caste prejudice. If an ADGP could be hounded to suicide, what hope remains for Dalit constables or sub-inspectors, not to speak of ordinary Dalits?

The tragedy underscores that caste hierarchy persists beneath the veneer of equality. Despite constitutional

safeguards and diversity mandates, India's police forces remain dominated by upper castes, reproducing social hierarchies within the bureaucracy. Dalit officers are routinely marginalised, denied postings, discredited for success, and reminded that—whatever their rank—their caste defines their place. Kumar's final note stands as a searing testament: in caste India, even power wears the badge of humiliation.

### The Hindutva Regime's Enabling of Caste Impunity

The current regime has strategically elevated a few Dalits such as Presidents Kovind and Murmu and select ministers—to project inclusiveness. This token representation offers aspirational symbols, deflects charges of casteism, and lets the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) claim empowerment while tightening caste hierarchies.

The experiences of CJI Gavai and ADGP Kumar expose the emptiness of this gesture. Symbolic elevation without structural reform offers no protection. When Dalits in high office act independently—as CJI Gavai did when dismissing the Khajuraho petition—they face violence that goes unpunished. When they rise by merit—as Kumar did—they face relentless humiliation the system refuses to address. Visibility masks vulnerability; caste remains the invisible law of power. No wonder, atrocities against Dalits in NCRB reports show a sudden spurt: the average yearly number of cognizable offences against Dalits shooting up from 32,494 to 45,622 during the nine years preceding and succeeding the BJP's takeover of power at the Centre in 2014.

This impunity is not incidental but ideological, rooted in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS's) worldview. From Golwalkar onward, the RSS has glorified *varna dharma* as a divinely ordained social order. Caste hierarchy, rebranded as cultural harmony, is central to its conception of Hindu civilisation. Once this ideology captured state power, caste violence became governance by other means—seen in the dilution of SC/ST protections, rise in atrocities, and appointment of upper-caste loyalists across institutions.

The shoe thrown at CJI Gavai and Kumar's suicide expose the same reality: the regime showcases Dalits for legitimacy while preserving Brahminical dominance through systemic impunity.

Both incidents expose a clear pattern: impunity for perpetrators, vulnerability for Dalits—no matter their rank. Kishore assaults the Chief Justice and walks free; officers named in ADGP Kumar's suicide note continue in service despite his wife's complaint. FIRs and inquiries follow, but accountability never arrives.

This impunity is structural, not accidental. With investigative agencies subservient to the regime, judges intimidated, media complicit, and civil society silenced, the system protects those who commit caste violence while blaming victims for asserting dignity. It is an order designed to shield perpetrators and punish resistance.

The episodes of Gavai and Kumar lay bare caste as the enduring grammar of Indian society, unbroken by constitutional promises. From the files hurled at Ambedkar in Baroda to the shoe thrown at CJI Gavai in the Supreme Court, from the historical humiliation of Dalit officials to Kumar's final note, the continuity is chilling.

## UPPER CASTES STILL RESIST DALIT AUTHORITY, RESPOND TO ASSERTION WITH VIOLENCE, AND RELY ON A STATE APPARATUS THAT ENSURES IMPUNITY.

Neither constitutional office nor professional merit offers real protection. Upper castes still resist Dalit authority, respond to assertion with violence, and rely on a state apparatus that ensures impunity. Formal equality exists only on paper; Brahminical hierarchy has been reinstalled beneath the veneer of democracy under the current regime.

The lesson for Dalits is stark: individual success within a casteist order cannot secure collective liberation. A few elevated figures—CJI Gavai or ADGP Kumar—do not signal emancipation; they mask continuing subjugation. Kumar's suicide exposes how token inclusion becomes another form of violence when institutions remain Brahminical at the core.

A lawyer assaults the Chief Justice and walks free; officers accused of harassing a Dalit ADGP remain in office. This is not democracy but rule by impunity. The regime has crippled institutional independence—investigative agencies serve power, courts face intimidation, and media functions as propaganda. When even the highest offices offer no protection, ordinary Dalits are left entirely exposed.

Accountability must begin with prosecuting Kishore and the officers named in Kumar's note. Justice demands independent institutions and sustained political struggle, not momentary outrage. Dalits must reject the BJP's tokenism and pursue Ambedkar's unfinished task—the annihilation of caste, not its reform. The assaults on Gavai and Kumar show that no Dalit is safe while impunity reigns; only solidarity across caste, religion, and region can challenge this authoritarian caste order.

### Two Incidents, One System

The shoe hurled at CJI Gavai and Kumar's suicide spring from the same source: a regime that sanctifies caste hierarchy under the banner of Hindu nationalism. Kishore's audacity, Kumar's despair, and the state's silence expose a society where Brahminical ideology thrives behind democratic facades.

These are not isolated tragedies but symptoms of a designed order—one that rewards perpetrators and punishes assertion. Resistance must mean more than mourning; it must mean naming the system, organising against it, and refusing the normalisation of caste violence.

Until caste hierarchy is dismantled, until Sanatan Dharma's caste core is unmasked, until impunity is replaced with justice, the shoe will be thrown again, and another suicide note will appear. The task before us is to ensure it need not. [📌](#)

*(Views expressed are personal)*

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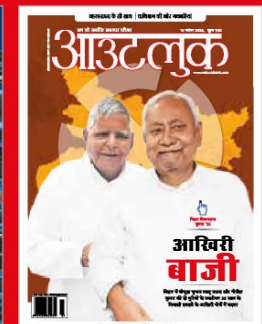
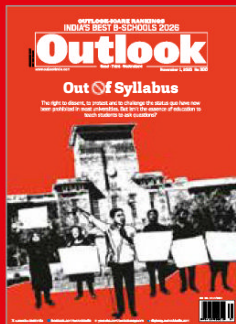


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## Diary



**Ashutosh Salil**  
is an IAS officer of the  
Maharashtra cadre

*Politics and Us*

My parents are visiting me in Brussels. They are always watching the election news on TV as it unfolds in Bihar where we come from. At night, when I remind my mother to put her phone away, she pleads for an hour of catching up on all election news and analysis of the day on YouTube. This is also because there is a story of unfinished political business or aspiration. Long ago, my grandfather had jumped into the electoral fray as an independent. He lost but the zeal was passed down as an inheritance and my father contested the college elections. Perhaps he would have taken it further, but he got married and had a family to take care of.

Unlike my reticent mother, my father is loquacious. In a small town, men like my father bonded over conversations. Mostly political ones. My father would often host them over endless cups of tea. The men were loud and argumentative. My father probably the loudest and never the one to concede. My mother preferred the quietness of her routine to these noisy intrusions. Here in Brussels, my father very often concedes to my fiery mother. I suspect he does so half-heartedly. To buy peace.

The men in my family since my grandfather have had a brush—mostly accidental—with elections. My father lost the only election he ever fought. It was for the college president in Munger in Bihar. He was a student of political science at the time. He started as the strategist for the campaign but in the middle of the campaign, their candidate defected to the other side. They found a replacement only to be told 2-3 days before the election that the replacement would be disqualified. Left with no choice, he put up a spirited campaign himself and lost by 12 votes. While he was interested in politics, he never envisaged a career in the field. He was recently married and my brother was born soon after. With a family to feed, my father completely retreated from the world of politics and focused on his work. However, he never lost his intellectual interest in politics.

Several years later in 1998, my elder brother won the election to the students' union of Hindu College in Delhi with the highest-ever margin in the college's history. Like my father, his entry was accidental, too. However, unlike my father whose campaign was driven by consideration of caste, my brother was driven by a fire to end elitism and also the genuine desire to unite the warring students' groups in the college hostel. He says the flame of politics was extinguished as quickly as it started. As for me, I couldn't go beyond being a very apolitical elected class representative in my college. My only motivation being validation of my popularity in

a small class of 70 students.

My paternal grandfather was the one seriously interested in electoral politics. Politics as a career. He was the only son of a reasonably well-to-do farmer, and well-educated with excellent connections to the political world. He had once refused a government job. He came very close to getting the ticket in the 1957 election to the Bihar legislative assembly and was one of the three shortlisted candidates from his home constituency. Somehow, he missed the bus. At the fag end of his career, he contested as an independent in the assembly election. Everyone, including him, probably knew he did not stand a chance. He had no resources and no mass support; not even his own children's backing. He would go campaigning with my youngest maternal uncle on a Bullet and distribute leaflets in the villages. Maybe it was just a lifelong dream that he did not want to leave unfulfilled.

For the last few years, my parents have been spending considerable time with me. Only recently did I realise that my mother is a keen political observer. She is also fiercely independent and her world views are diametrically opposite to my father's. Growing up, I had not noticed this side of my mother at all. When I asked about her newfound love for politics, she laughed and said, "I grew up more politically aware than any one of you, including your father." She told me about my maternal grandfather who was a farmer and also a political worker. However, unlike his father and brother, he was not associated with the dominant political party of the day. In her large extended family, her father was the only exception. In her village in Bihar, there were only five families like hers who were on the opposite side of the political spectrum. Even when she was badly outnumbered in her extended family and village, she teamed up with her sisters and sloganeered for her father's party of choice. The reason we did not hear her talk much about politics during our childhood was because there wasn't any space for her to do so. My father was mostly out for work and the women of our *mohallah* never discussed politics. They left it to the men and just followed their directions on the day of voting.

My parents have never been associated with any political party. However, they are active participants in the political process. They believe in politics and its transformative power. They also carry the noisy spirit of the Indian republic and democracy wherever they go. The streets of Brussels may be calm and deserted but my home is currently a battlefield. My parents will be at war till the election in Bihar gets over. □



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