



## CAUSALITY OF 'EMBEDDED AUTONOMY' AND 'ECONOMIC GROWTH' IN BIHAR: THE REGIME OF NITISH KUMAR

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### ABSTRACT

*Conceptualizing state distinct from society and the political system and drawing clear cut boundary between them does not explain much the particular trajectory of state's role in economic growth, however 'master' the concept be. Peter Evans' thesis of 'embedded autonomy' understands embeddedness and autonomy in its instrumental way and hence separates state from its society. It, then, becomes very difficult to understand a society with phenomenal economic growth in the absence of appropriate permuted level of embeddedness and autonomy of state, particularly Bihar.*

**KEYWORDS :** *Embedded Autonomy, Economic Growth, State, state-capacity.*

### INTRODUCTION

The essay intends to enquire the causal relation between two dependent variables, namely, 'embedded autonomy' and 'economic growth'. In lieu of this, essay is structured in three sections followed by conclusion. The first section presents a brief overview of literature on developmental state and its object of study 'economic growth'. In doing this, it also discusses the Peter Evans' thesis of 'embedded autonomy' and its causality with 'economic growth'. Since the essay intends to enquire the causal connection between 'embedded autonomy' and 'economic growth', it chooses Bihar (India) as a field of enquiry. The second section would try to justify the selection of Bihar, particularly the period 2005-13, as a field of enquiry to cross-check the applicability of causality between 'embedded autonomy' and 'economic growth'. The third section would try to place Bihar in its socio-political and economic demography, historically, to understand two important questions: a). Does Bihar (2005-13) establish causality between 'embedded autonomy' and 'economic growth'? b). and if no, then, how to understand Bihar's phenomenal economic growth during the period 2005-13? The final section would present some possible explanations/methodology to understand Bihar economic growth. Since the essay intends only to enquire the explanatory potential of concept i.e. embedded autonomy to understand Bihar's economic achievements during the period 2005-13, it will not end with detailed explanations behind Bihar's economic success; rather the essay would conclude with, only, the possible explanations for the same.

I

Post-second world war period saw the resurgence of neo-liberal perspective in development studies. Since late 1960s to early 1970s neo-liberalism remained the dominant theme in development studies and understandings. They primarily argued against state subsidies as it burdened economy and state interference in economic growth [Craig and Porter, 2006]. They argued for minimal state intervention and related it with higher economic growth by citing the examples of phenomenal economic growth of East-Asian countries. Several scholars, in 1990s, attacked the neo-liberals' narrow interpretation of East-Asian contexts. They re-interpreted the success story of East-Asian contexts and came to the conclusion that

economic growth and industrialization, in these countries, can be completely understood only if one takes the framework of market-state synergy i.e. where state shapes the functional direction and configuration of markets [Johnson, 1982; Amsden, 1989; Devo, 1987 and Wade, 1990]. These theorists understood state 'autonomous' form society and state having 'capacity' to shape society. State's role in efficient and effective dealing the national and international market forces were understood, not only as important, but as a necessity. In the late decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century debate took a new turn by formulating new epistemic question. The primary question to enquire was 'what kind of state-intervention' [Kohli 1994, p. 1269; and Evans 1995, p. 10], not mere the necessity of state intervention [White and Wade 1988, p. 5] in economic growth and industrialization.

In the study of Japan, during the period 1925-75, Johnson labelled Japan as 'Developmental State' and warned against relating Japan's phenomenal economic growth with its set of cultural events, and pushed for conceptualizing Japan through specific events in its history. He attacked neo-liberal understanding of Japan's success which overemphasized the role of market. He did not see market existing in isolation, apart from state, state-directed politics or politics *per se*. He argued for understanding the autonomous role of state in shaping the direction of market and hence, the directional growth of Japan's economy. To him, the combination of effective and meritocratic bureaucracy in the absence of strong civil and political interests made Japan a capable state to achieve its developmental goals/policies [Johnson, 1982]. Wade, through his study of S. Korea and Taiwan, established the explanatory, though partially, role of market or market-mechanism in understanding Japan's success; even though he agreed with Johnson's thesis i.e. Japan's phenomenal growth cannot be completely understood with the help of neo-liberal approach of free-market principle [Wade 1990, p.8]. He focussed on the epistemic question of, not, who allocates rather how allocation takes place under the interactive force of market-state synergy [Wade, 1990]. Amsden adopted an historical approach to understand the economic success story of S. Korea which progressed much higher and faster than Japan. She extends Johnson's work and comes to the conclusion that it is not the 'self-innovation' by S. Korea rather its attempt and intention to learn from the past-failure or the previous innovation which explains the case of S. Korea [Amsden 1982, p. 8]. Dual strategy of the S. Korean state, she thinks, i.e. granting subsidies as well as disciplining business explains the success of S. Korea than other Global South countries [Amsden 1989, p. 382]. Devo takes politico-institutional analysis, and avoids historical ones, of East-Asian countries to enquire the role of politico-institutional arrangements in formulating and implementing, effectively, the strategic industrial policies. He makes a distinction between political and institutional basis [Devo 1987, p. 19] of state in industrial transformation and comes to the conclusion that both of these are important for a state to become developmental.

In brief, it could be argued that outcomes of a developmental state are conditional to internal as well as external factors, and also the layered interaction of internal and external factors. Peter Evans, in his work, accepted the conditional dependence of developmental outcome of a country over: state's ties with dominant's interests of society, nature, form and structure of state and its bureaucracy [Evans, 1989]. If conditional dependence of state over society is truth then, how come a state become developmental and produce developmental outcome? To come out of this situation Evans proposed the conceptual framework of 'Embedded Autonomy' that a state must have to become developmental. 'Autonomy' and 'embeddedness', both aspects, requires state to function in particular way to produce developmental outcome. Evans' position corresponds with Johnson's position about state-capacity an important variable [Evans 1995, pp. 70-80] to make state developmental. Both saw the importance of rational and meritocratic bureaucracy in developmental state. Evans' does not think that replication of East-Asian models to other Global South countries would be fruitful [Evans 1995, pp. 39-40]. Each state could develop its own sense and structure or models of how to become developmental. Though he emphasized for state to become developmental, but he did not assume that one a state become developmental it will remain developmental always. Evans rightly argued that the status of developmental state is not static; a state may shed the tag of developmental state in due course of time once it deviates from maintaining the sufficient level of

'embedded autonomy' [Evans 1995, pp. 157-158]. Evans thesis is important to understand and explain the developmental trajectories of many countries, but it neglects many important variables which could have equally powerful explanatory role in explaining the developmental success or failures of a state. Leftwich brought the 'political' aspects in understanding and explaining the developmental states. He saw several variables as important constituents to explain developmental states, but saw state and the nature of 'politics' associated with it as an dominant variable to understand the developmental states and its performance [Leftwich 2000]. He did not see the developmental state as the function of its regime type. This brings an important question to be unresolved: how come the representation, effectively, of majority interests would be guaranteed if developmental state is not the function of its regime type? This question became the subject matter of Kohli's thesis. He saw the state as a function of its regime type. He took the historical dimension as a starting point to look into the aspects of some countries becoming more effective in producing developmental outcome, facilitating economic growth and industrialization than others. He saw the colonial legacy as an important explanatory variable to explain the particular direction of state on the path of becoming developmental [Kohli 2004].

In brief, for a state to be developmental and effective, Evans argues, in promoting industrial transformation and economic growth it must have both the elements, namely, 'embeddedness' and 'autonomy'. Autonomy aspect of state-capacity ensures that bureaucrats and office bearers do not use offices for their personal gains. It could be attained by staffing the offices through a highly competitive recruitment procedure and also by offering long-term rewards to staffs to create some sense of commitment and coherence. Autonomy of state would ensure against the fall of state into the hand of bourgeoisie. Embeddedness aspect helps state to establish the continuous negotiation of goals and policies and their channelization. Evans is not interested to tell us how much embeddedness and how much autonomy a state should require becoming developmental. To him, this question can only be answered in particular contexts and hence the requirement of particular level of embeddedness and autonomy would vary from state to state. SudhaPai, in her reading of Madhya Pradesh under the chief minister Digvijay Singh, has shown the similar interests with the embeddedness aspects of state. She argues that how the over-embeddedness of state into society stopped Madhya Pradesh to become developmental despite the sincere efforts taken by state leadership. She comes to the conclusion that in a situation of weak state (India) in a strong society it becomes difficult to act against the dominant social forces, even though the intention of state is at its best level [Pai, 2010]. Francine Frankel echoes with Pai's conclusion [Frankel, 1978].

'Embedded Autonomy', in Evans work, requires one important conceptual variable to be well understood i.e. 'state-capacity'. It could be safely argued that, for Evans, 'embedded-autonomy' is the function of state-capacity. It requires us, further, to understand the notion(s) of state in Evans' thesis of embedded-autonomy. Let us, firstly, explain the intellectual contexts in which Evans' work took shape. 1950s and 1960s were the period of behavioural revolution in American political science. Academic discourses were dominated by the powerful framework of David Easton and Gabriel Almond i.e. 'input-output' model and 'structural-functional' model respectively. They preferred 'political system' over 'state' as an object of enquiry. They thought that the concept of state is not conceptually clear and its vagueness hampers theorists to fully understand the 'political processes'. These theorists started focussing on political system but it did not solve the problems which it intended, rather it brought the complete set of complications in their methodology. Their approach distinguished 'political' from wider social environment. It is this intellectual context in which political scientists argued for bringing the state back in [Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol, 1985]. These theorists, while arguing for bringing 'state' back in as an object of enquiry, advocated Weberian concept of the state as an 'actual organization'. This notion of state has unique conceptual perimeter as state is not identical to the 'political system' and it is also clearly distinct from 'society'. It assumed that edges of the state are 'certain', 'fixed' and societal elements do not penetrate into the state. It led to the further assumption that there exists a clear-cut boundary between state and society.

This particular notion of state, more or less, also got reflected in Evans' later work a decade later [Evans, 1995]. Evans' thesis of 'embedded autonomy' assumed embeddedness and autonomy in its instrumental form and this gave rise to a narrower conception of state, mere, as a policy-making actor. Evans' thesis, also, does another problematic presumption i.e. state is neutral arbiter of people's interests and it has unified and consistent intentionality. Whereas, in practice, state-officials/functionaries often compete with each other [Miliband, 1969] and boundary between state and society is difficult to determine, hence, blur and fluid [Fuller and Benei, 2001; Pai, 2010; Brass, 1994; Gupta, 1995; Vanaik, 1990].

If boundary between state and society is the practical truth, but still, few states achieve higher economic growth than others; then, what are the competing reasons for the same? What explains the phenomenal economic growth of Bihar (India), in the period 2005-13, in the absence of state-autonomy and too much embeddedness of state into society?

Problem with the above discussed literatures is that all formulate one master concept i.e. embedded-autonomy, state-capacity, state-intention or synergy of state and society; and try to conceptualise state and its intentions through the master concept. Problems one encounter is that it fails to explain the phenomenon at local levels. This is the reason why a single concept will be failed to understand the particular economic trajectory taken by Bihar in the period 2005-13. I will, though, concentrate on one single master concept i.e. 'embedded autonomy' and would speculate about the explanatory potential of this concept in understanding Bihar's phenomenal economic growth during the period 2005-13. It will be followed by the possible methodology which could help us to understand Bihar.

## II

My aim, in the paper, is to enquire whether 'embedded autonomy' as an explanatory variable has anything to say about Bihar's phenomenal economic growth during Nitish Kumar regime (2005-2013). Evans intends to understand the role of 'state' in promoting or hindering industrialization in developing countries [Evans, 1995]. Several scholars have understood Evans' notion of state in the form of sovereignty and territoriality. This is the prime reason why scholars have criticized Evans for selecting Kerala (India) as a field of study, since Kerala is not the sovereign state. Points concerning the generalization of the case of India through Kerala's experience have been heavily criticized by scholars and, truly, an agreement has reached about methodological fallacy in generalization from one particular experience. Scholars have assumed that Evans conceptualized 'state' as a sovereign body and, hence, any attempt to enquire the full or partial applicability of Evans' thesis in federal framework (where, power or decision-making is shared between centre and provinces) and choosing 'provinces' as an autonomous object of study is itself a methodological injustice to Evans' intentions. Since I have chosen the state of 'Bihar' (India) as an object of study to enquire the applicability of embedded-autonomy to the phenomenon of economic growth in Bihar, this criticism also assumes to apply to my approach. I would like to convince in the next paragraph, with the help of some points, why the above criticism has no methodological sound base and why is it not even against the Evans' broader framework.

Evans, though, takes Weberian concept of state – as an 'actual organization', he does not take 'territoriality' as a defining feature of his conception of state as a 'policy-making actor'. Weber understood modern state as a system of administrative and legal order which

...claims binding authority, not only over the members of the state, the citizens...but also over to a very large extent, over all action taking place in the area of its jurisdiction" (Weber 1964, p. 156)

Thus, for Weber, territoriality is the important aspect of modern state. Since Evans' concern is industrial transformation and hence economic growth in developing countries (and for which 'embeddedness' and 'autonomy' are important explanatory variables), nowhere he says or seems to take the position that embedded autonomy is the function of territorial sovereignty. Embedded autonomy, for Evans, is related to state's capacity to make decisions and their enforcement. Since, decision-making and its enforcement can be shared within a political community; embedded autonomy of state cannot be the

exhaustive functionality of territorial sovereignty. Its applicability can be extended to the actual domains of decision-making.

Now, the new question comes is: has the decentralization of economic decision making taken place in India? What is the respective position of states in India, particularly the Bihar, as far as the sharing of economic decision-making between centre and states is concerned? 1990s is very important for India as it saw the beginning of an era of liberalization of the Indian economy. India, in 1990s, saw the gradual shift of its economy from Nehruvian 'Command Economy' to the 'Federal Market Economy'. Share of economic sovereignty between centre and states got tilted towards the latter in the era of liberalization. The new era provided greater agency to states to transform their situations as they think fit. Private investment became the major source of economic growth by replacing the spaces earlier captured by public investment. Private investors have developed a lot of interests in the domain of state and see state as the prime arena for private investment. State chief ministers are becoming very important in economic decision making. They directly welcome foreign investors and statesman. National and International media, in print as well as electronic form, directly covers the episode of state chief ministers and place it on the covers of magazine, newspapers and editorials. There are competitions, now, among states for attracting foreign as well as domestic private investment. Chief Ministers and their functionaries, particularly finance secretaries, often tours foreign countries in search of investors. The previous role and image of Union government as interventionist, planner of command economy and the endorser of permit-license regime are changing. In its new role, union government is supposed to facilitate the functioning of markets by ensuring transparency and accountability in the structures governing the markets. Regulation of federal market economy has become the prime concern of union government. It does not mean to say, in its new role as the regulator of market, that centre is providing more spaces for economic decisions to states. The Centre, through its attempt to place budget constraints on states, and the domestic and international credit-rating agencies have tried to curtail the decentralization of economic decision-making at the more practical level. In brief, conditionality (in all its forms i.e. political and economic) exerted by Centre over states have hampered state's attempt to realize, fully, the fruits of decentralization of economic decision-making.

Centre's attempt to take its new role as 'regulator' over 'interventionist' but still pushing conditionality over states, can incline us to assume that states are placed under similar conditionality of Centre. If all states are placed under similar conditionality of Centre, but still some states achieve higher economic growth than others; what are the competing explanations for the same? Is the explanatory variable 'embedded autonomy'? One important objection to our assumption will be that all states are not placed under similar conditionality of the Centre if we take the actual application of supposed conditionality seriously. If the same political party rules Centre as well as state or the party which rules at state is the coalition partner at Centre experience relatively less levels of conditionality than the other states. This objection, though very important but, strengthen my rationale of selecting Bihar as the field to enquire the applicability of Evans' thesis of 'embedded autonomy'. The period 2005-13 saw the different ruling party at the Centre and the Bihar. During this period Bihar was ruled by Janta Dal (United) under the coalition of Congress' (INC) arch-rival BhartiyaJanta Party (BJP) and the Centre was ruled by INC under the coalition United Progressive Alliance (UPA). With the previous logic, Bihar should have been placed under higher level of conditionality than the other INC or its partners' ruled states. This bring another important question: why did the Bihar achieve phenomenal economic growth than the other states, during the period 2005-13, even though it was supposed to placed under higher levels of conditionality of Centre? Can this phenomenon be explained through the framework of 'embedded autonomy'?

### III

Bihar, as per 2011 census, constitutes 8.57% of total population of India<sup>1</sup>. Large percentage of Bihar's population is illiterate<sup>2</sup>. Over 75% population of Bihar get their livelihood in agricultural and allied

<sup>1</sup> Census of India 2011, provisional population Totals.

<sup>2</sup> Census 2011

sector, but still the conditions of these sectors are not in good position<sup>3</sup>. Operational landholdings in Bihar are very worst as far as its distributive patterns are concerned<sup>4</sup>. Table 1 shows the relation between size classes of cultivated land with the major social groupings in Bihar<sup>5</sup>. About 46% of the rural household of Bihar, in 2003-04, were cultivating less than .001 hectare land. Land size of > .001 hectare but < 1 hectare was cultivated by 38.3% of the rural households of Bihar. Rest of the households i.e. 14.8% cultivated more than 1 hectare land each<sup>6</sup>.

People living below poverty line (BPL) were estimated, in Bihar, about 42% which is much higher than the country average of 28%<sup>7</sup>.

Politics in Bihar is seen as revolving around caste. Major political parties are seen as permuting caste combinations as part of their electoral strategy to influence voting in their favor. It is true for all the periods of Bihar since independence i.e. pre-Laloo, Laloo and post-Laloo period. It reflected in the disproportional representation of MLAs as per social profile in the Bihar legislative assembly<sup>8</sup>. Since the victory of JDU-BJP coalition in Bihar, in 2010, it is speculated that politics of identity is being replaced by politics of development and inclusive growth. It will be very simplistic to assume the transition of voting behavior in linear direction, rather a complex set of relations are being created between caste and development to influence voting behavior. If we concentrate on the shift in the core constituency vote of the major political parties and their coalitions from 2000-2005, we can find that RashtriyaJanta Dal (RJD) experienced the shift in its core constituency vote i.e. Yadavs. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) [NDA = JD(U) + BJP], on the other hand, consolidated its core constituency vote and in fact also benefited from support that it received from other voters. To say that people rose above the cast and voted for development would be an incomplete assessment because if we take a look at the figures, majority of the Yadavs still voted for the RJD and majority of the upper castes for the NDA. The RJD was voted out of power not just because of overwhelming desire for development or governance but also due to a shift in the caste alliance. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that while the caste-community coalition that used to vote for RJD still existed, the bond has become less compact. The defeat of RJD in 2005, thus, was due to the combined effects of shift of Dalits and Muslims away from RJD and development emerging as a potential issue in the elections, rather than the effect of either alone<sup>9</sup>.

Nitish Kumar tried his hand at creating a completely new social constituency that took into consideration caste loyalties but subsumed it within a larger discourse of development oriented inclusive politics. The intention was to break the back of Laloo's very formidable social coalition. On the other hand, Nitish government identified certain high priority areas that required urgent attention: roads, bridges, home, education, health care and law and order. In 2006, the Bihar secured the conviction of 6,389 offenders, including death sentence for seventeen, life imprisonment for 1,389, ten years or more to 366 and less than ten years to 5,067. In 2007, the number of convictions increased to 9,853. The Nitish Government also started the MMGSY or the Chief Minister's Rural Roads Programme to construct roads to connect habitations with a population of 509-599. Top priority was given to road development ensured that state expenditure on road construction increased from Rs 133 crore in 2004-05 to Rs 2,489 crore in 2008-09. Bihar was among the top ten states spending more than the national average on maintenance of national highways. About 3784 Km of roads was constructed in 2009-10 as opposed to only 384 km in 2004-05. On the other hand Nitish government also created the categories of "Mahadalits" from Dalits and Extremely

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>See, Kumar, Alam and Joshi, 2008. p. 2

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. p. 8

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. pp. 19-26

Backward Castes (EBCs) from Backward Castes (BCs) and followed exclusive policies for the development of these two new set of social groups.

State of economy of Bihar suffered badly during Laloo and Rabri regime but it showed positive signs during the Nitish Kumar regime. The state is largely depended on agricultural and allied sector but it has also the sound service sector and a small industrial sector. Till 2008, agriculture, industry and services constituted 35%, 9% and 55% of the total economy of the state respectively. Manufacturing sector, in Bihar, was in very bad situation as its average growth rate was merely 0.38% compared to India's average of 7.8% in the period 2002-07. Bihar has very disproportionate picture of per capita income in several parts of the state (Patna and some southern parts of Bihar have good picture than the northern Bihar), but still, at the all India level, Bihar has the lowest GDP per capita<sup>10</sup>. Corruption is the major hurdle for state government to lead the state to economic growth<sup>11</sup>. Nitish government adopted and implemented several reforms in economic and social sector and its results can be seen into the positive improvements in the health of economy of Bihar. World Bank, in 2009, ranked Patna (Bihar) the second best city after Delhi to start a business in India. For the period 1999-2008, Bihar's GDP grew at 5.1 a year, which was 2.1% below the Indian average<sup>12</sup>. CSSO, however, in 2010 reported that Bihar's GDP grew by 11.03% a year for the five year period between 2004-05 and 2008-09<sup>13</sup>. During this period Bihar was the second fastest growing economy in India, Just lagging by Gujarat which grew by 11.05% a year for the same period. CSO and NSSO reported that Bihar observed 14.8% growth in factory output in the period 2007-08 which was merely 0.44% less than India's rate<sup>14</sup>.

If, in Bihar, corruption is the major hurdle, state government's policy is not coherent and consistent in its intentions as policy get framed in spheres through the intention of targeting categories, powerful social forces still existed as substantial land reform did not take place and many others; how come Bihar achieved phenomenal economic growth during the regime of Nitish government? Several recent reports claim the reduction of corruption level in Bihar and project the image of Nitish government as who cannot tolerate corrupt officials. But, the fact is that no such report is based on the micro-level studies. No ethnography of corruption has been done in Bihar. People experience corruption in day to day life and too some extent people of Bihar have internalized corruption. There are substantial evidence from local levels and at the intermediate levels that even the new investors cannot do their business efficiently if they do not acknowledge the certain level of corruption in Bihar. Certain level of corruption is important to make Bihar economically running with a healthy rate. In short, there is too less autonomy and too much embeddedness in Bihar as far as state's position and capacity in Bihar is concerned; then why Bihar shows a healthy rate of economic growth if it fall under 'Intermediary state' under Evans' thesis.

#### IV

This section will not give the substantial answers to the question being asked throughout the paper; rather it will try to present some possible explanations for the same. Even in the absence of healthy permutation of embeddedness and autonomy, a state can grow at high economy growth if the conditions of business i.e. law and order is suitable. 'Perception of development' is another important variable which influences economic growth. As the incumbent Nitish won election in 2010, regime was forced to undertake some innovations on development front as people had voted the coalitions under the presumptions that Nitish is the man who can keep Bihar at the apex of development. If we understand state distinct from society and political system, as Evans did, it becomes difficult to understand Bihar's economic story. Bihar has never imagined itself apart from society and the boost or trajectory of economic growth can be only understood with the help of political demography of Bihar. Evans' thesis of 'embedded-autonomy', being

<sup>10</sup>For Bihar, P stands for Patna and Prosperity', *TheFinancial Express*, April 7, 2008.

<sup>11</sup>'Doing Business the hard way in Bihar', *TheFinancial Express*, February 18, 2008.

'CM: Corruption biggest challenge', *The Times of India*, December, 13, 2008.

<sup>12</sup>'Ruled by Lakshmi', *The Economist*, December 11, 2008.

<sup>13</sup>'Bihar grew by 11.03%, next only to Gujarat', *The Times of India*, January 3, 2010.

<sup>14</sup>'Bihar's factory output races to match India's pace', *The Indian Express*, January 21, 2010.

only instrumental as far as state's relation to society is concerned, will be unhelpful to understand Bihar generally and its economy in particular.

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