

JMM and State Politics in Jharkhand

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Abstract

The very first article of the constitution of India states that India will be a union of states. The States Reorganization Act 1956 was passed in August 1956 and enacted in November 1956. The Act came following the recommendations of Fazal Ali Commission to redraw the boundaries of Indian states and union territories. The prime motive of the Act was to promote national unity and integration by accommodating the regional aspirations. The Act created 14 states and six union territories abolishing the previous classification of states in A,B,C, and D. But, due to the vast cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity of the nation, the Afzal Ali Commission could not respond to all regional aspirations. The demand to create a separate state of Jharkhand bifurcating Bihar was one of them.

Key words : tribal communities, Natives, sadaans, marang gomke , abua raaj, regional aspirations, mahajani system, moneylenders, rehabilitation of the displaced, reorganization of states, jharkhand party, merger with congress, dishom guru, JAAC

Introduction

Bihar being a large state had geographical, linguistic and cultural diversities. The southern part of the state was mainly inhabited by the tribal communities and the Sadans; the natives of the region having linguistic, cultural and ethnic differences from the rest of the state. Geographically too, being the plateau region full of forests, trees and bushes, but abundant in natural resources, shows a remarkable difference from the rest of Bihar. The people of the region complained of discrimination in development and opportunities as well as negligence and exploitation. These factors gave rise to the demand for a state separate from Bihar during the pre-independence era named as Jharkhand; the land of the trees and bushes. The demand at first came from the tribal organisations mainly Adivasi Mahasabha led by Jaipal Singh Munda, a highly educated tribal stalwart, an Olympian turned politician who later came to be known as Marang Gomke and also served as a member of the Constituent Assembly of India. Soon, the demand for separate statehood became a strong voice and the first phase of the Jharkhand movement began. After independence, the said Adivasi Mahasabha was renamed as Jharkhand Party opening its doors to the people of all communities. The Jharkhand party not only gave momentum to the demand for creation of a separate state but also gained wide popularity in the present Jharkhand region that is evident from its huge electoral success in 1952, 1957 and 1962 Bihar state Assembly elections. The rise of the Jharkhand Party and Marang Gomke strengthened the foundations of the Jharkhand movement. When the need for reorganization of the Indian states was felt and Afzal Ali Commission was constituted in order to give recommendations for this purpose, it came to Ranchi as well and was welcomed with the slogans of Jai Jharkhand. But, it could not influence the commission and the dream of a separate Jharkhand state remained unfulfilled. The first phase of Jharkhand movement though strong and deep rooted brought electoral success to the Jharkhand Party but the ultimate goal of separate state remained miles away. It brought disappointment to the leaders and supporters of the movement. But, the ultimate manifestation of this disappointment came in the form of the merger of the Jharkhand Party into the Indian National Congress in 1963.



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This merger was unexpected, controversial and thought to be spearheaded by Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Munda who later became a minister in the Bihar government. It also brought an abrupt end to the first phase of the Jharkhand movement. Many splinter groups were formed to continue the movement but the key outcome of this merger was the foundation of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) in 1973 which played a significant role in the Jharkhand movement and later in the state politics of Jharkhand.

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) has been an influential force in the present Jharkhand region right from its birth in early 1970s. Shibu Soren, a youthful leader with a fighting spirit and an enthusiasm to fight for the cause of the tribals and natives of this region joined hands with Binod Bihari Mahto and A. K. Roy to form Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and lead the ongoing Jharkhand movement which at the time showed a kind of stand still, a vacuum after the merger of the Jharkhand Party into the Congress Party and demise of tribal stalwart known as Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Munda. After about three decades of stormy journey, the movement for a Separate Jharkhand state was at cross roads and urgently needed a strong and influential leadership for momentum, acceleration and direction. The silence in the Jharkhand movement was off and on broken by some fractions of erstwhile Jharkhand Party but, since their reach was limited, they could not bring a great change in the scenario. Shibu Soren, with the help and support of his companions, came forward and took the reins of the Jharkhand movement in his hands. It was in fact a kind of transition not only in the ongoing movement for a separate state but also in the regional politics.

JMM and Jharkhand Movement

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha gradually spread its influence among the tribal and native people by touching their basic issues like abolition of Mahajani system, rehabilitation of the displaced natives and recruitment of the local people in the local factories and industries as well as struggle to bring back tribal's right over their lands lost in the hands of moneylenders cunningly. Amid these issues, formation of a separate state was a prime agenda of the JMM. Its leaders convinced the masses that solution of all their problems lie in the formation of a separate state Jharkhand. Gradually, JMM extended its influence and strengthened its roots among the masses, especially the poor and the oppressed. Processions and demonstrations for separate statehood stormed the region. The JMM also joined electoral politics. In 1980 midterm elections, Shibu Soren won the Lok Sabha seat and became a member of parliament. The party also entered in Bihar legislative Assembly which continued in the coming elections as well. Shibu Soren won the Lok Sabha elections in 1989, 1991 and 1996 before the formation of Jharkhand as a separate state. In this way, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha became the most influential regional political party and leader of Jharkhand movement.

The JMM played a major role in the programs of Jharkhand Coordination Committee formed in the year 1986 by Dr Ram Dayal Munda and B.P. Kesari. In the year 1989, Many JMM members of Bihar Legislative Assembly resigned from their seats in order to emphasize the demand for separate Statehood. The six-day long economic blockade called by JMM showed the intensity of the demand and the then central government formed a twenty four member committee headed by BS Lali who was the then joint secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs. The committee was given the responsibility to study all aspects of the problem and give its suggestions. It recommended the formation of Jharkhand Autonomous Council but the JMM was adamant on its demand for a separate State and rejected the proposal for JAC. Though, later, the JMM demanded at least union territory status for the time being. Economic blockades, and demonstrations became a part of life in the Jharkhand region. The political scenario at the national level also changed dramatically in 1990s. Finally on 9th of August 1995, Jharkhand Area Autonomous Council was inaugurated with Shibu Soren as its Chairman and Suraj Mandal as the Deputy Chairman. The formation of JAAC is considered to be a major and significant step towards the formation of a separate Jharkhand state. Thus, it is evident that since the 1980s, JMM had become the most influential force in the Jharkhand movement and regional politics.

Impact of JMM in State Politics of Jharkhand

Formation of Jharkhand Area Autonomous Council could not halt the demand for a separate state. Amidst the rapidly changing circumstances, the central government finally brought the bill for the reorganization of Bihar and formation of a separate state Jharkhand which came into existence on 15th November 2000. To grab the power in the newly built state, a fierce struggle began behind the curtains. JMM headed by Shibu Soren wanted to take the reins of the new state on the basis of its role played in the Jharkhand movement but the game of numbers didn't favour him. Ultimately, Shibu remained the CM-in Waiting while BJP formed the first government in the state headed by Babu Lal Marandi. Shibu Soren had to wait for almost five years before he was sworn in as the chief minister of Jharkhand in 2005. But it lasted for ten days only. Again in 2008, he came into power for a short span of time. During 2009-10, Shibu remained in power for about six months. In this way, Shibu Soren popularly known as the Dishom Guru was sworn in as the chief minister of Jharkhand thrice but only for short spans of time.

Electoral Elevation of JMM

JMM had twelve members in the newly constituted Jharkhand Legislative Assembly. Grabbing power off and on for short periods of time, the JMM mostly sat on the opposition benches for almost two decades. Meanwhile, it kept elevating its tally in successive Assembly elections. In 2005 Assembly elections, it elevated its numbers to 17 from 12. It added one more in the 2009 and 2014 elections each. After the 2009 elections, the JMM joined hands with National

Democratic Alliance and Hemant Soren, the son and political heir of Shibu Soren became the Deputy Chief Minister of Jharkhand. Later, in 2013, the alliance with NDA came to an end and Hemant formed his own government allying with the United Progressive Alliance. The Bhartiya Janata Party was the biggest challenge before the JMM and it needed a clear mandate for which it tried its best to strengthen its position in the tribal and native people of Jharkhand. But, 2014 assembly elections brought despair for the party as Raghuwar Das was crowned as the chief minister of the BJP led NDA government. Finally, after around two decades since the formation of Jharkhand, in 2019 assembly elections, the Hemant Soren led JMM grabbing the highest ever seats formed the government allying with UPA. By now, Hemant Soren had established himself as the new generation leader of the party. Shibu was no longer active in regular political affairs of the party.

Also, It was the first coronation of Hemant Soren as the leader of the single largest party in the House and of a strong coalition with the Congress party and others. The beginning of the government was overloaded with great expectations. Slogans like Abua Raaj were made popular and such an atmosphere was created that the JMM led government is going to bring about a great change in the socio-economic scenario of Jharkhand. The essence of the atmosphere was deliberately made in such a way that it would work for the real upliftment of the natives and the tribal population of the state. It was backed by the role played by JMM in the Jharkhand movement. By this time, JMM had undergone a transition in power. As mentioned earlier, the veteran stalwart and face of the Jharkhand movement Shibu Soren had gradually distanced himself from active politics and Hemant Soren had, without any significant resistance in Soren family and party had established himself as the heir to Shibu Soren. His leadership was seen to be pro- tribal, native and minority. It was evident with the results of the 2019 elections. His coronation as the chief minister of Jharkhand was in fact the result of a long and hard struggle of almost two decades. The JMM had gradually and successfully penetrated into different electoral and political belts and sections of the state ensuring a hard earned victory in the assembly elections in an year that had already witnessed the second consecutive and tremendous victory of NDA in the parliamentary elections. Meanwhile, the sudden outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 and its continuation in 2021 posed great challenges before not only the people but also the governments. Its immediate effect was painful, miserable and shocking but its management and long term effects on society and economy were not less concerning and alarming. Things began to return to normalcy only during late 2022. JMM led alliance government was successful in winning the trust of the people again in 2024 assembly elections when JMM grabbed the highest number of seats in its history. The second consecutive term given to JMM led alliance shows its impact in state Politics of Jharkhand. In fact, the last and final phase of Jharkhand movement was identified with JMM, mainly Shibu Soren who was acceptable and loved by the masses even in the remote rural areas of the state. That is why, any study of the electoral and political scenario of Jharkhand is incomplete without JMM. The state politics in Jharkhand has two different power hubs. The UPA with JMM as the major partner with influential allies like Congress and RJD and the NDA with BJP as the major partner allying with AJSU. The political power of the JMM mainly comes from its traditional tribal belts and support from minority communities. The BJP with its strong line of tribal leadership has been trying to dominate these tribal belts and has succeeded in its efforts to some extent but so far the JMM has preserved and sometimes regained its influence and dominance in tribal belts. When allying with UPA, the support from minority communities has been an added advantage for the party as the UPA umbrella provides an ideological clarity to the party. Thus it can be said that the JMM is at present riding brightest chariot of electoral and political success in its journey of more than five decades. No doubt the JMM has crossed many milestones in its journey of about five decades yet, the road ahead is full of challenges and hardships. In fact, the JMM has never been able to secure an absolute majority on its own in 81 member Jharkhand Legislative Assembly. It has to rely on its allies to form and run the government. It has a strong coalition with the Indian National Congress and Rashtriya Janata Dal along with left parties. On the other hand, the Bhartiya Janata Party led NDA has a strong ideological base and support mainly in urban areas of the state which leaves no stone unturned in criticizing and questioning the public policies of the government. Development, poverty alleviation, rehabilitation and social security are major challenges before the government. Jharkhand needs solid infrastructural development coupled with development in permanent sources of income generation for the people. Pucca housing facilities, electricity, educational and medical facilities should also be taken care of. The schemes like Maiya Samman Yojna and two hundred units of free electricity per month have certainly increased the popularity of the JMM led alliance government but at the same time have increased the burden on the state exchequer. To gain the long term trust of the people, basic and grassroot development strategies must be followed.

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