

18th Lok Sabha Elections in Jharkhand: Implications from House of People to Legislative Assembly

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Abstract

Jharkhand witnessed two general elections back to back one for Lok Sabha (House of People) and another Vidhan Sabha (Legislative Assembly) in 2024. 18th Lok Sabha elections were held during May 13, 2024 to June 01, 2024 to elect 14 Members of Parliament (Lok Sabha) from 14 Lok Sabha constituencies. The Legislative Assembly elections were held in three phases during 13th to 20th November 2024 to elect 81 Legislative Members to its Legislative Assembly and form government at the State level. This paper is an endeavor to present the factual details of the Jharkhand Lok Sabha (House of the People) and Vidhan Sabha (Legislative Assembly) elections of 2024 in the state of Jharkhand. The paper inter alia discusses issues around which the major political parties contested the elections and to the extent such narratives and articulation of issues by different political parties had an influence on the voters. The paper also discusses the factors which may have been responsible for poor performance as well as successes of different political parties. Paper concludes in terms of the overall impact of the way electoral processes of the state impacted the democratic process and ethos of democracy in the country.

Key Words: Jharkhand, Lok Sabha Elections, Legislative Assembly

Elections to the Jharkhand Lok Sabha were largely influenced by the pre-elections developments. Two leading parties Bhartiya Janata Party (National Political Party) and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) (State Political Party) contested against each other amidst number of other regional and national parties. BJP contested as part of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and JMM contested as part of India Alliance along with Congress Party which is a National Political Party. The final

results were to be counted in terms of two leading alliances i.e., National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by BJP and India Alliance led by Indian National Congress and JMM. BJP and AJSU (All Jharkhand Students Union-AJSU) led by Sudesh Mahto were dominant coalition partners of NDA and they won seats for themselves in the Lok Sabha election. Results were declared on June 4, 2024 as mentioned in Table-I below.

Table-I Lok Sabha Election Results

SN	Constituency	Winner	Party	Vote Margin	Margin in %
1	Rajmahal (ST)	Vinay Kumar Hansdak	JMM	1,78,264	14.63%
2	Dumka (ST)	Nalin Soren	JMM	22,527	1.91%
3	Godda	Nishikant Dubey	BJP	1,01,813	7.28%
4	Chatra	Kalicharan Singh	BJP	2,20,959	20.34%
5	Kodarma	Annapurna Devi	BJP	3,77,014	27.52%
6	Giridih	Chandra Prakash Choudhary	AJSU	80,880	6.40%
7	Dhanbad	Dulu Mahto	BJP	3,31,583	23.22%
8	Ranchi	Sanjay Seth	BJP	1,20,512	8.32%
9	Jamshedpur	Bidyut Baran Mahato	BJP	2,59,782	20.34%
10	Singhbhum (ST)	Joba Manjhi	JMM	1,68,402	16.71%
11	Khunti (ST)	Kali Charan Munda	INC	1,49,675	15.98%
12	Lihardaga (ST)	Sukhdeo Bhagat	INC	1,39,138	14.39%
13	Palamu (SC)	Vishnu Dayal Ram	BJP	2,88,807	20.76%

As revealed through election results in Table-I, BJP won 8 (eight) seats of the total 13 seats that it contested whereas its alliance partner AJSU won 1 (one) seat of Giridih. NDA thus contested all the 14 seats and won a total of 9 (nine) seats in the Lok Sabha. Indian National Congress won 2 (Two) seats of the total 7 (Seven), that it contested and its alliance partner JMM won 3(Three) seats of the 5(Five) seats that it contested. The other two partners of India Alliance Rashtirya Janata Dal (RJD) and CPI(M-L)(L) failed to win any seat though they had contested one seat each of the total 14 seats. Most remarkable highlight of the elections was that JMM could win all the three seats which were reserved for ST candidates.

A total of five seats stands reserved for ST candidates out of 14 seats of the Lok Sabha in the state of Jharkhand. One seat, Palamu has been reserved for SC from where Vishnu Dayal Ram of BJP won with a margin of 20.76% votes. Nalin Soren of JMM won Dumka reserved seat for ST with least margin of votes i.e., 1.91%; whereas Annapurna Devi of BJP won the Kodarma seat with highest margin of votes i.e., 27.34%.

Thus, it is obvious that NDA alliance won 9 (Nine) of the 14 seats which is 3 (Three) less than it won in 17th Lok Sabha elections and as alliance NDA then had won a total of 12 seats. Out of remaining two seats one was bagged by JMM and one by INC in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Thus, BJP though won substantial seats in 2024 Lok Sabha elections but was comparatively at a loss whereas the INDIA Alliance fared well with 5(Five) seats during 2024 Lok Sabha elections and gained well. However, in terms of vote percentage NDA had polled 56% of the total votes in 2019 Lok Sabha elections which went down to 47.17% in 2024. Therefore, it is obvious that the swing was downward in case of NDA in 2024 Lok Sabha elections. On the other hand, for United Progressive Alliance (UPA) the poll percentage was 38.58 percent in 2019 Lok Sabha when it bagged just two seats; which went upward to 39.05 percent in 2024 with three more seats. Though in terms of percent of votes it gained marginally but in terms of seats it's gains were substantial. However, NDA lost about 9 percent of votes which may have gone to other parties contesting in the 2024 elections and their losses of seats are also substantial.

Factors Responsible for Low Performance:

One may read into the results of 18th Lok Sabha, several factors responsible for loss of BJP-led NDA and gains of JMM-led INDIA Alliance in the state of Jharkhand. Major electoral campaigns of the BJP were corruption, crime, and infiltration of Bangladeshi Muslims.

First reason is that the swing away from BJP-led NDA may have been on account of other parties contesting increasingly vigorously and with aggressive campaign during the entire electoral processes. Regional and state parties have learnt the operational tricks and the role of narratives during election campaigns and they used it effectively. Thus, the role of electoral campaign strategy was an important factor which led to loss and gain of voting percentage in the state of Jharkhand. It was the fight over narratives than over development.

Secondly, the complications may have arisen on account of imprisonment of Jharkhand Chief Minister Sri Hemant Soren before the elections on January 31st, 2024. He was arrested by India's Central Agency,

Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a high profile investigation for his alleged involvement in corruption charges relating to land deal. He kept denying right from the beginning about his involvement in any manner. The charges seemed frivolous and politically motivated that he purchased a land (8.36 acres)¹ from the proceeds from crime by selling army owned land.² His party contested the elections from behind bars when his wife Ms. Kalpana Soren took charge of electoral campaigns. Hemant was finally released on bail on June 28, 2024 from Ranchi's Birsa Munda Jail. He claimed on his release that he was falsely implicated in a money laundering case and had to spend nearly five months in jail. This entire episode may have played dominant role towards moving the sympathy of many of the tribal in favour of Hemant Soren as it became evident when he proceeded and won with thumping majority in the Legislative Assembly polls in November 2024, nearly four months after. Thus, the second dominant factor was the sympathy of the people towards Hemant Soren and his party because his wife Kalpana Soren took the cudgels of campaign and throughout the campaign she tried to convince the people about the strategy of discrimination and falsehood that is being played by the central government through the instrumentality of central agency ED. She and her party aptly played the tribal leader's victimization and discrimination card. Thus, it may have been gross miscalculation on part of BJP-led NDA alliance that captivating the leader of the party by implicating him into land scam would tilt the favour of voters to their side. Right or wrong, but this certainly had a great role to play during the elections. The impact was revealed more emphatically in the Assembly elections just four months later.

Thirdly, Jharkhand is a state which got bifurcated from Bihar and is rich tremendously in minerals and coal. It also has substantial population of tribal in the state nearly 8.6 million constituting about 26.2 percent of the total population.³ Given this nature of its population, JMM political party could capitalize on gross discrimination and victimization of tribal of the state by the central government. This narrative propagated by JMM really paid in substantial manner to JMM as it deftly tried to link it to the abundant natural resources mainly coal and minerals that the Centre is trying to exploit without much heed to the need of the tribal. His party focused on fight for protecting *Jal, Jangal and Jameen* for tribal throughout their campaign. This may have prompted many among tribal to think against the NDA and its partner. Thus, BJP-led NDA tried to castigate the image of Hemant Soren in the eyes of the voters as a 'corruption man' who thinks only for himself and his family; whereas JMM tried to project to the people, the way the national party is trying to malign his image and the image of the tribal leader for exploiting the

abundant minerals of the state. JMM was comparatively successful towards tarnishing the image and making a dent into the vote-bank of BJP. This too was substantially revealed in Assembly election results.

Fourthly, the leaders of BJP kept castigating the JMM leader and the party JMM, of several scams and that the crime is on the rise during the reign of JMM. This did not go well with the voters as they seem to stand educated by now that these are mostly politically motivated and that the corruption and crime was widely rampant even during the rule of BJP in the state. Heman Soren later claimed that the opposition party spent over Rs.500 crore on 'malicious campaigns' against him.⁴

Fifthly, BJP aggressively pursued the issue of infiltration of foreigners from across the border which has negative impacts upon the demography of the state and the way the outsiders are encroaching upon the lands and forest resources of the tribal people of the state. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav went to the extent of saying that ruling JMM-led coalition has been converting Jharkhand capital Ranchi into Pakistani city Karachi, alleging that Hindus are being subjected to atrocities in the state.⁵ However, this narrative too failed as the ruling party held responsible the central government itself for any infiltration, if they are there, as border management is the subject-matter of the central government. Hence, they should first be held responsible for any cross-border infiltration. However, they kept denying that there is any infiltration in the state. The verdict reveals that the people of state did not buy the narratives of the BJP, either in Lok Sabha elections or in Assembly elections.

Sixthly, even when Prime Minister landed for campaign as star campaigner of the party he tried to project that the first case of Love-Jihad happened in the state of Jharkhand and castigated the state government for being responsible for the same. He went on to claim in one of his rallies, "I have been travelling around Jharkhand and I have noticed that the biggest worry here is about the Bangladeshi infiltrators. As per whatever data has been available, we have learnt that the tribal population in Santhal has now reduced to half. We have to protect our tribal families and Jharkhandi from this and that should be our first priority."⁶ The opposition branded this as an endeavor on part of the BJP to polarize the voters in the state and that the ruling party at the center and their leaders in the state are trying to advance the communal card to garner votes. This too may have taken its toll on the BJP.

Last but most important issue was the in-fighting or internal dynamics of the political party which most political parties have been suffering from.

The political leaders who aspire to be members of legislatures, approach most of the leading parties on the basis of their calculation in terms of winning prospects of the parties. The political parties on the other hand need to cross the magic number in the legislature to form the government. Hence, the political parties too, lure the leaders on their sides calculating their strength at the local levels and the winning ability of such leaders. When local leaders or party workers are sidelined to make way for a nationally imposed leader; the local leader starts working against the party itself and makes all efforts to get the imposed candidates defeated. Such in-fighting and internal disturbances are there in all the political parties but one which has least is lucky enough to ward off such internal disturbances. BJP had to work a lot to cajole its leaders to continue to support their candidates during elections.

Release of Hemant Soren and Assembly Elections:

Hemant Soren once was released from captivity, first took oath of office of Chief Minister causing erstwhile CM Champai Soren to relinquish the office in his favour. He subsequently took the command of the party in his own hands and started aggressively narrating his main opposition BJP as to the way they tried to break him and his party before the Lok Sabha elections by captivating him. He quickly read the mind of the voters and acted swiftly by announcing the "*Maiya Samman Yojana*" by transferring Rs.1000/- per month to those who applied for it. Later the amount was elevated to Rs.2500/- per month. Hemant Soren also waived farm loans of up to Rs. two lakhs to nearly 1.75 lakhs farmers. He also waived the outstanding electricity bills and promised a scheme of providing free electricity up to 200 units. Soren also introduced universal pension schemes including for lawyers.⁷ It all happened on the eve of Assembly election that transformed it into votes readily.

The performance of JMM in Lok Sabha was repeated more rigorously and with greater vigor during the Legislative Assembly elections of November 2024.

It is quite obvious from Table-II that JMM-led India Alliance swept the Assembly elections with over 56 seats out of a total of 81 seats. BJP could muster 16 seats and was a distant second in the entire fray. It makes it obvious that the policy interventions as well as the narrative of alleged victimization by the BJP played substantial role towards sweeping the mood of the people in favour of JMM in particular and INDIA Alliance in general. JMM also learned from the policy programs that were adopted by BJP in other states and the way they helped towards winning the elections, especially the Ladli Behna Yojana of Madhya Pradesh.

Table-II Results of Legislative Assembly Elections

SN	Political Party	Total Seats	Votes Percentage
1	Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)	34	23.44%
2	Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)	21	33.18%
3	Indian National Congress (INC)	16	15.56%
4	Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)	4	3.44%
5	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (Liberation)—CPI-(ML)(L)	2	1.89%
6	AJSU Party	1	3.54%
7	Lok Janashakti Party (Ram Vilas—LJPRV)	1	0.61%
8	Jharkhand Loktantrik Krantikari Morcha-JLKM	1	
9	Janata Dal-(United)—JD(U)	1	0.81%
	Total	81	
	NOTA		1.27%

Another important factor that helped JMM to wean away the voters in its own favor was the Champai Soren episode. Champai Soren was elevated to the seat of Chief Minister when Hemant Soren resigned in the wake of his imprisonment by ED. However, he was made to step down once Hemant Soren was released after the Lok Sabha elections. He subsequently joined the BJP which may have thought that he being famous as Kolhan Tiger would help BJP with more seats in the Kolhan region. Champai Soren miscalculated that when BJP would come to power he may be the choice for the post of Chief Minister being the strong representative of tribal of the state. However, this back-fired both for Champai as well as the BJP; as Champai's son Babulal Soren lost the election who was provided with BJP ticket allegedly as part of switch-over deal.

Jairam Mahto and his party Jharkhand Loktantrik Krantikari Morcha (JLKM) also played the role of spoiler as he made a dent into good number of BJP vote banks. He and his party seized a sizable chunk of votes during Assembly elections causing harm to NDA candidates on number of seats. Mahato won the Dumri Assembly seats for himself.

Thus, roping in of two chief ministers, Hemant Biswa Sharma of Assam and Shivraj Singh Chauhan of Madhya Pradesh, in the state of Jharkhand

for managing the win in Legislative elections for the BJP too failed to deliver the result. Rather, it may have back-fired for the BJP as people may have misread into it the increasing role of outsiders in state politics.

Conclusion

Political parties calculate and involve themselves in complex political arithmetic and design caste, religious and regional dynamics to win maximum number of seats so that they can form government both at the center and in the state. BJP too made all preparations like: rigorous campaigns by star campaigners like Modi, Yogi and Amit Shah; bringing in Babu Lal Marandi as a robust political leader of the state as party president for Jharkhand; roping-in two Chief Ministers, Hemant Biswa Sharma and Shivraj Singh Chauhan in Legislative Assembly elections; settling former Chief Minister Raghubar Das as Governor of Odisha; and bringing-in another stalwart leader Arjun Munda into the Central Cabinet; performed poorly not only in Lok Sabha elections but also in Assembly elections. The performance went from bad to worse in Assembly elections. This makes it obvious that BJP as a political party failed to learn the dynamics of electoral politics in the country as well as in particular states especially from its past experiences. It is here that the BJP as a national political party has more to learn, especially when the incumbency factors are working against.

The overall impact of Lok Sabha elections in the state of Jharkhand was that an erstwhile 'working government' won a 'massive majority', all at the cost of BJP and its campaign strategy. Competitive populism was at its peak and the development discourse was conspicuously missing from the entire campaign strategy of the political parties. This is a dangerous sign for democracy and reveals the sagging ethos of democratic processes and electoral processes within democracy especially when India boasts itself of being the largest democracy on earth as well as mother of all democracies. 2024 electoral process will continue to be an excellent learning lab for national political parties in future.

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