

Agrarian Transformation, Rise of Backward caste Politics and their Implications for Dalits in Bihar

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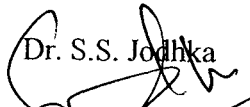
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Caste continues to be an important element of Indian society. It appears and re-appears in different forms.¹ An attempt is made in this work to comprehend the significance of caste in the context of agrarian structure and democratic politics with special reference to Bihar. Perspective on caste is mostly seen in cultural term such as ideology and social institutions. Economy was not seen as an important factor for determining social status and hierarchy. This cultural-centric formulation of caste is reflected in the arguments of a majority of sociologists and social anthropologists. Prominent among them is Dumount's influential interpretation of the institution as a 'structure of ideas'. Srinivas was also criticized for the concept of sanskritisation which is mainly seen in cultural term. Thus, no significant reference to economy was given while interpreting the caste.

On the contrary, agrarian social perspectives are mainly class centric and caste-blind. This is also reflected in the arguments of a majority of social scientists working on the subject. They have confined their analysis mostly in class terms. Whereas, caste is seen either as being irrelevant or dependent on agrarian phenomena. The various debates in the political economy of agriculture have also been seen in the same context. In the context of Bihar, a recent study shows the close links of caste and agrarian structure. It means that the bottom layer of the agrarian structure would be heavily drawn from Dalits and the lower stratum of other backward classes/castes.² Whereas, the upper layer of agrarian structure would be primarily drawn from the upper castes and upper stratum of backward castes.³ In spite of close links of caste and agrarian structure, the picture becomes complex when there is evidence of emergence of a small section of agricultural labourers

¹ Recent controversy on reservation for OBC (Other Backward Classes) in higher educational institution is a case which points towards the importance of caste. The major debates on this issue concentrate on whether caste or class should be the criteria for deprivation.

² See Chakravarti, Anand (2004) pp. 49.

³ Brahmin, Rajput and Bhumihar and Kayastha comprise upper castes. Yadav, Kurmi and Koeri comprise the upper stratum of the Other Backward Classes (OBC). To understand the emergence of upper backward caste in agrarian economy and politics see, Prasad (1991), Blair (1980). Nathan (1996) points that in certain parts of Patna, Nalanda and Rohtas districts (in central Bihar) the zamindars were Kurmis.

from upper castes.⁴ In addition, there is already a sizeable section of agricultural labourers from upper backward castes.

Nevertheless, this kind of formulation of class is not in strict Marxian sense of 'class consciousness'. The Marxian sense of 'class consciousness' is only reflected when we see the agrarian struggle in Bihar where the backward castes and dalit agricultural labourers are in contradiction with the landlords of the upper castes and the rich landowners (kulaks) of the upper backward castes. Apart from the complexities of caste and class which is mainly the result of agrarian change, it is also important to interrogate how the agrarian change is related to politics.⁵

According to Pinch,

"For Kurmi, Yadav and Kushvaha leaders, this would represent a sea-change in Indian political culture, since (the) Kshatriya identity (to which they had aspired) only had meaning in the context of a colonial political system crafted around visions of martial grandeur. In independent India politics would be predicated instead on universal adult suffrage and a commitment to the welfare of the nation's citizenry and would be played out by Indian party politicians seeking Indian votes."⁶

1.1: Conceptualizing Democratic Politics and the Sociology of Caste:

Quite a number of sociologists and political scientists have pointed out the impact of democratic politics on caste. They were of the view that "ascriptive structure" of caste society has tremendous resilience. Instead of completely replacing the closed system of social stratification based on caste into an 'open system' of social stratification based on individual choice and achievement, democratic politics and modern technology could in some ways strengthen caste.

⁴ See for instance, Sharma, A.N. (2005) Singh, Sashi Bhusan (2005).

⁵ On this issue, Harry Blair (1980) pointed out the rise of kulaks and Backward classes in politics. Pradhan P.H. (1991) also argued about the rise of kulaks in north India with some reference to Bihar.

⁶ As quoted by Hauser, pp. 51. *Seminar*, February, 1997.

Commenting on the changing aspect of caste with the rise of non-Brahmin movement in South India, Ghurye had argued that the mobilization against the hierarchy of caste did not necessarily mean the end of caste. These mobilizations give rise to “the feeling of caste solidarity” which could be truly described as “caste patriotism” (Ghurye, 1932: 192). It should be noted that Ghurye was writing about this phenomenon as early as in 1932 which is a reality even today.

M.N. Srinivas, another prominent sociologist, developed this point further in his writings. Commenting on the impact of modern technology and representational politics which were introduced by colonial rulers in India, he argued that caste was experiencing “horizontal consolidation”. He vividly documents the impact of modern technology on caste:

“The increase in horizontal solidarity which occurred with improvement in communications enabled allied jatis living over a wide region to be drawn into the mobility process. Caste associations came into existence in different parts of the country, and each association had as its aim the improvement of the social and economic standing of its caste. Many published journals devoted to caste welfare, collected funds for endowing scholarships and building hostels for students from their respective castes, and undertook programs of reform of caste customs” (Srinivas, 2005: 97-98).

Besides the impact of modern technology on caste, the introduction of representational politics by the British also helped in this process of horizontal consolidation of caste. In this context, Srinivas writes that:

“The policy which the British adopted of giving a certain amount of power to local self governing bodies, and preferences and concessions to backward castes provided new opportunities to castes. In order to be able to take advantage of these opportunities, caste groups, as traditionally understood, entered into alliances with each other to form bigger entities” (Srinivas, 1962: 5).

The above studies of Ghurye (1932) and Srinivas (1962) focused on changing aspects of caste during colonial period. However, this process received a further impetus with the

introduction of democratic politics after India's independence. Srinivas also gave several other concepts among them 'dominant caste', 'vote bank' which are useful in making sense of political process in India. In a similar vein, Dumont too responded to the question of change in caste order. He described this process as change from 'structure' to 'substance'

“.....the transition from a fluid, structural universe in which emphasis is on interdependence and in which there is no privileged level, no firm units, to a universe of improbable blocks, self-sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another, a universe in which the caste appears as a collective *individual* (in the sense we have given to this word), as a substance” (Dumont, 1988: 222, emphasis in original).

Apart from sociologists and social anthropologists, political scientists also interrogated the significance of caste in Indian politics. This was primarily because the emergence of 'caste associations' in different parts of the sub-continent beginning with the late 19th century. While commenting on this phenomenon, Rudolph and Rudolph argued that a caste association was

“.....no longer an ascriptive association in the sense in which caste taken as jati was and is. It has taken on features of voluntary association. Membership in caste association is *not* purely ascriptive; birth in the caste is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for membership. One must also 'join' through some conscious act involving various degrees of identification” (Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967: 33, emphasis in original).

Rajani Kothari, another political scientist, developed his argument on similar lines while talking about caste associations. Caste federation, he argued “once formed on the basis of caste identities go on to acquire non-caste functions, become more flexible in organizations, even begin to accept members and leaders from castes other than those with which it started, stretches out to new regions, and also makes common cause with voluntary organization, interest groups and political parties. In course of time, the federation becomes a distinctly political group” (Kothari, 1970: 21-22). Moreover, in the

process, not only politics gets “caste-ridden”, caste also gets “politicized”. This is not that the ‘politicization of caste’ strengthens the caste system rather it gets eroded and takes a different form.

In addition to Rajni Kothari’s viewpoint, Sudipta Kaviraj points out the vitality of tradition where caste politics is the response to modernity. He points out that the ‘caste groups’ instead of crumbling with historical embarrassment, in fact, adapted themselves surprisingly well to the demands of parliamentary politics’. Their participation in electoral politics also transformed ‘the structural properties of caste in one fundamental aspect; it created a democracy of caste in place of hierarchy’ (Kaviraj, 2000: 103). Number of votes and spatial concentration are more important than ritual status in the competitive electoral politics. Therefore, caste collectivities do not participate as equals even in modern democratic politics as suggested by Kaviraj. This phenomenon is reflected in most of the discourses related to the caste and democratic politics in India.

It would be misleading to say that castes are unequal only in terms of purity and pollution. Caste based inequalities are far more entrenched in everyday social relationship. “The circumstances of birth into a low-ranking caste tend to determine their social and material conditions” (Chakravarti, 2004: 78). Therefore, the political economy of Indian agriculture is also closely tied to caste.

The existing literature on caste and democratic politics are mostly based on the experience of the “backward”, the middle level caste groups. Srinivas formulated the concept of “dominant caste” largely on the basis of these caste groups. Apart from other characteristics or features of dominant castes, the numerical strength of these caste groups makes a strong ‘vote bank’. Therefore, when number of votes matters more than the ritual purity in electoral politics, the participation of these caste groups are more significant than other splintered numerically small castes.

The economic mobility brought to them through land reforms and other measures such as Community Development Programme and Green Revolution greatly helped them to

acquire political power. However, by 1960s within a decade of independence and democratic politics, the “backward” or middle level castes had emerged as important players in regional and state level politics. When we analyse the accommodation politics of Congress, it has been pointed out by many scholars that in some regions, this party was able to accommodate growing aspiration of middle level caste groups.⁷ However, especially in north India, Congress ignored the aspiration of backward castes (Jaffrelot, 2003). This has resulted into an increasing significance of regional politics.

The general election of 1967 is considered a watershed in Indian politics. This was the first time when Congress Party was defeated in many states in the country. Over a period, some caste based regional parties came into existence and effectively challenged the monopolies of upper castes in political arena. Many scholars have documented the rise of backward caste in politics.⁸ However, with the rise of backward caste politics, there is also the rise of autonomous dalit politics especially during the period of 1980s. Although there were some notable spokesperson of dalit rights in pre-independence and post-independence India, prominent among them was Ambedkar. Nevertheless, dalit politics remained confined to some pockets of the country and could not make a significant impact on electoral politics at regional or national politics. There was some kind of manipulation and co-option of dalit leaders. Dalits continued to experience marginality and powerlessness. In fact, some scholars have pointed out that rise of backward caste in democratic system had an adverse effects on Dalits. In addition, in their exploitation backward castes have joined the upper caste. The dominant class among backward castes became more aggressive and despotic against Dalits.⁹

1.2: Focus and Objectives:

Given the ritual sanctioned dominance of upper castes over the rest of the population, upper caste groups controlled most of the power resources. However, their dominance could not remain intact due to the rise of rich peasant among the upper *Shudras*. The

⁷ See for instance Manor 1982; Lele 1989; Weiner 2002.

⁸ See Nayar 1966; Kothari 1970; Frankel and Rao 1989; Brass 1990; Hasan 1998; Kohli 2001.

⁹ For a detailed discussion on this point see Bose, 1985; Kohli, 1990; Chakravarti, 2004.

trend, which is now emerging, is not a single pattern of contradiction between upper castes vs. lower castes. Although, caste remains an important category for analytical purpose, class is even more important for such an exercise. Therefore; both, 'caste' and 'class' categories are used to analyze the changing socio-economic and political situation in Bihar.

In this backdrop of changing realities of caste, class and politics; the aims and objectives of the study are:

- 1) to enquire the structural-historical reasons for the rise of backward caste politics;
- 2) to look at the link between change (or lack of change) and nature of caste-politics;
- 3) to explore the changes related to political power of different caste groups; and
- 4) implications on Dalits due to the rise of backward caste politics.

Based on these stated objectives of the study, following hypotheses are made for empirical test:

- 1) agrarian transformations resulted in the rise of 'kulaks' among backward castes; and
- 2) rise of 'kulaks' has close link with the rise of backward caste politics: and
- 3) these changes adversely affected the Dalits.

Through a broad survey of available secondary source materials, an attempt is made to explore the underlying situation giving rise to such phenomenon. Using a historical perspective, I shall try to identify specificities of the region and focus on diverse strategies adopted by different deprived caste groups to ameliorate their socio-economic and political conditions.

1.3: Overview of the Study:

Chapter 2 gives a socio-economic profile of Bihar. Chapter 3 starts with the debates related to the peasant society in sociology and social anthropology. This debate becomes

relevant in order to have a clear picture of agrarian structure. Further, debates on political economy of Indian agriculture are also presented and the specificities of Bihar is located in this framework. In order to know present agrarian situation of Bihar, historical perspective is taken starting from the Permanent Settlement of 1793. To know the changing aspects of agrarian structure, the major agrarian movements of Bihar are discussed. Most prominent among these is the movement of Bihar Pradesh Kishan Sabha led by Swami Sahajanand Saraswati which ultimately unsettled the Permanent Settlement or zamindari system. After independence, the issues related to land reforms initiated by the state are discussed. The failure of land reform measures has been shown which ultimately benefited the landed gentry of upper castes and gave rise to the 'kulaks' among upper backward castes.

Chapter 4 deals with the rise of backward caste politics in Bihar. This chapter shows the connection between 'rise of kulaks' and backward caste politics. The 'kulak' among backward castes have effectively challenged the monopoly of upper caste in political arena. This has been shown in three phases of the rise of backward caste politics such as elections of 1967, 1977 and 1990s onwards. The Laloo phenomenon during the phase of 1990s has been given prominence.

Chapter 5 deals with the emerging contradiction between backward castes and Dalits which mainly comes into being with the emergence of 'kulaks' among backward castes. It has been shown that upper castes are not only the oppressor of Dalits; the upper layers of backward castes have also become their oppressor. At the same time, poor backward castes are also victimized by upper castes. The result of this contradiction gave rise to the emergence of 'naxalism' and the formation of 'private caste armies'. This study shows that the state always supported the dominant class for the repression of dalits when they organized themselves to claim their social, economic and political rights. They were branded 'naxalites' and murdered with the help of police and private caste armies. Chapter 6 presents the overall conclusion.

Chapter 2: Bihar: An Introduction

Bihar's geographical location on the map of India is in the upper half and slightly to the left. This can be termed as "the heart of India" -- and being the fountainhead of its history. Precious little is known about the state's remote past. The point of departure for most recent historiographic expedition into Bihar's past has been the Magadhan empires.¹⁰

In the context of religion, Bihar has been the reverent place of three of the six major religions in India i.e. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.¹¹ Bakhtiyar Khilji invaded it in 1197 consequently leading to new ruler, Delhi Sultans in 1497.¹² In 1765, the British took over Bihar and merged it with Bengal. In December 1911, Bihar and Orissa were separated from Bengal but in 1912, Bihar state was formed.¹³ Orissa separated from Bihar on 1st April, 1936 under the government of India act, 1935 as an independent separate state and the province of Bihar came into being as an administrative unit of British India. The British rule in Bihar was marked by numerous revolts and struggles.¹⁴ The most prominent was Gandhi's Champaran struggle.¹⁵

¹⁰ See Das, A.N. (1992): *The Republic of Bihar*. New Delhi: Penguin Books (1992). Pp. 18.

¹¹ It was in Bihar that Prince Gautam attained enlightenment in the year 528 B.C. and became Buddha and the great religion of Buddhism was born. This place is at the present Bodh Gaya which is a town in Central Bihar. Lord Mahavira, the founder of another great religion, Jainism was born and attained nirvana (death) here. It is located at Pawapuri which is towards the south east of Patna. The tenth and the last Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh born and attained sainthood in Bihar. A majestic Gurudwara has been built to commemorate his memory. It is known as Harmandir located in eastern Patna. Known reverentially as Patna Sahib, it is one of the holiest places of worship (*Takht*) for Sikhs.

¹² It was Akbar, the great Mughal emperor, who during 1575-76 annexed Bihar and Bengal to his empire and gave Bihar a stable administration making it a part of Bengal. However, with the decline of Mughal Empire, Bihar passed into the hands of Nawabs of Bengal.

¹³ During most of the time in British India, Bihar was part of the Presidency of Bengal, and was governed from Calcutta. So such, this was a territory very much dominated by the people of Bengal. This was very much resented by the Biharis and they launched their own "Bihar for Biharis" movement whose prominent leader was Sachidanand Sinha. On this issue see, Das, A.N. (1992), pp. 29-30.

¹⁴ The most prominent revolts against the British were Santhal Pargana revolt of 1781-82, the Ho agitation of 1820-21, Kol agitation of 1831-33, etc. All these revolts were finally shaped into the revolt of 1857 led by Kunwar Singh (landlord from Ara, Bihar). This was the beginning of national freedom movement in India.

¹⁵ Due to the request of Raj Kumar Shukla from the district of Champaran, in 1917 Gandhi came to Motihari, the district headquarters of Champaran for Indigo movement.

After independence in 1947, erstwhile Bihar province formed the state of Bihar as a part of republic of India. On 14th November 2000, the southern half of Bihar became the state of Jharkhand. Bihar lost approximately 45% of its territory and the rich mineral resources of its southern part to the new state of Jharkhand.

At present, the total area of state is 94163sq.km. Out of which rural area is 92358 sq. km. and urban area covers 1805 sq. km. only. The population density is 800 persons per sq. k.m. It is heavily inclined towards the urban areas i.e. 809 persons per sq. km. In rural areas it stands at 803 persons per sq. km. Average size of agricultural operational holdings is 0.93 hectares whereas the national average is 1.57 hectares ('Ravi,'2004:20-21). Various developmental indicators of Bihar in terms of demography, income, education and health are shown in Table 2.1 at next page.

Table 2.1: Bihar - Human Development Fact Sheet

S.No.	Indices	State	India
1.	Human Development Index Value 2001(calculated only for fifteen major states)	0.367	0.472
2.	Human Development Index Rank 2001 (out of 15)	15	
3.	Human Development Index Value 1991	0.308	0.381
4.	Human Development Index Rank (out of 32)	32	
5.	Human Poverty Index 1991	52.34	39.36
6.	Human Poverty Index Rank (out of 32)	32	
7.	Gender Disparity Index Value 1991	0.469	0.676
8.	Gender Disparity Index Rank (out of 32)	32	
Indicators			
Demography			
S.No.	Indicators	State	India
1.	Total Population – 2001	82,878,796	1,027,015,247
2.	Sex Ratio – 2001	921	933
3.	Dependency Ratio -1991	12	12
4.	Dependency Ratio Rural – 1991	13	13
5.	Dependency Ratio Urban – 1991	9	10
6.	Sex Ratio Children 0-6 years – 2001	938	927
Income			
7.	Per Capita Net State Domestic Product (at 1993-94 prices, Rs.), 1998-99	4,397	9,647
8.	Percentage of Persons in Labour Force, 1999-2000	57	62
9.	Percentage of Female in Labour Force, 1999-2000	26	39
10.	Percentage of Population Below Poverty Line - 1999-2000	43	26
Education			
11.	Literacy Rate - 2001 (%)	48	65
12.	Male Literacy Rate - 2001 (%)	60	76
13.	Female Literacy Rate - 2001 (%)	34	54
14.	Rural Literacy Rate - 2001 (%)	44	59
15.	Rural Male Literacy Rate - 2001 (%)	58	71
16.	Rural Female Literacy Rate - 2001 (%)	30	47
17.	Urban Literacy Rate - 2001 (%)	73	80
18.	Urban Male Literacy Rate - 2001 (%)	81	86
19.	Urban Female Literacy Rate - 2001 (%)	63	73
20.	Gross Enrolment Ratio Class I-V (6-11 years),1999-2000	79	95
21.	Boys-Gross Enrolment Ratio Class I-V (6-11 years), 1999-2000	95	104
22.	Girls -Gross Enrolment Ratio Class I-V (6-11 years), 1999-2000	61	85
23.	Teacher-Pupil ratio (Primary School), 1999-2000	63	43
Health			
24.	Life Expectancy at Birth, 1992-96 (yrs.)	59	61
25.	Life Expectancy at Birth (Rural), 1992-96 (yrs.)	59	59
26.	Life Expectancy at Birth (Urban), 1992-96 (yrs.)	66	66
27.	Infant Mortality Rate – 2000	62	68
28.	Under 5 Mortality Rate – 1991	89	94
29.	Under 5 Mortality Rate - Male -1991	75	91
30.	Under 5 Mortality Rate - Female -1991	104	101
31.	Maternal Mortality Rate - 1998 (per 100,000 live births)	452	407
32.	Total Fertility Rate – 1998	4	3
33.	Percentage of children underweight (-2SD), 1998-99	54	47
34.	Percentage of houses with access to safe drinking water – 1991	59	62
35.	Percentage of houses with access to toilet facilities – 1997	58	49
Environment			
36.	Percentage of Recorded Forest Area to Total Geographical Area-1996-98	17	23

Web Address: <http://www.undp.org.in/Programme/undpini/factsheet/bihar.pdf>

Social Structure

The present study has analysed the social structure of Bihar in both categories of caste and class. Accepting the fact that these two categories overlap each other largely. Although over a period, there is a disjunction between caste and class. This would be evident in the course of discussion.

If one looks at the social structure in terms of caste, then Bihar (as the case with India) is characterized by a rigid caste order.¹⁶ In ritual domain, brahmins stands first, Rajput, bhumihars and the kayastha follow the hierarchy. The above caste groups are called as the upper castes that played decisive role in economic and political sphere of Bihar. They are also the major landowners in Bihar. Most prominent among the land owning castes are rajputs and bhumihars. All upper castes wear the sacred thread but they were not learned in Sanskrit text as the brahmins are. Therefore, Brahmins are the only caste who performs religious ceremonies. The elite status of kayastha majorly comes from its traditional occupation of “writers” or “scribes”. Later on, this caste entered into the various kind of modern occupation related to government services.

The second social group is constituted by the backward caste. In Varna system, they are above the line of pollution called as Shudras. These castes are further divided in upper shudras and lower shudras. While the former are majorly drawn from peasant castes, latter are the artisan and service castes. Tenants and agricultural labourers mainly constitute this social group. The upper layer of this caste group that is yadav, kurmi and koiri is economically more powerful than the rest of the group. This upper layer derives its economic strength from its share in agricultural activities and dairy practices. The most populous and ‘politically conscious and dominant community’ in this group is yadav community (Singh, 1998:3696). It is also known as Goala and Ahir. The basic occupation

¹⁶ The major characteristics of caste system given by Ghurye are: i) segmental division of society; ii) hierarchy; iii) restriction on feeding and social inter course; iv) civil and religious disabilities and privileges of the different sectors; v) lack of unrestricted choice of occupation; and vi) restriction on marriage. G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India*. Fifth edition, Bombay: Popular Prakashan (1932), pp. 2-22.

of this caste is cultivation and is sometimes known as herdsman and milkman. The other two castes, kurmi and koeri practice cultivation along with doing the tenancy work.¹⁷

The third social group consists of lower castes and untouchables or Harijans, also known as Scheduled Caste in constitutional vocabulary. In social science discourse, Dalit as a category is used for them. The major source of livelihood for them is menial occupations, agricultural labourers and landless labourers. The major caste categories in this group are Chamar, Pasi, Musahar, Dom, Dhobi, Dusadh etc. The occupation of chamar is that of skinning the dead animals and to make leather goods out of them. In many places in Bihar, the job of mid -wife is especially done by the womenfolk of Chamars. The Dom performs the initiation rites of the dead person for which he is paid. The Pasis are traditionally toddy-trappers. The traditional occupation of Dusadh is Chaukidar or watchman. The Dhobi washes clothes of his customers. The population of major caste and ethnic group is given in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Population of major castes and ethnic groups of Bihar

Category	Caste/Group	Per Cent of Total Population	
		A*	B*
Forwards, or 'twice-born'	Brahman	4.7	4.6
	Bhumihar	2.9	2.8
	Rajput	4.2	4.1
	Kayasth	1.2	1.2
	Total Forwards	13.0	12.7
Upper Backwards	Bania	0.6	0.6

¹⁷ The analysis of backward castes in Bihar has been very clearly outlined by Atul Kohli. "The backward castes, taken together, compose the largest group within Bihar. It is, however, an extremely heterogeneous group. The *Yadavs*, *Koiris* and *Kurmis* are the most significant of the backward castes. Their significance derives in part from their numbers, in part from their control over small and medium landholdings, and in part from their relative standing in the caste hierarchy. Though distinctly below the twice born castes, The *Yadavs*, *Koiris* and *Kurmis* are generally the elite among the backward castes. The *Yadavs* are agriculturalists by tradition. They are followers of Krishna, and on that basis they have often tried without much success, to raise their status in the hierarchy by organized activity. Among the backwards, the *Yadavs* are politically the most significant. The *Kurmis* have a reputation of being hardworking agriculturalists. Many of them own sizeable pieces of land. The *Koiris*, by contrast, tend to be poorer than either the *Yadavs* or the *Kurmis*." Pp: 208-209. *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1990).

	Yadav	11.0	10.7
	Kurmi	3.6	3.5
	Koiri	4.1	4.0
	(Total Upper Backwards)	(19.3)	(18.8)
Lower Backwards			
	Barhi	1.0	**
	Dhanuk	1.8	**
	Hajjam	1.4	**
	Kahar	1.7	**
	Kandu	1.6	**
	Kumhar	1.3	**
	Lohar	1.3	**
	Mallah	1.5	**
	Tatwa	1.6	**
	Teli	2.8	**
	Other Sudras	16.0	
	(Total Lower Backwards)	(32.0)	(31.2)
	Total Backwards	51.3	50.0
Muslims		12.5	12.2
Bengalis		-	2.4
Scheduled Castes		14.4	13.8
Scheduled Tribes		9.1	8.9
Grand Total		100.0	100.0

* Column A does not include Bengali speakers as a separate group, while column B does include them, with the enlarged total (100.0 per cent of population +2.5 per cent Bengali speakers) revised to 100 per cent. Source of Data: For specific Hindu castes, 1931 census; for all others, 1961 Census. Earlier data have been revised to reflect boundary changes since 1931. As quoted by Harry W. Blair in *Rising Kulaks and Backward Classes in Bihar. Economic and Political Weekly. Special Article. January 12, 1980. pp. 65.*

For the vast population of Bihar, the major source of income is agricultural activities. Thus the categorization of social groups have to be seen in the perspectives of agrarian social categories i.e. class also. According to 1981 census, 79.07 percentage of total population is engaged in agricultural activities. 37 % of total work force is agricultural labourers. Here in, caste overlaps with class as the proportion of upper castes in the category of agricultural labourer is very low, i.e. 0.3 %. Likewise, backward castes 34 % and Scheduled Castes 40 %, Scheduled Tribes 13.8.% and Muslims constitutes 13 % of agricultural labour force (Singh, 2005: 13).

When we see the agrarian structure of Bihar, various hierarchical groups constitute it. Landlords are mainly drawn from the upper castes. With the growth of capitalism in agriculture, there is also the emergence of 'kulaks' i.e. small capitalist farmers which is mainly drawn from the upper backward castes. The difference between landlords and kulaks is that the former posses huge amount of land and appropriate its rent, the latter uses modern technology and HYV seeds but they have less lands than the landlords and produce for market purpose.

Another class is the middle peasants who produce mainly for subsistence and use family labourers. This class is mainly constituted by backward castes like Yadav, Koeri and Kurmi. Although there are also some upper castes who are included in this class yet they do not cultivate their land directly due to ritual taboo. Apart from working on their own land, backward caste group also works on the leased land of upper castes.

The next class is that of marginal farmers who are also called as sharecroppers or *bataidars*. The class of sharecroppers is mainly constituted by the backward castes. The system of leasing out the land takes myriad forms. Major forms include cash based leasing out where the owner of the land is paid in cash after each harvesting season. In the system of *tihai*, the farmer working on land gets one third of the production. In this system, landowner contributes very little in terms of money. Then, there is another system where landowners take care of the whole expenditure and the farmer gets one fourth of the production (Singh, 2005: 14-19).

The bottom layer of agrarian structure is the class of agricultural labourers mainly constituted by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes. This class does not own land and thus is forced to sell own labour in bonded or semi-bonded conditions.¹⁸

¹⁸ A bonded labourer as defined by the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976 is, “a labourer who incurs, or has, or is presumed to have incurred, a bonded debt”. And, a ‘bonded debt’ is defined as “an advance obtained, or presumed to have been obtained by a bonded labour under, or in pursuance of, the bonded labour system”. And ‘bonded labour system’ as per the act is “the system of forced or partly forced labour under which a debtor enters, or has or is presumed to have, entered, into an agreement with the creditor”, to the effect that he or his family members or his successors lose the right to choose any other employment and move freely throughout India and have no option, but to work for the creditor without wage or with nominal wages, defined as less than the minimum wages fixed by the state government. Pp. 2124, Bihar’s Most Wretched. Indu Bharti. *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 22, (1990).

Chapter 3: Agrarian Structure and its Transformation in Bihar

3.1: Agrarian Social Perspectives:

In order to understand agrarian structure and its transformation in Bihar, it is important to analyse the debate on this in sociology and social anthropology. As 'all economic activities are carried out in the framework of social relationship, production is organized socially, markets function as social institutions and consumption patterns are shaped by social norms and cultural values. Agriculture is no exception. The institutional framework of agricultural production determines how and by whom land is cultivated, what kind of crops can be produced for what purpose, how food and agricultural incomes can be distributed, and in what ways or on what terms the agrarian sector is linked to the rest of the economy' (Jodhka, 2003:1213).

However, the interest of sociologists and social anthropologists in the study of agrarian social structure and change is relatively recent phenomenon. A new awareness that these have developed until sixties, have ignored the vast bulk of population living in misery, poverty, institutionalized inequality and exploitation that were characteristics of the agrarian systems of the developing societies. Not that this area of enquiry has altogether been left out of scientific enquiry as economists and historians have been studying it for quite some time in the past but with perspective specific for their own disciplines. Even in social anthropology, such studies were not altogether absent but they were presented in the garb of 'community studies' (Xaxa, 1988).

Indeed the present day interest in the study of agrarian social structure and change has emerged out of series of community studies of the peasants in classical anthropological tradition. Yet, the perspective and approach to the study of peasant and peasant community in the classical anthropological tradition and those to the study of agrarian social structure and change are not identical. The difference lies in the fact that whereas the former tended to highlight the totality of the community, social institutions and cultural sphere of people studied; the latter focused mainly on relations between land and

society. The property structure in land and corresponding to it a specific social existence form of labour power thus came to constitute the core of the study of agrarian structure and change.

The study on agrarian structure and change was outside the purview of western tradition of social sciences. It actually originated in the peripheral eastern and central Europe with the famous debate between Russian economist Chayanov (1987) and the Marxist analysis of countryside by Lenin (1899; 1908) along with Kautsky's work on 'agrarian question' (Banaji, 1976). These countries were then, as in the case of developing countries now, faced with their poorest, most backward and numerically large population on their way to modernization. The interest in the transition and transformation of their peasant communities was therefore naturally roused.

The European research on peasantry had however a severe setback in the period between two world wars. The political developments like military dictatorships, farm collectivism and nationalist ideologies that overwhelmed Europe during this period did not favour studies on peasants and peasant communities. Similarly, the conceptual scheme classified society simply as industrial and pre-industrial; the latter being a common category for even such discrete groups like the Neolithic tribesmen on the one hand and gentry on the other. Thus, the peasants and peasant communities did not find a distinctive place in the western conceptual categories.

The study of peasantry however got a further momentum after a rediscovery of peasantry in anthropology in the form of 'part societies with part cultures' (Kroeber, 1948). This discovery re-conceptualized the existing conceptual scheme of the society. This gave a new lease of life to social anthropologists in the U.S.A. who, as Shanin observes, had run short of small and self constrained tribes – the traditional subject matter of their studies. On the other hand, concern for tribes in Africa and Asia dominated the anthropological studies by the European scholars.

Though the re-conceptualization of society was propounded initially by Kroeber, it was Robert Redfield who gave it a concrete and cogent expression through his empirical works and set the trend of the peasant studies to come for over a decade. Redfield (1965) argued that peasant societies had similarities focused on their attachment to land and the pursuit of agriculture as a way of life. Peasant societies, unlike tribal communities, also produced a surplus that was generally transferred to a dominant group of rulers in the city (Wolf in Jodhka 2003:1215). Therefore, peasant societies could not be seen as isolated 'primitive communities' of tribal society.

In a similar vein, Shanin offered an 'ideal type' of peasant society with the following features. First, the peasant was the basic unit of production and consumption in a multi-dimensional social organization. Second, land husbandry was the major means of livelihood. Third, there was a distinct traditional culture linked to the way of life of peasant communities. Fourth, an elite living outside the community dominated the peasantry (Shanin in *ibid*:1215).

The above theorization of peasantry by and large neglected the social arrangement on land, and concentrated mainly on typologies of peasant and tribal societies. The reason, according to Beteille, was the typical orientation of social anthropologists which could not be shed away in spite of discovery of new subject matter for their studies (Beteille 1974: 58). It was only from 1960s that the relationship between land ownership, control and use of land and social structure has been increasingly brought into focus by some sociologists and social anthropologists. This emphasis in the study of peasant studies in the developing societies and their political economy has set new trend of studies in the sphere of social science enquiry. Such studies, of late, have tended to view the peasant societies from the framework derived from the writings of Marx, Lenin and Mao. Shanin calls it the Marxian tradition of class analysis (Shanin 1973:13). Equally important in shaping studies in the direction has been the development of economic anthropology as a distinct branch of study in social anthropology.

As peasants were by definition pre-modern, hence they were primarily the 'subject-matter' of social anthropologists. The emergence of 'rural sociology' in the United States as an applied discipline was an outcome of 'farm crisis' during the civil war in the late 20th century (Newby 1980: 10). The identification of 'rural sociology' with 'rural society' has also raised questions about its relevance in the western context where no rural areas were left anymore and almost entire population had become urbanized (Friedland in Jodhka 2003: 1215). In response to the critique of 'rural sociology', a new sub-discipline known as 'sociology of agriculture' came into being which focused its attention on understanding and analyzing the social framework of agricultural production and structures of relations centered around land. It raised questions about how and on what terms the agrarian sector was being integrated into the system of commodity production and about the unequal distribution of agricultural incomes and food among different categories of people (ibid: 1216).

Sociology of agriculture as a sub-discipline marked a conceptual shift during early 1970s. It distinguished itself from 'peasant studies' on the grounds that the former's focus was on capitalist farming. As, its focus was on capitalist farming, where the production was primarily for market, not on peasants producing for their own consumption by using family labour; thus it claimed more kinship with the tradition of 'political economy' of agriculture or 'agrarian studies'. At the methodological level, historical enquiries became as relevant as ethnographic empirical studies (ibid: 1216).

As this chapter focuses on agrarian transformation in Bihar, it would be important to understand the political economy of agriculture at all India level and locate the case of Bihar on the basis of studies on political economy of agriculture in Bihar. Though this study concerns the present agrarian scene in Bihar, historical perspective would be taken up to approach the problem.

3.2: The Debate on Political Economy of Agriculture

The debate on political economy of agriculture is viewed as a contribution to the 'mode of production' debate which began in early 1970s with Rudra's (1970) claim that the nature of mode of production in rural India is pre-capitalist or feudal. After his formulation of agrarian economic structure, several social scientists joined this debate on the basis of their empirical studies.¹⁹

A group of scholars such as Chattopadhyay (1972a, 1972b), Banaji (1972, 1973, 1977), Gough (1980), Omvedt (1981), Harris (1982) and Breman (1985) among others argued that Indian agrarian economy is characterized by elements of the capitalist mode of production as opposed to the Rudra's findings. These elements are self-cultivation, monetization, mechanization of agriculture, productivity orientation, propensity for profit, private ownership of means of production, free wage labour, investment in agriculture, increase in extraction of relative surplus value, generalized commodity production and the existence of a free market.

Utsa Patnaik (1971, 1972a, 1972b) differs from the above scholars arguing that while it shows some features of capitalism and constitutes a small but growing class of capitalists, its basic nature is still pre-capitalist. She cites the reasons for the existence of this nature such as no accumulation of surplus value for investment and reinvestment in agriculture, excessive use of capital for usury and trade, destitution of a large proportion of wage labour on its employer.

¹⁹ "Much of this literature has been preoccupied with the nature of the mode of production in agriculture. The main question is whether its mode of production is capitalist, pre-capitalist, semi-feudal, colonial, semi-colonial, 'dual' or 'multiple'. The debate on the predominance of the capitalist mode of production in agriculture and the rural social system is based on indicators like self-cultivation, monetization of the economy, wage labour, mechanization of agriculture and a productivity-oriented propensity for profit, etc. The semi-feudal mode of production in agriculture was indicated by the existence of bonded labour, usurious credit practices, non-monetized wage and market relations in agriculture, a master-serf relationship in production based on share-cropping, an exploitative power-oriented (rather than profit-oriented) attitude towards arming, and under-utilization of resources with poor investment in agricultural units." Pp. 55, *Indian Sociology: Social Conditions and Emerging Concerns*. Yogendra Singh. Vistaar Publications, New Delhi (1986). The contribution of respective thinkers debating on the mode of production in Indian agriculture and rural society has been compiled in a book titled *Agrarian Relations and Accumulation: The 'Mode of Production' Debate in India* edited by Utsa Patnaik. Published for Sameeksha Trust by Oxford University Press (1990).

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Another set of scholars like Bhaduri (1973a, 1973b), Prasad (1973, 1974), Chandra (1974) and Sau (1973, 1975, 1976) argued that Indian agrarian economic structure is semi-feudal. The existence of semi-feudal is characterized by these authors with the features of share cropping, perpetual indebtedness of the rural tenants, and concentration of usury and land ownership in the hands of the same class, lack of accessibility to the market, existence of small peasants, non-monetized wage and market relations, power-oriented attitude of the exploitative upper class, non-utilization of resources for economic development, and lack of accumulation of capital for investment in agriculture. According to them, semi-feudal mode of production has more affinity with feudal mode of production than that of capitalist one. Thus, it appears that there are overwhelming disagreements among the social scientists over the nature of agrarian economic structure in India but there is consensus that capitalism dominates Indian agriculture (Thorner, 1982: 2063) with local specificities and regional variations.

Among them Prasad (1973) studied the economic structure of rural Bihar on the basis of data collected from three districts of Purnea, Saharsa and Monghyr. 11 villages of Purnea and Saharsa were surveyed covering 1,597 households for an evaluative study related to the economic benefits of Kosi Command Area in 1970. Another survey of 760 households from 12 villages of Monghyr district was conducted with a view to assessing the structure of rural unemployment in the area in 1972. This data throws considerable light on existing 'production relations' in the area.

Prasad's analysis of the data suggests a model. The essential feature of the model is reflected in the big land-owning classes, who are the main constituents of the rural rich, approaching the whole process of production and distribution with a view to strengthening the control over land and their hold on rural masses, resulting in a set-up which we may call semi-feudal. Where an indissoluble bond between direct producer and overlord is maintained by resort to 'production relations' essentially characterized by the two modes of appropriation, namely the share-cropping and usury (Prasad, 1973: 872). This results in semi-servile condition of living and low level of consumption and hence mass poverty and low productivity of land and labour which is understood mainly

in terms of disguised unemployment, under-utilisation of resources and almost negligible net investment in the agricultural sector.

While describing reactionary role of usuries capital (Prasad, 1974), he prefers the term semi-proletariat to define agriculture labours in rural India which is essentially the feature of semi-feudal production relations. The proletariat as a class is found in a capitalist set-up where it is free to sell its labour power. On the other hand, in a semi-feudal set-up de facto, it is not free to sell its labour power.

The semi-proletariate of the agriculture sector constitutes the bulk of rural poor. They comprise households who cultivate land mainly with the help of their family labour and at the same time supply labour to other cultivating class. Some of them own some cultivable land. Quite a significant number of them lease-in land mostly on crop sharing basis; and in some cases on terms requiring payment in cash or labour services. There are others who do not own even homestead land. A sizeable section is landless agriculture labour. Almost all the semi-proletariat households are deficit ones in the sense that their bare minimum consumption expenditures exceeded their incomes (ibid:1305). When consumption expenditure is more than their income, it is necessary for them to take loans from the big landowners who charge them 100% interest rates per annum. As a result of this it is beyond their reach to pay even the full interest of the loan.

What happens in this type of unequal exchange is that landowners don't insist the debtors to discharge full debt obligation. Debtors are mostly forced to sell their land to pay only the interest of the debt. In this process, landowners are assured of cheap labour and better terms for leasing out land. Therefore, landowners appropriate almost entire surplus value.

Another reason which is important to understand why semi-proletariat stays in the vicious circle of indebtedness is distress sale of agricultural produce during the harvest to pay the interest of the consumption loans. The little that is left after the sale is used up before the start of the next cultivating season. This indebtedness often leads to sell their land. This also forces them for distress sale of the agricultural produce. Therefore, it is the reason that

semi-proletariat has been slowly losing land. The high rate of growth of the agricultural labours, higher than the growth of the rural population, during the period 1961-71 also points to the same situation (Prasad, 1974: 1308). While Prasad gives an elaborate analysis of rural economic structure of Bihar, its weakness lies in the analysis of 'mode of production'. It is mainly the unwillingness of the Marxist scholars to deal with the caste factor which is the basic facet of Indian society (Thorner, 1982:2064). In this context Beteille (1974) also argues that 'interest' (economy) and 'ideas' (caste) both are important for the development of Indian sociology.

Thus, both the caste and class dimensions are important to understand agrarian economic structure will be evident in this chapter. Now, it is imperative to discuss agrarian relation and agrarian system that developed during colonial i.e. pre-independence and post-colonial i.e. post-independence period which will throw light to understand contemporary agrarian scene and most importantly, agrarian conflict that is occurring in Bihar.

3.3: Pre-Independence Scenario:

The agrarian structure of Bihar in colonial period should be seen in the backdrop of permanent settlement introduced by Lord Cornwallis in 1793.²⁰ The main feature of the permanent settlement was that the zamindars were given proprietary rights over the land. In fact, zamindars were made the intermediaries for collection of land revenue to the state. Under the permanent settlement, the revenue demand was fixed at nine-tenths of the rent that the zamindars were assumed to collect from their tenants (Sharma, 2005:961).

²⁰ The Permanent Settlement Act, the famous legislation of 1793 enacted by the British East India company, fostered and consolidated a specific land relation between those who had control over it, the *Zamindars*, and those who did not. For most of nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Permanent Settlement helped the upper caste land owning classes to continue their traditional dominance over the land in return for 9/10ths of their total rental income. Such attempts at directly controlling Bihar's most fertile and productive lands sowed the seeds of future agrarian struggles. *Prospects of Radical Change in Bihar: Recuperating the Diseased Heart of India* by Shishir K. Jha [November, 1997]

Source: <http://www.proksa.org/politics/shishir.html>.

Also see Land System in India: A Historical Review. Rekha Bandyopadhyay. *Economic and Political Weekly*. December 25th. 1993. pg. A-149.

As the right of land was vested in the landlords, there was almost no protection for the right of actual tillers. The acts of 1859 and 1885 introduced to consolidate the position of tenants hardly provided any protection for the tenants (Ojha, 1978:35). There was wide gap between land revenue paid by the actual tillers of land and the rent paid to the zamindars. A large number of intermediaries derived income from the landed property without making any effort (ibid: 46-47). The reason for the emergence of intermediaries was basically the inability and incompetency of zamindars. Therefore, they employed a highly ramified set of middlemen for their estates, in turn, receiving from them proprietary share of rent. These middlemen not only acquired degrees of rights on the land itself but also exploited poor peasantry leading to perennial source of agrarian tension (Das, 1983: 26-27). The following figure reflects the agrarian structure in terms of class relations.

Figure 3.1: Hierarchy of interests in land

The State of Bihar (the "super-landlord")	
The Zamindar (legally, a "proprietor," but acting as an intermediary of the state in the collection of rent from tenants)	The Tenure-holder (acting as an intermediary of the state in the collection of rent from tenants)
The Occupancy Raiyat (a rent-paying holder of land having the right of occupancy on the land held by him)	The Non-occupancy Raiyat (a rent-paying holder of land not having the right of occupancy on land temporarily in his possession)
The Under-raiyat (a rent-paying holder of land having temporary possession of a holding under a raiyat)	
The Muzdur (a wage laborer having no rights in land)	

Source: pp. 11, *Agrarian Crisis in India: The case of India*. F.T. Jannuzi. Austin and London: University of Texas Press (1974).

In the context of caste basis of agrarian structure, it has been pointed out that 'the upper classes of society – zamindars as well as tenure holders – were almost exclusively drawn from the upper castes. However, a large number of the upper caste households were also tenants and peasants (these were the people – mostly bhumihars – who organized militant peasant movements in the 1920s and the 1930s against the zamindars). The upper middle castes were largely peasants, non-occupancy raiyats and to a lesser extent traders and agricultural labourers, while the lower middle castes were essentially agricultural labourers and to a lesser extent artisans and peasants. The Scheduled Castes were mainly agricultural labourers. Thus, caste stratification was almost identical to that based on the interests in land.'²¹

Furthermore, the nature of rent exaction was quite elaborate in the form of labour rent, produce rent, homage etc. In sum, the 'pegging' of land revenue as compared to other taxes was reflected in the inflated value of land, the benefit from which followed to the limited class of zamindars which, by and large, either purchased more rent receiving land with it or dissipated it in ostentious consumption (Das, 1983:37). Perhaps, the most vicious aspect of rent exaction through such tenancy showed itself in the produce rent or *bhaoli* system. Again, this produce rent is to be distinguished from the rent, also paid in produce, by numerous groups of peasants – the sharecroppers – the main point of distinction being the absence of any customary or legal rights of the latter group in the land that they cultivated on a crop-sharing basis (ibid:39).

Although the Tenancy Act of 1885 provided for certain security to the tenants, yet it did not countenance default on payment of rent and revenue. As a result, on failure to pay rents, the tenants' most productive asset – land was taken away by zamindars. Such lands appropriated in satisfaction of rent decrees were known as *bakasht* lands. However, although the tenants as unregistered share-croppers generally cultivated their own land which had become the *bakasht* lands of the zamindars. Rarely did the landlords grant them any rent receipts for them to be able to claim occupancy. This was another source of

²¹ Pp. 962, Agrarian relations and socio-economic change in Bihar. A.N. Sharma. *Economic and Political Weekly*. March 5, 2005.

continuing agrarian tension and erupted in outbursts. In the 1930s the tenants, hit as they were by the low prices of food grains due to the economic depression coupled with exorbitant rental demand resisted this forced alienation of land and its produce. *Bakasht* dispute became the focus of peasant unrest in Bihar in the 1930s (Hauser in *ibid*, 1983:43-44).

Apart from appropriation of agricultural surplus through produce rents and money rents and consolidating their monopoly over land through *bakasht* mechanism, the zamindars and their *amlas* extracted agricultural surplus in various other ways also. These exaction were in the form of money -- *salami* or consideration money paid when occupancy holdings were transferred; both money and produce – *abwabs* or various extra-legal and even explicitly illegal cesses levied on the peasantry and labour through a vicious system of *Corvee* known as *begar*.

There existed in fact an extraordinary large number of such exactions e.g. *Bhusavan* (supplying husle for zamindar's cattle), *Motoravan* (for purchasing the zamindar's car), *Hathiyavan* (for purchasing the zamindar's elephant), *Bagavan* (for planting the zamindar's orchard), *Petpiravan* (when the zamindar's wife conceived), *Janmavan* (when the zamindar was blessed with an offspring), *Holiyavan* (when the zamindar celebrated the *Holi* festival), *Pakwavan* (when the zamindar got a boil) and so on. And strange it may sound, the ingenuity for zamindars for hunting out ever new pretexts for these illegal exactions was indeed surprising (*ibid*: 44-45).

Climaxing this whole edifice of exploitation was the physical maltreatment, oppression – *zulum* – in the exaction of labour rent through the unpaid forced labour called *begar*. Legal provision notwithstanding, the zamindars had the first claim on the tenant's labour and it was exacted ruthlessly (Hauser in *ibid*: 45). In addition to the kind of systematic exploitation of peasantry, this settlement was also marked by deterioration in agricultural production (Ojha, 1978: 68).

The exploitative agrarian structure did not lead to the emergence of agrarian capitalist in the form of rich peasantry independent of landlords. There was almost complete stagnation in agricultural production in Bihar during the British period. The class that acquired the surplus used it on conspicuous consumption such as luxury goods, purchase of more zamindaris, etc; while the class of peasants, which could have invested in land, was hardly in a position to do so because of prevalent practice of rack-renting.

There was little investment by the government on infrastructure such as irrigation, which was taken on large scale in states such as Punjab; this also contributed to the stagnation of agricultural production. In view of the policy of the government and partly due to the peasants own monetary needs, the cultivation of some commercial crops like indigo, sugar cane, opium, etc. increased at the expense of food grains and as such, the per capita availability of food grains declined in the state.

The extreme exploitation, combined with the agricultural stagnation, led to pauperization of the peasantry on a large scale. A significant proportion of the tenants were unable to pay the rent and consequently they were evicted from the land (Sharma, 2005: 962). But the transfer increased from 1935 onwards and peasants who lost their lands, either became labourers or were resettled on zamindars land as sharecroppers. The landlords started making exorbitant demands for a share of produce as rent on these sharecroppers, which at times amounted to even three-fourths of the gross produce. During the period 1915-1933, landlords ruined their tenants financially by systematically ruining them for arrears of rent. This situation led to proliferation of agricultural labourers in the state²² which was the result of the expropriation of owner cultivators and the consequent proliferation of the peasantry.

This extreme kind of exploitation of peasantry due to rack-renting and *abwabs* and also the commercialization of agriculture without growth, thus led to the migration to different

²² An enquiry into the conditions of *Khirhar* village in north Bihar in 1939 found that the most numerous class was represented by the landless labourers who formed 72 percent of the rural population. For details see Sarkar, S. (1939). Economic Condition of a Village in North Bihar. *Indian Journal of Economics*. July. Quoted in Sharma, A.N. (2005).

parts of the country and even abroad as a strategy of survival and in the absence of organized resistance. This is evident from the fact that during the close of 19th century, thousands of people migrated as indentured labourers to various British colonies. In the early 20th century they also migrated to jute mills of Bengal, Calcutta and tea gardens of Assam in large numbers.²³ This phenomena is more vividly described by A.N. Das:

Although by the third decade of the nineteenth century, slavery had produced revulsion in the liberal conscience of Whig Englishmen, trade in human labour from Bihar was not suspended. It was merely given the less repugnant name of 'indentured labour', as the people were shipped off to British colonies in Mauritius, Fizi, the Caribbean Islands and south Africa, and sold to Dutch colonialists in Surinam (Das, 1992: 27).

There is dearth of writings on the devastating effects of Permanent Settlement which the British imposed on Eastern India.²⁴ Now, it is important to note that even this arrangement technically the same in Bengal and Bihar, had different results in the two regions. In Bengal, urban Calcutta attracted the moneyed zamindars, the colonial influence wrought some cultural change epitomized in what is known as the Bengal Renaissance, and the colonial state promoted some degree of education, modernization and even entrepreneurship. In Bihar, by contrast, it drove people deeper into misery, rusticity and rural idiocy. Perhaps because many zamindars in Bihar were not absentee landlords and the impact of ups and downs was not immediate for the fate of the land

²³ According to 1921 census, more than 20 lakh people from Bihar had migrated and a large number of them were people from upper castes as well who could not do manual work in the villages because of caste taboos. For details see Sharma, Alakh N. (2005). Agrarian Relations and Socio-economic Change in Bihar. *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 5.

²⁴ An analysis of the impact of Permanent Settlement of 1793 on the rural socio-economic structure of the non-tribal areas of Bihar with particular reference to a few districts – Patna, Gaya, Tirhut and Purnea has been done by Manoshi Mitra in *Agrarian Social Structure: Continuity and Change in Bihar, 1786-1820*. Manohar Publications (1985). The author states on pg. 34 that "It appears that the Settlement of 1790 which was declared Permanent in 1793 did not mean any drastic revisions in the landowning patterns. Wherever possible, the big *zamindars* were contracted with for the revenue even where the Board had a dispute with the *zamindar*, and in spite of adverse reports regarding mismanagement by the *zamindars*. The pattern which thus seems to emerge is that the British government placed its best bet on the big *zamindar* who were not just revenue officials or proprietors of land, but who, on the basis of their multifaceted hold over agrarian society and economy, could be the most effective agency both for the short term aims of revenue extraction as well as the long term need to secure the countryside through a layer of rural potentials who identified their interests with British power and British sovereignty. The smaller landholders were also not alienated."

market in Bihar as in Bengal, and because there were more cultural continuities, the situation that developed in Bihar under the Permanent Settlement was, on the whole, worse (ibid: 28-29).

The important factor for the slow development of the rich peasantry in Bihar was the lack of large local urban markets for rural produce. Even till the beginning of the twentieth century, Patna, the biggest town in Bihar, was miserable hamlet compared to Calcutta. During most of the British rule, however, the lack of urbanization of Bihar also meant a relatively slow growth of middle class and a much slower process of their de-peasantisation and de-ruralisation. The headquarters of the government was located outside Bihar till 1912 and, as a consequence, the demand for intermediaries in the process of governance, clerical staff and legal and other professional of higher orders were also localized in Calcutta.

After comparing a few aspects of agrarian situation in Bihar and Bengal, let us integrate the situation which led to the situation which led to the militant peasant movement and ultimately unsettled the Permanent Settlement. The exploitative nature of Permanent Settlement actually led the large scale alienation of the peasants from their land. As the land became the *bakasht* lands of zamindars, when the peasants were evicted from land due to failure of the payment of exorbitant rents, continued to remain a source of tension, often erupting in violent outbursts.

In the 1930s, this culminated in an unprecedented peasant mobilization for nearly one and a half decades in different parts of the state. It was more prominent in the areas south of Ganges. Apart from *bakasht* issue, this sometimes took the form of movements for conversion of produce rent into cash rent as well as reduction of rent and at other times, of those of ending the system of illegal exactions like *abwabs*, *begar* and finally the movement for abolition of zamindari itself.

Swami Sahjanand Sarawasti and others launched this struggle under the banner of Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha (BPKS) as one of the provincial contingents of the All India Kisan

Sabha (AIKS).²⁵ As far as movements go, the other major movements led by the BPKS were the bakasht struggle, for the restoration of lands seized from the occupancy raiyats; and the bhaoli struggle, to transform produce rent into money rent. But it was the movement for zamindari abolition that led to the rise of the Kisan Sabha and when this issue was settled, with the passage of the Zamindari Abolition Act in 1950, the demise of the Kisan Sabha soon followed (D. N., 1989: 661).

The support base of the BPKS comprised largely upper caste substantial *raiya*ts and was dominated by the *Bhumihars*. It did not cover under-raiyats and agricultural labourers (Sharma, 2005: 962-963). One of the serious drawbacks of the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha was the internal differentiation within the peasantry. It relied much more on the rich and upper-middle peasants for its support and programmes. These two were taken as the overall representation of the peasantry class which was very suicidal as it marginalized the agricultural laborers and petty cultivators. Thus, the Kisan Sabha's zamindari abolition movement was not full-fledged anti-feudal movement. Consequently, demands like ending sharecropping or other forms of tenancy were not part of the Kisan Sabha movement. Further, the Kisan Sabha totally ignored, even opposed, the granting of land rights to the dalits and other agriculture labourers. The ascriptive notion, characteristic of a feudal society, that *majdoors* could not be *kisans* was part of the Kisan Sabha philosophy.²⁶ Even Rahul Sanskritayana²⁷, a founder-member of the Communist party in Bihar, wrote prevaricatingly in 1940s:

²⁵ The organised peasant movement in Bihar began in 1928 with the formation of the Patna District Kisan Sabha (better known as Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha) under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati in 1927. Later it developed into the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS) at the annual gathering of the peasants during the *Sonepur* fair in 1929 with Swami Sahajanand Saraswati as its president. In April 1936, the All-India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) came into existence and BPKS became its foremost provincial unit struggling against zamindari (Bhattacharya 1986: 17-22).

²⁶ See D N (1989): Swami Sahajanand and the Kisan Sabha. *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 1.

²⁷ When the Kisan Sabha was formed by Swami Sahjanand Saraswati towards the end of 1920s, Rahul joined it enthusiastically and took part in various peasant agitations. The most notable of these was Amwari Satyagraha in Chapra in 1939, when he along with his comrades Nagarjuna and Jalil Chakir, was severely assaulted by zamindar's retainers. On 20th October 1939, when the Bihar unit of C.P.I. was formed, Rahul became one of its founder-members and in 1940 he became the president of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS). Pp. 65. A.N. Das (1982): *Peasants and Peasant Organisation: The Kisan Sabha in Bihar* in A.N. Das (ed.) *Agrarian Movements in India: Studies in 20th Century Bihar*. Frank CASS, London.

There is no doubt that ultimately the rights of peasants and agricultural labourers are the two sides of the same problem. It is also undeniable that the conditions of agricultural labourers are piteous and their problem must be solved. However, we should remember that all revolutions can not be made at the same time ---- Even if agricultural labourers remain labourers, their wages will go up only if the income of the kisan increases ----- I feel that it will be a serious mistake on their part if they enter into quarrel with the kisan just now (Das, 1982:81).

However, by 1941 with the experience of BPKS movement, Sahjanand admitted that the agrarian problem could not be solved without solving the problem of agricultural labourers (Das, 1982:80). In spite of his best intentions, he was not able to convince his associates fully on this. When the problem of agricultural labourers was neglected by BPKS, they slowly started getting organized in two ways. The first was the organizations set up by zamindars and their agents who tried to take advantage of the differences between kisans and the agricultural labourers. The second was a move on the part of some leaders of the Scheduled Castes like Babu Jagjivan Ram to set up a Bihar Provincial *Khet Mazdoor Sabha*²⁸ in 1937 (Hauser in *ibid*: 81).

While Rahul exposed the move of the landlords to take advantage out of the rift between agricultural labourers and kisans, he was not in the favour of the organisation of agricultural labourers set up by the *dalit* leaders. He suggested them to form caste organization for social reform among them and take up constructive educational programmes. He actually neglected the problem of agricultural labourers giving them fake hope for the communist revolution in the near future²⁹.

²⁸ Jagjivan Ram's organization never left the ground and gradually became defunct under the pressure of the nationalist movement activities of Congress. Pp. 27. Nirmal Sengupta (1982): *Agrarian Movements in Bihar* in A.N. Das (ed.) *Agrarian Movements in India: Studies in 20th Century Bihar*. Frank CASS, London. At the same time, in the beginning of the BPKS, the emerging Socialist party gave it a strong support; however, after the independence the latter established its own Hind Kisan Panchayat. The split of the party workers between *Kisan Sabha*, *Hind Kisan Panchayat* and another political unit Forward Block weakened BPKS a lot. This fragmentation increased further as Sahjanand formed his own *All India United Kisan Sabha*.

²⁹ For details see A.N. Das (1982): *Peasants and Peasant Organisation: The Kisan Sabha in Bihar*. Pp. 81 in A.N. Das (ed.) *Agrarian Movements in India: Studies in 20th Century Bihar*. Frank CASS, London.

Thus because of the upper caste domination of the Kisan Sabha, it was not only the *dalits* agricultural labourers who were alienated from the Kisan Sabha; there was also an inevitable alienation of the backward castes, who constituted the majority of the peasantry. In *Shahabad* (present-day Bhojpur and Rohtas), for instance, 90 percent of tenants organized against the Kisan Sabha under the banner of *Triveni Sangh*³⁰ (of Kurmis, Koeris and Yadavs), that was the instrument of the bulk of actually cultivating peasants in their struggle against various forms of feudal exactions.

By and large, the movement of the BPKS benefited the upper caste occupancy *raiyats*. And one peculiar development in Bihar was that along with the peasantised section of upper caste, there was the section that had taken to modern education, entered the various profession and services and yet retained their interest in landed property. This was the section that had bought into *zamindaris* and developed a feudalism from below, a village level feudalism as opposed to the large feudal estates, the feudalism from above created by the Permanent Settlement³¹.

3.4: Changes in Post-Independence Period:

When India became independent, the ruling party adopted the agenda of landlord oriented path of agrarian transition aiming at radical land distribution. The issue of land reform got manifested into three agrarian theses and socio-political steps were taken correspondingly. First was *Congress Agrarian Committee* constituted in 1949 by the President of the Indian National Congress. In its Report on the agrarian problem in India it introduced programme of land reforms within the parliamentary-democratic framework

³⁰ Three caste associations, namely, Yadav Kshatriya Sabha, Kurmi Kshatriya Sabha and Koiri Kshatriya Sabha came together and formed an umbrella organisation called '*Triveni Sangh*' on 30th May, 1933. Though the attempt was limited to the Sahabad district, the basic objective of the Sangh was to work for the upliftment of backwards and dalits in general. It took up the programmes like administering the sacred thread to all the backwards. For details regarding organisation and functions of *Triveni Sangh* and its impact on the political scenario, see Backward Caste Assertion in 'Backward Bihar' by Prakash Louis, pp. 47-70, *Vikalp*, Vol. XI/2003. (especially see pp. 57-62). For a detailed account of caste conference, see Political Elite and Caste Association: A Report of a Caste Conference. M.S.A. Rao, *Economic and Political Weekly*. May 18, 1968. pp. 779-782.

³¹ See D N (1989): Swami Sahajanand and the Kisan Sabha. *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 1. pp. 661.

to be followed by all Congress government in the country. Second was Communist Party of India's *Political Thesis* (1948) which aimed at 'land to the tiller' and militant mobilization of the peasants for an agrarian revolution. The third was Gandhian approach followed by Vinoba Bhave *Bhoodan – Gramdan* movement in 1948. These three theses were the initiatives aiming at changing the agrarian structure (Joshi 1975: 38-39).

On the basis of their purpose, land reform measures were of four categories/classes. The first category includes the acts related to tenancy reforms. It broadly aimed at abolishing tenancy and transfer ownership to tenants. Second category of acts attempted to abolish intermediaries. The third category focused on ceilings on land holdings so as to redistribute surplus land to the landless. Finally, the fourth category of land reform measures aimed at consolidation of disparate landholdings. The various acts aiming at land reform measures passed by Bihar government at various times are shown in Table 3.1 at next page.

Table 3.1: Bihar Land Reform Legislations

Year	Title	Descriptions	Category/Class
1950	Land Reforms Act	Abolition of zamindari; implementation of this act very slow	2
1957	Homestead Tenancy Act	Confers rights of permanent tenancy in homestead lands on persons holding less than one acre of land	1
1961 (amended 1971)	Land Reforms Act	Prohibits subletting, preventing sublessee from acquiring right of occupancy	1
1961	Land Ceiling Act	Imposition of ceiling on landholdings of 9.71-29.14 hectares (1960-1972) and of 6.07-18.21 hectare (after 1972).	3
1973 (amended 1982)	Act 12 (amendment to Land Reforms Act)	Introduced provisions relating to the voluntary surrender of surplus land.	3
1976	Act 55	Provided for the substitution of legal heir; ceiling area shall be redetermined when classification of land changes; ordered that the landholder necessarily retained land transferred in contravention of the Act.	3
1986	Tenancy (Amendment) Act	Provides definition of personal cultivation; provides for acquisition of occupancy rights by <i>under-raiyats</i> .	1

Source: Land Reform, Poverty Reduction, and Growth: Evidence From India. Timothy Besley and Robin Burgess (2000). The quarterly Journal of Economics. May. [Online]
Available: <http://econ.lse.ac.uk/courses/ec307/L/beselyburgessfinal.pdf>

Ruling party's strategy focused on the abolition of the statutory landlordism and providing incentives to ex-landlords and rich peasants for transforming themselves into agrarian entrepreneurs (Sharma, 2005:963). It led to the abolition of zamindari system in 1950, which encouraged the peasants to buy the land released in the process.³² As a result only the rich tenants could retain the land and smaller peasants simply lost access to land or became tenants-at-will or landless agricultural labourers. The phenomenal increase in the number of agricultural workers in the wake of first phase of land reforms was a manifestation of this reality.

It should be noted that immediately after independence, Bihar was the first state in country to do away with zamindari system, whereby the exploitative system of intermediaries between the actual tillers and the state was abolished and the tillers came in direct contact with the state. However, though zamindari was abolished, the former zamindars were not deprived of their homestead and private lands, which were quite large. The Section VI of the act stated that an intermediary can hold all lands in his *khas* possession, used for agricultural or horticultural purposes. Taking advantage of it, ex-intermediaries also evicted their tenants in a big way resulting in the process of de-peasantisation of the already poor agricultural labourers. Apart from Section VI, other sections like V and VII permitted the *zamindars* to keep enough homestead land (house, courtyard, backyard, garden lands, ponds, libraries, places of worship connected with the household) and land for the purpose of trade, handicraft or commerce and for storage etc (Bhattacharya, 1986: 29-34). Huge monetary compensation given to the *zamindars* by the state for acquiring their land made the Act more dilute (Singh 2005: 27-28). These all acted as buffer for the landowners from Zamindari Abolition Act.

Zamindari abolition was complemented by the imposition of ceiling on large holdings in order to remove the inequitable distribution of land. After many hurdles, the first Land

³² In 1947, the Bihar government passed the Bihar Abolition of Zamindari Bill. It was subsequently amended and published as Bihar Abolition of Zamindari Act, 1948 to suit the interests of the landowning parties. It was again substituted by the Bihar Land Reforms Act, 1950. More than obvious, the *zamindars* opposed this act aggressively under the leadership of Maharaja of Ramgarh. It was thus challenged by the landed gentries in the Supreme Court as it infringed with the Right to Property. It was only in the year 1952 that the validity of the Act was upheld by the Supreme Court.

Ceiling Act was passed in 1962. Subsequently, some amendments in 1972 and 1973 effected in this Act have removed many of the earlier loopholes, but it still had several defects. In the wake of zamindari abolition and land ceiling acts, several lakhs of sharecroppers were evicted illegally from the land in their possession (Sharma, 2005:963).

Government's non-implementation of act of 1961 had been noteworthy throughout the 1960s. The act came into force on April 19, 1962. The act of 1961 actually served to encourage largely fictitious, yet legal, transfers of land within Hindu joint families. 'Benami' or fictitious transfers of land (sometimes ludicrously to cattle recorded as 'persons who would have inherited such land' on the death of the landholder) became the accepted legal method of preserving rights in land far in excess of variable ceilings established by law.

Methods of retaining control of lands in excess of the ceiling area were sometimes suggested by certain provisions of the act of 1961. A landholder could claim that he had promised acreage to the Bhoodan (land gift) movement, which should not be considered in fixing his ceiling – even if that acreage were nominally in his possession and the lands comprising it had not yet been distributed by Bhoodan authorities or formally registered in accordance with state law as Bhoodan land.

The *Bhoodan* movement entered Bihar in September 1952 with the pledge to collect 3,200,00 acres of land required to solve the problem of landlessness. However, despite best of the efforts by the workers, only 2,102,000 acres of land had been pledged till August 1954. This situation further bettered with the collection of 2,147,842 acres of land pledged till June 1956. After the departure of Vinoba Bhave in 1956 from Bihar the movement gradually lost its momentum in Bihar. The all-India conference of *Bhoodan* workers at Kerala in 1956 changed the course of *Bhoodan* movement as it matured towards *Gramdan* i.e. whole village will be gifted to the movement as the consolidation

of individually gifted land was not feasible.³³ The *Gramdan* experiment was planned in such a way that in the longer term it will herald an age of rural transformation resulting in egalitarian social order.

By establishing variable ceilings and allowing the landholder to resume lands from his tenants for 'personal cultivation'; the act permitted the eviction of thousands of under-riyats or tenants from lands they had tilled for many years, sometimes for generations, without being accorded occupancy-riyat status or rights. Legal and extra-legal eviction of countless under-riyats was therefore an inevitable by-product of the act of 1961 (Jannuzi, 1974: 82-83). About the size of state acquired 'surplus land' and its distribution, it has been commented that:

on proclamation of the Land Ceiling Act, the government of Bihar set a target of acquiring 17.77 lakh acres of surplus land. Till the end of March 1987 only 3,34,000 acres of land had been acquired. Out of this only 2,27,000 acres of land were distributed, and 10,000 acres of land had not yet been handed over to the allottees; the rest of the area is lying under litigation (Prasad 2001: 81).

The government itself admitted that 'not much has been done.'³⁴

Consequently, in order to provide additional protection to the under-riyats and sharecroppers, the Bihar Tenancy Act of 1885 was amended in 1970 to safeguard the

³³ As it stands, a village will be called a *gramdan* village if it fulfills the following four conditions: i) Legal title to the land is given up by the landowners. However, the right to cultivate and inherit the land is retained. ii) One-twentieth of the land is donated to the landless. The remaining may be retained by the owner. iii) A village assembly constituting all adults in the village is formed, in which the legal title of the land in the village is vested. And iv) Cultivators contribute one-fortieth of their produce and the wage earners one-thirtieth of their earnings to the village fund, administered by the village assembly. Pg. 308, *Social Transformation in Rural India: Mobilization and State Intervention* by T.K. Oommen. Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. (1984)

³⁴ "Very little has yet been done to implement the ceiling law. A small staff consisting of one upper division clerk for each district headquarters and one lower division clerk for each sub-divisional headquarters has been appointed but no higher staff has been appointed. Only recently, the printed forms of the notices to be issued under section 6 of the Act, asking the land holders to submit returns have been supplied and it is understood that notices are now under issue. Since the implementation of this law is so slow, it is necessary to take steps to expedite the work." Report of Shri Ameer Raza, Joint Secretary, Planning Commission on Implementation of Land Refoms in Bihar. Implementation of Land Reforms: A Review by the Land Reforms Implementation Committee of the National Development Council Government of India, Planning Commission, New Delhi. August, (1966).

interests of the tenants with regards to ejectment and also to ensure that lands were restore to those unlawfully ejected. For the purposes of Tenancy Reforms, Bihar was broadly divided into three areas namely a) 5 districts governed by the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, 1908 (modified up to 1969); b) Santhal Parganas district governed by the Special laws applicable to Santhal Parganas, Tenancy Act, 1949 (modified up to 1969) and c) 11 districts which are governed by the Bihar Tenancy Act 1885 (modified up to 1989).

The Bihar Tenancy Act fixed the maximum rent as below:

1. Where the under-*raiyat* pays money rent—
 - a) not exceeding 150 per cent Of the rent paid by the *raiyat* himself in cases where there is a registered lease or agreement;
 - b) in any other case, 125 per cent;
2. Where the under-*raiyat* pays share rent, the rent shall not exceed 7/20th of the produce (the straw or *bhoosa* belonging entirely to the under-*raiyat*).

The Bihar Tenancy Act, 1885 stated that a tenant will acquire occupancy rights of the land he has been tilling after 12 years of continuous possession. It added that non-occupancy under *raiyats* who hold land on written leases are liable to ejectment on the expiry of the term of the lease. Those holding on oral leases are not liable to ejectment except on ground of non-payment of rent or improper use of land. Other legislations that were crafted by the government to safeguard the interests of the labourers and peasants were the Bihar Privileged Persons Homestead Tenancy Act, The Bihar Money Lender Act, etc. The Act miserably lacked the protective provisions for the protection of under-*raiyats* and or non-occupancy tenants. Actually, these were the people who were in desperate need of reprieve as these were the tenants-at-will. Due to lack of their statutory status, these people lost the payment of rent option outlined in the Act.

According to a statement furnished by the Bihar Government; 15,426 proceedings for restoration were instituted under Section 48 E of Bihar Tenancy Act by December, 1963.

Out of 15,289 proceedings instituted on application by under-raiyats, 11483 cases were rejected by the Collectors. Again, out of 5170 proceedings referred to the Conciliation Boards, it could settle only 1933 cases amicably. The most important point is that the number of cases rejected by Collectors was as high as 11,483. The restoration was ordered in 7550 cases.³⁵ This situation has not changed too much over the years as it has been observed.³⁶

However, the implementation of various measures of land reform remains far from satisfactory. The most prominent among those are land ceiling and tenancy acts. This is in sharp contrast with the neighboring state of Bengal where the implementation of laws has been more effective.³⁷ The system of tenancy is almost entirely concealed and informal, and hence there is no security of tenure.³⁸ Apart from land reform provisions, the implementation of minimum wages act in rural areas is also worse.

Thus inspite of all the legislations related to land reforms, the agrarian structure of Bihar remained exploitative and detrimental to growth. The obvious reason was the failure of

³⁵ "The bulk of the applications for restoration were rejected. It would be useful to study the grounds for the rejection of these applications. It may be that the under-raiyats were not able to establish their claims to have been in possession of the land. Considering that the bulk of the applications were made and rejected came from District Purnea where survey operations were completed a couple of years ago and under-raiyats were presumed to have been recorded in considerable numbers, it would throw doubts on the adequacy of the records prepared, unless it is presumed that the bulk of the applications were false which is hardly likely. This would seem to emphasise the need for great vigilance in the preparation of records to ensure that they reflect the true position on the ground." Report of Shri A. N. Seth, Director, Planning Commission on Implementation of Land Reforms in Bihar. Implementation of Land Reforms: A Review by the Land Reforms Implementation Committee of the National Development Council Government of India, Planning Commission, New Delhi. August, 1966.

³⁶ An examination of the data regarding the cases of restoration effected under Section 48E of Bihar tenancy Act (as amended over the various years) up to March 1989 indicates that out of a total of 63,253 cases registered; 56,632 cases i.e. 90 percent of the cases have been disposed off. Out of this total, only 15,048 cases have been in favour of *bataidars* and the remaining 41,584 cases have been rejected. The major ground for the rejection of cases was obviously the inability of *bataidars* to furnish suitable evidences. Iyer, Gopal, K., *Concealed Tenancy: Dilemma of Share-croppers in Bihar*. Land Reforms in India (Bihar), Sage Publications, (1993) and cited by Shankar Prasad, "Land Reforms Legislations in Bihar", in Sharat Kumar and Praveen Jha, ed., *Development of Bihar and Jharkhand: Problems and Prospects*. Shipra Publications (2001).

³⁷ See Prasad (1986): *Land Reforms in Bihar: A Case Study*. A.N.S. Institute of Social Studies, Patna (mimeo) and LBSNAA (1991): 'Report on the implementation of land ceiling programme in Bihar, paper presented in Workshop on Land Reforms in Bihar, A.N.S. Institute of Social Studies, Patna, (February 8-11) for some glaring cases of failures of land ceiling acts.

³⁸ See LBSNAA (1991b): *Report on Tenancy situation in Bihar*, paper presented in Workshop on Land Reforms in Bihar, A.N.S. Institute of Social Studies, Patna, (February 8-11).

the state in implementation of the legislations. However, over a period of time, there is a major change in agrarian structure of Bihar because of the abolition of revenue collection intermediaries which actually weakened the feudal structure without destroying it. Zamindari abolition actually benefited all the upper caste tenure-holders, majority of upper caste non-occupancy raiyats of the former zamindars and a significant section from the upper middle castes became big peasants. The new class of big peasants dominated the villages and exploited the peasantry through sharecropping and money lending.

Studies suggest that the agrarian structure in Bihar is not only exploitative but also largely one that hampers the process of agrarian transformation. Prasad (1973) aptly characterized the agrarian structure of Bihar as 'semi-feudal'. According to him, the vast majority of poor peasant households were 'deficit' ones, who forced them to take consumption loans from the land-owning class and which they were never able to return even in the long run, due to their being heavily in debt and deficit. This led to the system of informal bondage³⁹ which assured the big land-owning class a number of benefits including availability of cheap labour, better terms for leasing out land, benefits obtained through distress sales and by acquiring poor peasant lands.

However, inspite of all these problems, Bihar experienced a relative satisfactory expansion in agricultural production – the rate of agricultural growth during the 1950s in Bihar was about 3 percent which was higher than in several other states. Apart from other factors, this agricultural expansion has been mainly attributed to various land reforms measures, though inadequate in themselves. The first phase of land reforms i.e. zamindari abolition, inspite of large scale eviction of erstwhile cultivators, had resulted in some relaxation of the stranglehold of 'semi-feudal relations of production' – as is reflected in

³⁹ A bonded labourer as defined by the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 1976 is, "a labourer who incurs, or has, or is presumed to have incurred, a bonded debt". And, a 'bonded debt' is defined as "an advance obtained, or presumed to have been obtained by a bonded labour under, or in pursuance of, the bonded labour system". And 'bonded labour system' as per the act is "the system of forced or partly forced labour under which a debtor enters, or has or is presumed to have, entered, into an agreement with the creditor", to the effect that he or his family members or his successors lose the right to choose any other employment and move freely throughout India and have no option, but to work for the creditor without wage or with nominal wages, defined as less than the minimum wages fixed by the state government. Pp. 2124, Bihar's Most Wretched. Indu Bharti. *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 22, 1990.

the fact that a fairly large number of substantial tenants having occupancy rights in land got a title to the land and thus had become interested in striving increasing production. This together with the reduced burden of land revenue and to some extent of debt, also due to the pre-independence inflation caused by Second World War, had resulted in some private investment in the agrarian economy.⁴⁰

The 1950s and early 1960s represented a phase marked by slackening of the peasant movement. It was because of confusion among different sections of peasantry regarding different land reform measures. The activities of earlier Kisan Sabha had stopped and Sahajanand had died.⁴¹ The Communist Party of India (CPI) waged a few agrarian struggles in the 1960s, the most notable among them being the *Sathi* Farm struggle in Champaran.⁴²

Attempts were also made to launch a separate agricultural labourers movement for protecting the *bataidar's* rights and also over issues such as homestead tenancy, famine relief measures, *taquavi* loans, irrigation rents, sugar cane prices, etc. The sharecroppers

⁴⁰ See Prasad, Pradhan H. Agrarian Violence in Bihar. *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 30, 1987.

⁴¹ "After Sahajanand's death, his close associate Karyanand Sharma sought to carry on the movement. Sharma had led the famous Barahiya *Bakshi* struggle of 1937-39 and disillusioned with the Congress, he later joined the CPI. It was under his leadership that the CPI waged some important agrarian struggles in 50s, the most notable among them being the *Sathi* Farms struggle in Champaran. Attempts were also made to develop separate agricultural labourers' struggle on wage demands as well as struggles on the question of the *bataidars'* rights and also on issues of homestead tenancy, famine relief measures, *taquavi* loans, canal rent in canal-irrigated areas, sugarcane prices etc. Till his death in 1960, Karyanand was a front ranking CPI leader in Bihar and also the leader of the party's legislative wing. During his last years, he came to lay increasing stress on organising the agricultural labourers and poor peasants, particularly on building the *Khet Mazdoor Sabha*." Pg. 23. *Report From the Flaming Fields of Bihar: A CPI(ML) Document*. Published by Prabodh Battacharya, 10B Radha Madhab Datta Garden Lane, Calcutta; first published in August 1986.

⁴² The first major agrarian movement on an issue other than that of zamindari after independence occurred, coincidentally in Champaran district where Gandhi had started the first agrarian movement on behalf of Congress. The *Sathi* struggle was, however, was directed against Congress. B.B. Varma, an important Congress leader and landholder of Champaran, as the first Indian manager of Bettiah Raj settled large amounts of land with his relatives, important Congress leaders and influential outsiders like Birla and Nepani who wanted the sugarcane plantations to feed their factories. Local peasants resisted the occupation of this land by the Shahis and a political scandal of considerable dimensions arose on the basis of this agrarian issue. Karyanand Sharma, the famous peasant leader and a communist from pre-independence days, was the leader of these struggles by Communist Party of India. See A.N. Das (1983). *Agrarian Change from Above and below: Bihar 1947-78* in Ranajit Guha (Ed.) *Subaltern Studies II, Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Pp. 203. See also pp.23, *Report from the Flaming Fields of Bihar: A CPI(ML) Document*. Published by Prabodh Bhattacharya, 10B Radha Madhav Dutta Garden Lane, Calcutta; first published in August 1986.

of Purnia district which comprised significantly of tribals also waged struggles against their eviction by landlords from the tenanted lands which they had reclaimed, many of these later recorded as occupancy raiyats after the struggle.⁴³

The above discussion has briefly assessed the 'usefulness' of the major land reforms measures which were aimed at solving the problem of landlessness. It can be safely concluded that "in Bihar land reform was throttled at its embryonic stage. The zamindars were helped through legal exemption clearly because the state itself – as represented by the legislature and bureaucracy – was overwhelmingly dominated by the zamindars themselves". The author further states that "when the Bihar Land reforms Act, 1950, was sought to be executed, the state apparatus predictably stood the *zamindars* in good stead".⁴⁴ Therefore, it can be appropriately concluded that the land reform measures in Bihar was actually the landlords oriented path of agrarian transition which gave birth to the new emergent class of '*kulak*'⁴⁵ i.e. small capitalist farmer class which derived its improved socio-economic status from miniscule successful implementation of the land reforms and pale green revolution.

Kulak's rise and role in the state's political arena would be discussed in the next chapter. Its rise led the agrarian struggle to a more aggressive front. The resultant struggle was two-fold in nature; first, it took the shape of caste wars e.g. upper caste vs. lower caste and the second which was more dangerous as in class war i.e. lower vs. upper class and

⁴³ This struggle was launched by the great peasantry leader, Nakshtra Malakar.

⁴⁴ *Bihar: Legal Loopholes to Landlords' Rescue* by Arun Sinha. Pg. 1759. *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 21, 1978. The author concludes that "various other laws connected with land reforms – the Bihar Moneylenders Act, Bonded Labour Abolition Act, Minimum Agricultural Wages Act, etc. have not led towards land-to-the-tiller, but have only legally consolidated all the forms of feudalism." On the same aspect see *Land Reforms and the Draft Five Year Plan 1978-83* by Ratan Ghosh. Pg. 1850-53, *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 10, 1979.

⁴⁵ The caste basis of the kulak has been described in pg. 47-55 in *Report From the Flaming Fields of Bihar: A CPI(ML) Document*. Published by Prabodh Battacharya, 10B Radha Madhab Datta Garden Lane, Calcutta; first published in August 1986. Also see *Caste and Class in Bihar* by Pradhan H Prasad in *Economic and Political Weekly* February 1979, pp. 481. Other articles by the same author dealing with the kulaks and its caste composition are *Rising Middle Peasantry in North India*, *Economic and Political Weekly* February 1980, pp. 215; *Rise of Kulak Power and Caste Struggle in North India*, *Economic and Political Weekly* August 17, 1991. pp. 1923.

kulaks. The agricultural field of Bihar changed into the 'flaming field of Bihar'.⁴⁶ It should be noted that the class contradictions in the industrial or agrarian sectors remain dormant in a situation of growth and become militantly manifest in the period of stagnation. Therefore, this was the reason for the emergence of naxalite movement since the mid-1970s which continues unabated even today. At the same time landlords, big peasants and upper middle peasants formed their own armed gangs, mostly caste-based against the emerging radical peasant movement⁴⁷. While peasant mobilization has gained in South Bihar, but in recent years it has even extended to a few districts in North Bihar and has been spreading to new areas.

However, it is important to see a distinct change in the pattern of land ownership; the upper castes have lost substantial amount of land. These purchases are generally from intermediate castes like Yadavs, Koeris and Kurmis – and in some cases even lower backward castes and Scheduled Castes.⁴⁸ According to a recent resurvey of 12 villages carried out by the institute of Human Development, New Delhi during 1999-2000 (the first survey was carried out during 1981-1982 by I.L.O. and A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna, Bihar) reflects this trend in Table 3.2. It shows that Backward II (upper middle castes) constitutes only 9.72% households who sell their land while upper castes constitute 26.51% (*Brahmin + Kayasthas*) and 30.68% (*Bhumihars + Rajputs*)

⁴⁶ This much written about term has been extensively discussed in *Report From the Flaming Fields of Bihar: A CPI(ML) Document*. Published by Prabodh Battacharya, 10B Radha Madhab Datta Garden Lane, Calcutta; first published in August 1986.

⁴⁷ Some of the armed gangs are *Kunwar Sena (Rajputs)*, *Bhumi Sena (Kurmis)*, *Lorik Sena (Yadavs)*, *Brahmarishi Sena (Bhumihars)*, *Sunlight Sena (Rajput, Bhumihars and Pathan Muslims)* among others. *Swarana Liberation Front (Bhumihars)* is the caste based militia of landlords/big peasants with their areas of influence in different parts of the state. These gangs are mostly operating at informal levels. The Kisan Sangh, which is patronized by a few politicians belonging to a few dominant castes like *Kurmis, Yadavs, Bhumihars* and *Rajputs* in three or four districts. Of all the private armies, the *Ranvir Sena* (dominated by *Bhumihars*) is most dreaded. It has taken part in several massacres during last few years and is more organized than other caste-based militia.

⁴⁸ "There is evidence to suggest that the *zamindari* abolition (the abolition of the large hand holdings) of the 1950s may have led to some land transfers from the twice born castes to their tenants, many of whom were from the backward castes. Two other historical facts increased that tendency. The flight of Moslem *zamindars* from central Bihar to Pakistan at the time of the partition resulted in some backward-caste tenants becoming de facto landowners. After independence, "ceiling legislation" was passed and led to pressure on traditional landowners to sell their excess lands to new groups who could afford to buy, many of whom, especially in central Bihar, belonged to backward castes. One seasoned observer of Bihar estimated that as much as 10 percent of the state's agricultural land may have been transferred from the twice-born *zamindars* to backward castes." Pp. 210-211, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability*. Atul Kohli. Cambridge University Press (1990).

who sell their land. It shows that upper middle and lower middle castes constitute 11.11% and 10.97% respectively who purchase land from upper castes.

Table 3.2: Percentage of Households and Average Size of Selling and Buying of Land, 1999-2000⁴⁹

	Percentage of Households Selling Land	Average Land Sold (Acres)	Percentage of Households Purchasing Land	Average Land Purchased
<u>Caste</u>				
Brahmin + Kayastha	26.51	1.22	7.83	1.34
Bhumihar + Rajput	30.68	0.93	9.09	0.85
Kurmi	17.86	0.24	17.86	0.76
Koeri	10.00	0.40	3.33	0.62
Yadav	9.62	0.33	13.46	0.95
Other Backward II	9.72	0.73	11.11	0.62
Backward I	5.16	0.53	10.97	0.64
Scheduled Castes	1.99	0.20	4.48	0.52
Muslim	13.13	0.92	9.09	1.09
<u>Class</u>				
Agricultural labour	3.50	0.69	4.04	0.23
Poor middle peasants	15.38	0.38	15.38	0.41
Middle peasants	17.54	0.27	17.54	0.98
Big peasants	24.52	1.00	13.55	1.13
Landlords	29.73	1.03	12.84	1.17
Non-agriculturists	5.22	0.72	5.97	0.29
<u>Total</u>	13.02	0.90	8.64	0.85

⁴⁹ Pp. 966. Agrarian Relations and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar. Alakh N Sharma. *Economic and Political Weekly*. March 5, 2005. Sharma categorises upper middle castes such as Kurmi, Koeri and Yadavs as Backward caste II, and Backward caste I are categorized as lower middle castes.

Due to demographic pressures and sub-division of holdings, the average size of land holdings has declined among all castes and classes. However, as can be seen from Table 3.3, the percentage fall in average area is much higher among upper castes as compared to middle castes (Table 3.3).

Table 3: Average Size of Owned Land in 1999-2000 and 1981-1982 and Percentage Fall in Average Land holding Across Caste and Class⁵⁰

	Average Size of Land Owned (Acres) 1999-2000	Average Size of Land Owned (Acres) 1981-1982	Percentage Fall in Average Area
<u>Caste</u>			
Brahmin + Kayastha	3.45	6.25	44.86
Bhumihar + Rajput	2.78	5.43	48.85
Backward I	0.75	1.31	42.73
Yadav	1.17	1.60	26.71
Koeri	1.11	1.41	21.69
Kurmi	3.45	4.28	19.48
Other Backward II	1.25	3.20	61.03
Scheduled Castes	0.31	0.63	50.38
Muslims	1.14	2.19	47.88
<u>Class</u>			
Agricultural labour	0.45	1.08	58.02
Poor middle peasants	0.83	0.73	-13.66
Middle peasants	1.02	1.48	31.56
Big peasants	2.99	4.78	37.42
Landlords	2.93	6.13	52.31
Non-agriculturists	0.31	1.40	77.86
<u>Total</u>	1.80	3.42	47.82

⁵⁰ Pp. 966. Agrarian Relations and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar. Alakh N Sharma. *Economic and Political Weekly*. March 5, 2005.

Significantly, the increase in per acre productivity has not kept pace with the increase in population. This has happened mostly in case of upper castes as their landholdings have increasingly become smaller. A significant proportion of them are facing acute economic hardships. As the local economy has not developed, a large number of them are migrating to other areas in search of any kind of employment.

As upper caste youths have also resorted to migration, it is more difficult to rural poor to manage even a precarious living in rural areas. In such a situation, there are just two ways to survive – either stay back and struggle or migrate where there is possibility of getting employment. That the main response of the poor has been to migrate is reflected in the 1999-2000 survey that shows a substantial increase in the number of migrants. Table 3.4 at next page shows the pattern of migration.

Table 3.4: Changes in Magnitude and Nature of Migration by caste, Class and land Size

(In Percentage)⁵¹

	1981-82				1999-00	
	Migrant Workers to Total Rural Workers	Distribution of Migrant Workers		Migrant Workers to Total Workers	Distribution of Migrant Workers	
		Seasonal	Long- Term		Seasonal	Long- Term
Caste						
Upper Castes	12.40	68.75	31.25	28.97	47.95	52.05
Backward II	10.18	75.86	24.14	16.93	60.81	39.19
Backward I	8.02	84.21	15.79	14.74	58.11	41.89
Scheduled Castes	6.07	90.00	10.00	14.01	58.02	41.98
Muslims	13.68	100.00	0.00	24.78	46.43	53.57
Class						
Agricultural labourers	7.07	90.24	9.76	11.14	71.77	28.23
Poor middle peasants	9.47	100.00	0.00	20.59	64.29	35.71
Middle peasants	4.17	33.33	66.67	12.29	36.36	63.65
Big peasants	12.25	67.74	32.26	19.19	57.75	42.25
Landlords	16.81	75.00	25.00	39.64	38.53	61.47
Non- agriculturalists	16.07	88.89	11.11	37.60	46.15	53.85
Size of owned land (acres)						
Landless	7.63	91.89	8.11	16.70	64.42	35.58
Up to 1	9.15	85.19	14.81	22.15	45.21	54.79
1 to 2.5	16.33	70.83	29.17	23.59	43.28	56.72
2.5 to 5	14.56	80.00	20.00	18.46	55.56	44.44
5 to 10	7.58	80.00	20.00	14.42	46.67	53.33
10 +	7.35	20.00	80.00	13.79	100.00	0.00

⁵¹ Pp. 968. Agrarian Relations and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar. Alakh N Sharma. *Economic and Political Weekly*. March 5, 2005.

The incidence of migration is fairly evenly distributed across all castes and classes but by-and-large, upper castes and Muslims and landlords/middle peasants and non-agriculturalists classes report long-term than short-term migration. The desire to earn more has increasingly become an important reason of migration. Many people now prefer to work outside as this enables them to break loose from existing caste taboos that today exists in the villages. While upper castes do not do any manual wage work in their villages because of their caste taboos, they undertake all kinds of work or low-paid self-employed work in their place of migration. In fact this is an important reason that upper caste youths migrate. In the case of lower castes also, many people migrate to escape from the prevailing caste discrimination in the village.

The increased migration of labour from the state has contributed its own share to changing the rural labour markets and social structure. It has not only helped the migrants and their families in meeting a part of their consumption needs, but has also helped to raise the agricultural wages. The latter is so because of the withdrawal of surplus labour by way of migration, particularly in most part of north Bihar. It should be noted that the remittances from migration contribute significantly to the household income. These two developments such as mobilization of the rural poor peasants and increased migration appear to be the most important agents of change in rural Bihar during the last three decades (Sharma, 2005: 970). Now, the striking feature of the poor in Bihar is that they show a high degree of sensitivity with regard to their economic and social conditions and access to basic amenities.

Chapter 4: Rise of Backward Caste Politics in Bihar

4.1: Theoretical Context: Caste, Class and Politics

Mc Kim Marriot's 'Village India' is considered as the precursor to understand the role of castes beyond the local confines. Marriot expressed this conceptually in terms of little and great traditions, which actually are the process of cultural change, found in all major civilizations. He pointed out that caste acts and interacts in a nexus beyond the village (Marriot, 1955)⁵². In this similar vein, M.N. Srinivas used the term 'dominant castes', referring to castes with ritually high or middle status, landed property, sizeable numerical strength and political power in electoral and legislative politics. He pointed out that the hierarchy of purity is effectively challenged on the ground by the presence of 'dominant caste' (Srinivas 1987). Kothari uses the term such as newly 'ascendant' castes, suggesting shifts in political control in different phases of 'politicisation of caste' (Kothari, 1970). In contrast, Beteille argues that even those who fight politically in the name of caste never invoke the 'Dharmasastra' in their defense (Beteille, 2000: 229-230).

While these changes in the castes are taking place, there has been a process of class formation, resulting in the formation of a multi-caste middle class in urban settings (Desai, 1984), as well as castes are moving from a system of cumulative to dispersed inequalities (Beteille, 2002). Sharma argues that caste is not reducible to class and vice versa. It is also not an explosive class. More important is to understand caste-class nexus, its continuity and change. Class functions within the contest of caste. By appropriating the caste-class nexus, a new power elite has emerged in the country-side" (Sharma, 2001: 11).

It is becoming clear that class identities are pervasively fragmented along caste lines, and that functional interactions of caste, class and politics in the earlier phase of upper caste dominance are increasingly displaced by dialectical contradictions (Omvedt, 1982). In this context, Gupta argues that "the back of old fashioned Brahman-Kshatriya dominance

⁵² This view on Marriot's work is expressed by Gupta (2004) while writing on the issue of caste identity.

was broken most effectively across India by those peasant castes that were till not long ago considered to be 'shudras'. It is the activism of these agrarian castes that laid the foundations of a sustainable anti-establishmentarianism among *dalit* communities in India" (Gupta, 2004: X). "Agrarian castes such as Jats, Ahirs, Gujars, Thevars and Kurmis are out there leading politics from the front and taking caste identities outside the village" (Ibid: XI). He further argues that "it may not be accurate to call these castes 'dominant' (in the way Srinivas conceptualized the term). Dominance is disaggregated and highly time-bound, for caste alliances are fluid and are constantly being reconfigured. In terms of caste arithmetic, no one caste goes the distance on its own. This is why identity matters more than system when castes are invoked at the collective-level – all else is labile and transitory" (Ibid: X-XI).

With the rise of agrarian castes, caste conflict is unlikely to subside. It will be manifested at two levels. At the micro-level – in India's half-million villages – we can anticipate continued strife between *dalits* and local dominant castes. As Francine Frankel and others have pointed out (Frankel 1978) the green revolution combined with the abolition of zamindari system disrupted the old *jajmani* system based on mutual obligations, and put in place a more market oriented labour market that is conducive to bargaining and protest on the part of agricultural laborers, but which also induces the landowning dominant castes to use their control over the local machinery of state to attempt to maintain their dominance. The result, as M.N. Srinivas (Srinivas 1962) has argued, is that in place of acceptance within the hierarchy, one sees greater competition and conflicts between castes and a bleeding process of violent conflict and rising distrust. At the macro political level we can anticipate that the issue of reservations will ever become more contentious as a result of economic liberalization.⁵³

⁵³ See Weiner, Myron. The Struggle for Equality: Caste in Indian Politics. Pp. 220-221 in *The Success of India's Democracy* (ed.) Atul Kohli. Princeton University (2001).

4.2: Backward Castes Assertion in Colonial Bihar

The backward castes are mainly of two types, first the peasant castes; and second the service and artisan castes. In the middle called 'backward' rank, there are about a hundred castes Yadavs, Koeris and Kurmis being the most numerous. They are agriculturalists by caste occupations and in the pre-independence period were mostly tenants in zamindari system. Besides exploitation in the form of *malgujari*, the peasants were also subjected to various forms of *begars* and *abwabs* i.e. illegal cesses. The peasants, on every conceivable occasion, had to pay some amount to zamindars and others of feudal hierarchy. The yadavs and koeris had to supply milk and vegetables to zamindars and others of upper castes at lower than market prices.⁵⁴

Along with economic exploitation, the restriction placed by higher caste zamindars on ritual observances by the lower caste tenants caused serious discontent amongst the latter. As zamindars were getting firm support extended by imperial government to the institution of permanent settlement, the former inflicted unheard of atrocities on lower caste tenants. For instance, zamindar of Rewra in Gaya district was so brazen that, faced with shortage of cow's milk, he sent his retainers to milk lactating tenant women (Sankrityayan in Das, 1982: 48-49).

While on economic and social scales, the tenants were pushed down to a very low position, those among them who belonged to relatively more affluent castes longed for higher ritual status in consonance with their increasing wealth. The major castes among the backward castes who aspired such were yadavs and kurmis.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See DN Dominant Caste, Ruling Classes and the State. *Economic and Political Weekly*. November 10, pp. 2468. (1990). See also A.N. Das (ed.) *Agrarian Movements in India: Studies on 20th Century Bihar*. (1982).

⁵⁵ The Census of 1901 attempted to fit the different castes in four varnas described in Vedic 'varna ashram' system. The Bhumihars were recorded as Vaishyas making them socially lower than the rajputs and Brahmins and equal in status with relatively poor and downtrodden castes like the Kurmis, Yadavs, Mallahs, Harijans and Kahars. The reason behind this was, in the social scale, although the bhumihars were known to be Brahmins, yet they were not given the ritual status of Brahmins because they were cultivators. Nawrang Rai, a Sanskrit scholar and a Bhumihar youth, scanned the Sanskrit texts to prove that Bhumihars were actually Brahmins by varna. Later, he became famous as Swami Sahjanand Saraswati, founder of

The Yadavas are a major agriculturalist caste who, in addition to cultivation, derives income from animal husbandry also. They trace their ancestry to Lord Krishna and claim caste purity with the Jats, Rajputs, etc. With the development of capitalism in some sectors of agriculture and the rise in demand for milk in fast growing towns, these Yadavas somewhat consolidated their economic positions. In the caste hierarchy, however, they remain fairly low even to date and are classified as one of the "Backward classes". On account of this, they had to face social humiliation, and as most of them were tenants, they were also subjected to severe economic exploitation. In the early part of 1920s, stirrings began among Yadavas and social movement started among them. To begin with, these movements were merely aimed at preventing social oppression but soon economic issues were also taken up and sporadic unrest followed (Das, 1983: 70).

H.C. Prior in an Annual Report of Bihar and Orissa (1922) gives account of the assertion of Yadavas in Bihar:

"In Patna district there had been for some time friction developing between the *Gwalas* (Yadavas) and other Hindus. The *Gwalas* asserted their rights to wear sacred thread, refused to do any *begari*, to sell their produce at privileged rates or to allow their women folk to go to bazaars to sell milk. The first claim was strongly resented by all the other classes of Hindus, while the *landlords strongly objected to the refusal of begari and of privileged rates*. An anti-*Gwala* movement was therefore formed. The object of this movement was purely retaliatory and in pursuance of its objects, *Gwalas* who refused to sell milk in the bazaar were to be deprived of the services of barbers, washerman and mid-wives, and were not to be allowed to graze their cattle on the zamindars waste lands. This opposition only served to make the *Gwalas* more determined than ever. Feeling between the two parties began to run high, and in the latter part of November, when some zamindars refused to allow the *Gwalas* to hold a meeting on their village, a serious riot was with difficulty averted. The boycott of the *Gwalas* was still continuing at the end of the year; several minor riots have occurred and it is not yet clear how the question will be finally settled (emphasis added by Das, 1983: 71).

BPKS. See Nirmal Sen Gupta (1979). Caste as an Agrarian Phenomenon in 20th Century Bihar in A.N. Das (rev. Nilkanth (ed.) *Agrarian Relation in India*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications (1979).

From the above account it is clear that the movement for upward mobility of the backward Yadavas through the adoption of upper caste practices and rituals, sanskritisation movement as Srinivas termed it. The violent attacks on it by the upper castes as 'cultural watchdogs' have analysed by him in merely cultural terms (Srinivas 1966). But the economic content of anti-feudal movements (the refusal to do *begar*, to sell below the market price) is lost sight of in his analysis. Others have emphasized that sanskritisation was attempted as a means to get rid of economic and social oppression (Jha, 1977:556). The point is that caste functioned at many different levels of both production relations and super structure. Consequently, the struggle against caste exploitation and oppression was necessarily fought out at different levels, of both 'infrastructure' and 'superstructure'.

Besides the sanskritisation movement among Yadavas, Kurmis also attempted for their upward mobility through this process. The sanskritisation process of Kurmis is best understood in the tribe-caste continuum. According to Das, this tribal group whose name obviously derives from the totemic symbol of the tortoise (*kurm*) were considered as tribes even till the beginning of 20th century and were often classified by British administrators as 'criminal tribes'. While the Kurmis in the plains had settled down to agriculture, others like Kurmi Mahtos of Chotanagpur were still on the margins of food production.

The extension of agriculture also saw the becoming good cultivators and loosing their 'tribal' identities to find a place in the caste hierarchy. Successive Census operations saw Kurmis of various types – the Awadhias, the Mahtos, and even the lowly horticulturist, rather than agriculturalist, Koeris, coming together to demand a higher gradation than was allotted to them. Claims of being Kshatriyas descended from the '*Kurubans*' – the *Kaurawas* of Mahabharata – were advanced. 'Sanskritisation' was attempted through vegetarianism, wearing the sacred thread, etc. And in time honored tradition, Brahmins were found to sanctify the Kermis's new social position within the caste system just as various others had been transferred earlier into 'twice-born', through '*hiranyagarbha*'

(golden womb) and other similar ceremonies by Brahmins in earlier ages, for a suitable consideration.

In the '*hiranyagarbha*' ceremony, a tribal potentate who wished to sanskritise himself into a *Kshatriya* entered a golden pot symbolizing a womb. This was done under the ministrations of a Brahmin who was ready to sanctify a higher ritual status for people of means. After the ceremony, the potentate emerged after his symbolic second birth as a higher caste person. The Brahmin took the pot as his fee (Das, 1992: 24).

The Census of 1931 remarks:

The Brahmins who got fees were rather encouraging them (the upwardly mobile lower castes), though (privately) they refused their social status improved in anyway. In spite of quite sniggering by the hypocritical Brahmins, however, the social status of Kurmis kept rising, not on account of ritual observances alone but because of their benefiting from active involvement in commercial agriculture at which, not being hamstrung by taboos of manual labour, they became adept. It was this that gave the Kurmis of Bihar a wider outlook and they initiated the All-India Kurm-Kshatriya Sabha. Where they sought kinship with a diverse peasant groups as the Patidars of Gujarat, on the dubious phonetic similarity between 'Kurmi' and 'Kunbi (Ibid).

Therefore, a reform movement from within was started among backward castes. And for this, they have started organizing themselves in caste associations. They also got support from similar caste groups at all Indian level.

Admittedly, the assertion of backward castes was not liked by upper castes and hence, they let loose a rein of terror on the backward castes. They snatched away the sacred thread and denied them the status of 'twice-born'. They also caused obstruction in the marriages of the backward castes, and refused to give them water from their wells, and prohibited the use of public roads. The lands of some of the backward castes were auctioned out by upper castes. Some of them were thrown out of jobs. Over the above, the upper castes abused and beat up the backward castes (Louis, 2002:129-136). As the

spate of violence targeting the lower and backward caste increased, they formed a united front to resist violence by upper castes. This resulted in the formation of a caste coalition including *Ahirs (Yadavas)*, *Koeris* and *Kurmis* called '*Triveni Sangh*' in 1933.⁵⁶

The major issues of contention with the upper castes were increase in the wage and denied and violated dignity. The upper castes being the landed gentry used to hire the labourers (primarily lower castes) but did not paid the minimum wages to the latter. Any resistance from the lower castes was violently suppressed. The *Sangh* effectively challenged the dominance of the upper caste landed gentry but gradually receded in the background due to inherent contradictions and accommodation policy of the upper caste dominated Congress political party.

4.3: Ascendancy of Backward Castes in Politics

After independence, there is a gradual rise of backward caste in politics. This phenomenon is largely related to the emergence of rich peasantry among backward castes after zamindari abolition. The government of independent India took several measures for the improvement of agriculture. Through these some of the hardworking intermediate caste tenant landowners prospered and became rich peasants. As an indicator it may be noted that for the first time, in 1967, Yadava members became the most numerous single caste in Bihar Legislative Assembly. Thus, in late 1960s, along with the Brahmin, Rajput and Bhumihars there are several Yadava, Kurmi, and Koeri landowners too (Sengupta, 1979: 90).

Since the late 1960s, there is a gradual rise of the rich peasantry of the backward caste in politics. At the same time, there is also beginning of the 'class struggle' of agricultural labourers against the landowning class of upper castes and intermediate castes (upper backward castes). In spite of the emergence of the 'class struggle' of agricultural

⁵⁶ For details regarding organisation and functions of *Triveni Sangh* and its impact on the political scenario, see Backward Caste Assertion in 'Backward Bihar' by Prakash Louis, pp. 47-70, *Vikalp*, Vol. XI/2003. (especially see pp. 57-62). For a detailed account of caste conference, see Political Elite and Caste Association: A Report of a Caste Conference. M.S.A. Rao, *Economic and Political Weekly*. May 18, 1968: pp. 779-782.

labourers, the politics in Bihar is not translated in to the class politics. “While the landlords and rich peasants in Bihar are becoming more and more keen to use casteism for their own ends, for example, in a recent demonstration, organized by members of backward castes at Patna demanding reservation of jobs, slogans were shouted such as ‘Release Mahabir Mahto’. The murderer of *Belchhi*, Mahabir Mahto, was a notorious landlord and a *Kurmi* by caste. By exploiting the caste sentiment the leaders of that demonstration tried to rally hundreds of poor *Kurmis* to get his release (Sengupta, 1979: 92-93). The above account suggests that the political mobilization on the basis of caste is important for achieving and advancing class interest by the emerging ‘kulaks’ of backward castes. At the same time, there is also “conflict of interest between the ruling class of upper caste and the emerging ‘kulaks’ of backward castes” (Prasad, 1991: 1923).

Analytically, there are three important phases of the rise of backward caste politics in Bihar. The first phase is the election of 1967 when backward caste members increased their representation in Bihar Vidhan sabha. The second phase is the election of 1977 which was fought largely on the issue of reservation for backward caste in government employment when Karpoori Thakur became chief minister. He was from the numerically small *nai* or barber caste (a lower backward caste). The third phase is the post-1990s, which can be considered as the rise of backward caste politics in full blow. This assertion was embodied in the emergence of Laloo Prasad Yadav as the leader of Janata Dal in 1990 and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in 1998. The post-1990s politics also saw its growing *yadavisaton* which alienated the *Koeris-Kurmis*, a cognate upper backward caste group that deserted the JD to form the Samata Party in 1994, and joined hands with the Hindu right-wing Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in national and state politics. The underlying factor for the emergence of backward caste politics can be understood with the ‘rise of kulaks’. Before going into the different phases of backward caste politics, the rise of kulak is significant to be analysed.

4.4: Rise of 'Kulaks'

The political process set into train by this awakening will, of course, be subjected to a backlash from those who have enjoyed power and privilege for close to half a century. Also, the new bearers of power from the deprived sections will not necessarily pursue the interests of the large masses in whose name they are likely to assume power (as some of them already have); for the masses there is still a long road ahead (Kothari, 1998: 35-36).

This argument by Kothari explains the political mobilization of the rising kulaks and gradually becoming the bearers of power do not go hand in hand for the upliftment of masses. The political aspiration of the bearers of power from the deprived section is largely based on realizing their economic interests. A similar viewpoint on this is given by Myron Weiner saying that “there is no evidence that either in U.P. and Bihar the lower members of backward castes have materially benefited from the rising political power of their community” (Weiner, 2001: 214).

Nevertheless, it is important to look at the relationship between the consolidation of landholdings among upper middle castes and their increased representation in Bihar Legislative Assembly. Table 4.1 & 4.2 at next page show the caste and landownership and representation of different sections of society in politics respectively.

Table 4.1: Caste, Class and Land Ownership in the Plains of Rural Bihar⁵⁷

Caste	Percentage of Persons to Total in Each of the Caste								
	Groups								
	Land-Ownning Category (Acres)				Class				
	0	0-5	5-10	10+	All	Landlord and Rich Peasant	Middle Peasant	Poor Peasant	Per Capita Cultivated Land Owned (in Acres)
Upper castes	5.7	62.1	17.9	14.3	100 (22.2)	89.5	2.9	5.5	0.54
Upper middle castes	25.9	66.4	5.5	2.2	100 (21.7)	27.8	35.1	27.6	0.33
Other Middle castes	60.9	37.6	0.0	1.5	100 (16.3)	7.5	9.2	77.9	0.17
Scheduled castes	69.5	30.4	0.1	0.0	100 (27.2)	2.0	4.4	92.0	0.12
Hindus	40.9	48.7	5.9	4.5	100 (87.4)	31.6	12.5	51.5	0.31
Muslims	58.6	35.4	4.4	1.6	100 (12.6)	21.0	10.3	58.3	0.25
All	43.1	47.0	5.8	4.1	100 (100)	30.3	12.2	52.3	0.30

⁵⁷ Note: Figure in parentheses refer to percentage distribution with reference to the row total. Source of Data: An empirical research study by International Labour Office, Geneva, and ANS Institute of Social Studies, Patna, on "Dynamics of Employment and Poverty" in Bihar in 1981. See P H Prasad and G B Rodgers, *Class, Class and Landholding in the Analysis of the Rural Economy*, World Employment Programme Research, Population and Labour Policies Programme, Working Paper No 140, August 1983, ILO, Geneva. As quoted in Rise of Kulak Power and Caste Struggle in North India, Pradhan H Prasad. *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 17, 1991. pg.1925.

Table 4.2: Caste Composition of Parties and Coalitions in Power in Bihar Vidhan Sabha, 1962-1977 (Figures in Percentage)⁵⁸

Caste Group		1962	1967	1969	1975	1977	State Population
Upper Caste							
	Brahman	14.1	8.6	11.8	16.0	2.8	4.6
	Bhumihar	13.6	11.1	10.5	9.3	12.0	2.8
	Rajput	14.1	24.1	19.1	14.4	19.0	4.1
	Kayastha	6.0	3.1	2.6	1.5	5.1	1.2
Total		47.8	46.9	44.0	41.2	39.3	12.7
Upper Backward Caste							
	Bania	2.7	3.1	3.3	4.1	2.8	0.6
	Yadava	8.2	14.8	15.1	9.3	14.3	10.7
	Kurmi	6.5	1.2	3.3	4.6	2.3	3.5
	Koeri	6.5	6.8	3.9	4.1	4.1	4.0
Total		23.9	25.9	25.6	22.1	23.5	18.8
Lower Backward Caste		0.5	3.1	1.3	1.5	2.3	31.2
Total Backward Caste		24.4	29.0	26.9	23.6	25.8	50.0
Muslims		8.2	4.9	8.6	10.3	6.5	12.2
Bengali and Others		1.1	3.1	0.0	0.5	2.3	2.4
Scheduled Castes		17.4	11.7	12.5	15.5	18.0	13.8
Scheduled Tribes		1.1	4.3	7.9	8.8	8.3	8.9
Grand Total		100.0	99.9	99.9	99.9	100.2	100.0

⁵⁸ As quoted in pg. 68. Rising Kulaks and Backward Classes in Bihar: Social Change in the Late 1970s. Harry W Blair, Special Article, *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 12, 1980.

Although the above tables show that the linkages between 'rise of kulaks' and their growing political power, yet Prasad argues that "there is no one to one correspondence between the two. It is only when after the development of capitalism in agriculture, the kulak's class interest come into clash with the class interests of the ruling class that the seed is sown for the political struggle between the two. This usually heralds mobilization among the kulaks and the phenomena known as the 'rising of kulak power'. In India this process gets complicated because of traditional feudal identities related to caste and religion" (Prasad, 1991: 1923).

Prasad further points out that the growth of capitalist farmers (i.e. kulaks) took a decisive leap forward mainly after the mid-1960s, to be more precise, after the advent of the new technology in agriculture, that is, the HYV seed-fertilizer-water technology. In the political arena this finds expression in the kulaks dominating the state-level ruling parties in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Ibid). Another factor, which is important for the success of deprived community in political arena, is the formation of community identity through caste associations as numerical strength plays a significant role in democratic politics. Caste alliances are also made to realize secular interest.

It is very much evident from the Table B that the share of upper castes in regional power politics declined from 47.8 percent in 1962 to 39.3 percent in 1977. Again the gradual increase of backward caste is too significant to be ignored. The difference between the upper castes i.e. 39.3 and the total backwards i.e. 25.8 in 1977 is less than 10 percent. It was more than enough for the upper castes to resent the reservation policy⁵⁹ benefiting the backward castes. On the other hand, the backward castes whose participation increased to a considerable extent wanted more benefits and became more aggressive in power play. The logic and calculation was simple; the volatile nature of the political power due to large scale of coalitions, frequent changing of loyalties, rampant defections, etc. were of little help to the respective caste or caste group to control power. The other

⁵⁹ The Janata Party government headed by Karpoori Thakur announced on 29th June, 1977 to reserve 26 percent of the seats and jobs for other backward classes and castes.

way was to get the government jobs as these gave enough strength to backward class to destroy the upper caste hegemony.⁶⁰

At this point again⁶¹ a brief critic of sanskritisation can be given. Initially the backward caste movement with the emergence of caste association was more or less aimed at gradual enhancement of caste status. It is interesting to note that the upper backward castes comprising the kulak seldom tried to emulate the 'twice born' upper caste mode of actions. Moreover, the former was strong enough to overcome the latter's resistance. The neutrality of sanskritisation process can be partially explained by the availability of 'secular' sources of upward mobility. Thus, the education and political power became a major source of upward mobility rather than emulating the 'sacred' way of life. Again, the politics of survival adopted by kulak was based on their projection as 'exploited and marginalized' section of society to gain the benefits of reservation. The reservation in jobs was a potent source of economic power and was capable of providing upward mobility in the social structure. In this context, Prasad mentions the manifestation of class in caste terms:

In caste terms, the state level ruling class is the upper castes and its traditional role is being challenged by the upper middle castes. This is the caste character of the current political struggle in Bihar which is essentially the phenomenon of class struggle. But people are mobilized on caste lines and not on class line because class-consciousness is yet to emerge in a semi-feudal social formation whereas caste identities have been deep-rooted for ages. The castes in India which represent the traditional classes, on the basis of an archaic feudal division of labour, survive with extra-ordinary rigidity mainly because the large bulk of

⁶⁰ One can identify some of the social factors, which contributed for the emergence of backward castes in the centre stage of Bihar's economy and polity. The backward castes are not in the same scale with the upper castes in terms of caste purity. But in relation to lower castes they are not stigmatized by the practice of pollution. It is this factor of being socially placed in the middle order of society which has protected them from shares of untouchability and at the same time has opened up venues for them to be beneficiaries of special constitutional provisions under affirmative action. At the economic realm, both the backward castes and scheduled castes were agricultural labourers. But while the latter were reduced to the state of being just 'landless agricultural labourers', the former due to their additional income from animal husbandry could also venture to become tenants. Pp. 51. Backward Caste Assertion in Backward Bihar. Prakash Louis. *Vikalp*. Vol. XI/2003.

⁶¹ This concept is previously criticized while discussing colonial caste politics r backward caste assertion in colonial Bihar.

people have been stuck in the quagmire of non-development since centuries (Prasad, 1991: 1925).

However, with the 'rise of kulak' among backward castes the earlier contradictions between upper caste-class vs. lower caste-class have changed. In this situation, the upper-middle caste kulaks have also become exploiter of rural proletariats. Therefore kulaks are facing the challenge from below i.e. rural proletariat constituted mainly by lower-backward castes and *dalits*. The struggle of rural proletariat is in the form of naxalite movement which started in late 1960s and is still waging its war. And the result is unending violence and massacres in the state.

As it is evident from the above discussions, the rise of kulak is significant to the assertive backward caste politics. Now the subsequent stages i.e. the election of 1967, the election of 1977 and the third phase is the post-1990s when the rise of backward caste politics came in full blow.

4.5: Bihar Assembly Election, 1967

The result of 1967 elections was a striking proof of a newly conscious peasantry. The Congress dominated by the landowning upper castes was defeated because of the withdrawal of support by the awakened middle peasantry. Its share decreased to 40 percent from its performance of 58 percent in 1962. The most important victory margin was of Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeri dominated SSP (Sanjukta Socialist Party) on the issue of 'backwardism'. It improved its share of seats from 2 percent to 21 percent. All together, CPI and CPI(M) garnered 9 percent seats which was an improvement from their earlier performance of 4 percent. This election also witnessed multi-cornered contests in almost all of the Assembly constituencies.⁶²

⁶² For more details, see Congress Debacle in Bihar: Voting Pattern in 1967. Navneeth. *Economic and Political Weekly*. August 24, 1968. pp. 1312.

The struggle of backward caste assertion was made by Sri B.P. Mandal⁶³, the first chief minister from backward caste on 25th January, 1968. It affected the nature of ministry as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: The Social Composition of ministry of two Chief Ministers

(Figures in bracket are in percentage)

Caste of the Minister	No. of Ministers during the time Sri M.P. Sinha's time (5 Mar 1967 - 28 Jan 1968)	No. of M.L.A's at the time of formation of Soshit Dal (1 Feb 1968 - 23 Feb 1968)
Rajput	5 (23.80)	6 (16.66)
Brahmin	3 (14.28)	Nil
Bhumihar	4 (19.04)	3 (8.33)
Kayastha	1 (4.76)	Nil
Banik	Nil	2 (5.55)
Yadavas	1(4.76)	6 (16.66)
Kurmi	1(4.76)	1 (2.77)
Koeri	2 (9.52)	3 (8.33)
Scheduled Castes	1(4.76)	3 (8.33)
Scheduled Tribes	1(4.76)	9 (25)
Muslims	1(4.76)	4 (11.11)
Bengalis	1(4.76)	1 (2.77)
Nai	1(4.76)	Nil
Total	21	36

Source: Jha, Dayadhar, *State Legislature in India*, Abhinav Publication, 1977, pp. 286-300. As quoted in pg. 43. *Caste Politics in India (A Case Study)*, Kiran Shukla. Mittal Publications, Delhi. (1987).

⁶³ B.P. Mandal was also the chairperman of the Mandal Commission constituted by Janata Party government in 1978.

The above table shows that the council of ministers was predominantly composed of upper caste members during the time of upper caste chief minister, Sri M.P. Sinha; and a majority of backward caste during the time of Sri B.P. Mandal, a backward caste chief minister. 13 out of 21 belonged to upper castes during the time of Bhumihar chief minister M.P. Sinha whereas 9 out of 38 belonged to upper castes during the time of backward caste (Yadava) chief minister B.P. Mandal. However, due to mechanization of upper caste bureaucracy, the first backward classes government could not survive long.

4.6: Caste and Reservation Politics

The sustained demand of the OBC leaders and their growing political power pressured the Congress government in 1971 to constitute the Mungeri Lal commission. This commission listed 128 castes as OBC and 93 others as MBC, taking into account social status, educational backwardness, adequacy of the representation in government services and share in trade, commerce, industry, etc. The commission recommended 26 percent reservation for jobs and 24 percent for educational institutions. The then Jaganath Mishra government did not take any action on these recommendations and it was the Janata party government, headed by Karpoori Thakur which implemented these recommendations

As against the 49.5 percent reservation recommended by Mandal commission (taking SC, ST and OBC together) there existed provisions for 50 percent reservations in government jobs and educational institutions in Bihar – 3 percent for women, 8 percent for backward classes, 12 percent for extremely backward classes, 14 percent for Scheduled castes, 10 percent for Scheduled Tribes and 3 percent for economically backward upper caste people. Except those for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, all other reservations were available for people whose annual family income is less than the minimum income tax limit. These provisions were made by the Karpoori Thakur government in 1978.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ For details see Indu Bharti: The Politics of Anti-Reservation Stir. *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 10, 1990.

During this time, the upper castes had launched a strong anti-reservation movement leading to a virtual caste war. They never opposed reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes because their monopoly was not threatened by *dalits*. But they fiercely opposed reservation for OBC because upper caste's monopoly was likely to be threatened by OBC. Therefore, upper castes gave slogan for an alliance of 'Dalits' and 'Forwards'. This was reflected in their slogan '*agra-harijan bhai-bhai, yeh pichhdi jati kahan se aie?*' (Upper castes and *Harijans* are brothers, from where have these backward castes cropped up?).

Another factor behind the rabid anti-backward classes agitation then was that the Janata party's coming to power in 1977 election, epitomized the ascendancy of backward classes in politics. It was also true that the attempt during the emergency to implement land reform measures and to restore some semblance of a work culture in the bureaucracy had enraged the upper castes also and they, (particularly the Rajputs and Kayashas) supported the Janata party. But the election of Karpoori Thakur, the leader of backward classes, as chief minister was taken by the upper castes as a threat to their hold over state's politics and administration.

This is also reflected when through the reservation issue, Karpoori Thakur asserted that "the Backwards had displaced the Forwards as the dominant force in the Bihar politics, that the old days of dominance in public affairs by the 'twice born' were gone forever, and that his government would be one based on the support of backwards." The Forwards interpreted these things this way as well, fearing that their days of dominance indeed have departed, and responded with volatile mixture of fear and rage. But finally in April 1979 the combination of a Forward-*Harijan* alliance in the Assembly and national-level Jana Sangh/BLD conflict within Janata party brought down the Thakur government. It was succeeded by a ministry headed by a *Harijan*, Ram Sunder Das, but dominated by the same combination of Forwards and Jana Sanghis that had defeated the Thakur government.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ The Forward-*Harijan* alliance may be explained as it is pointed out that the rising backwards are also facing a challenge from below, for the same expansionary tendencies within the Indian electoral system

4.7: 1990 Assembly Election & the Laloo Phenomenon

.....the appeal to justice, equity and self-respect of the backward and the depressed sectors of society, which Laloo Yadav has employed so effectively to sustain his populist agenda, is not new. Those appeals too have a history and notable spokesmen. That makes their representations in the 1990s by Laloo Yadav no less important and meaningful, but places them in the larger history of social experience of which they are a part (Hauser, 1997: 52).

The results of Bihar Assembly election 1990 are important to understand the notion of democracy and democratic process in the favour of the victim of social exclusion. The aggressive movement by the lower castes to gain entry into the political and developmental process had finally resulted in success. The state politics dominated by upper castes who were numerically small thus negating the very principle of the majority rule principle gave way to the lower castes to control the political power in the state.

With the sweeping victory of the Janata Dal led by Laloo Prasad Yadav in 1990, OBC M.L.As represented majority for the first time in the Bihar Vidhan Sabha, instead of upper castes. This was largely due to the re-election of OBC MLAs on a Janata Dal ticket or the first time, the rural poor, who were victims of semi-feudal order, cast their votes in large numbers, facing threats to their life in the process. They were obviously galvanized into action by the speeches of Laloo Prasad Yadav against the upper caste landlords, thereby providing the *dalits* with a new sense of 'izzat' (dignity) (Robin, 2004: 5361).

This assembly election also saw the weakening of Rajput-backward alliance forged because of the perceived loyalty of Rajputs to their caste leader V.P. Singh. In fact, during the Lok Sabha election of 1989, it played an important role in the success of Janata Dal. When the reservation issue came in 1990, there was a sharp polarization of

that got them involved in politics has also energized those at the bottom level, the Harijans, who are in general the landless agricultural labourers of Bihar. Few Harijans have led by naxalite cadres to demand better working conditions, but far more have been awakened through the populist rhetoric of the Emergency Congress and Janata regimes on land reform, minimum wages, bonded labour, debt redemption and so on. The Harijans then constituted a threat to the dominance of backwards, at least in so far as they can ally with the Forwards. Pp. 71. Rising Kulaks and Backward Classes in Bihar. Harry W. Blair. *Economic and Political Weekly*. January 12, 1980.

upper castes vs. backward castes. For backward castes, reservation was very important for upward social and economic mobility. Therefore, they supported Janata Dal without fragmentation. The outcome was sweeping victory of JD. In addition to that, the central leadership was more inclined towards the backward castes so the Yadavs and Kurmis got a fair deal of seats in forthcoming elections. Thus, the upper castes were gradually sidelined. The Congress (I), upper castes dominated political party also had to nominate a record number of 105 candidates to face the backward caste candidates of Janata Dal.⁶⁶

The most significant outcome of this election was the substantial increase in representation of the backward and lower castes in the legislative assembly. The most visible castes among backwards who got substantial representation in legislative assembly were from upper backward castes such as 63 Yadavs, 18 Kurmis, 12 Koeris and 16 from Bania community. There were altogether 117 members of backward castes in the state assembly. It further increased to 161 in the next assembly election held in 1995.

However, the united front of the backward castes also witnessed its split. This was particularly because of the growing representation of Yadavs due to their numerical strength. The split appeared between the Yadavs and Kurmis on the question of getting nominations for the seats. As the Yadavs were the forerunner in the process of political mobilization (due to the fact that two chief ministers were from this caste itself), the BJP as well as Congress, both tried their best to lure Yadavs to their side by giving them , more nominations than other castes. This further increased the rivalries between the Kurmis and the Yadavs. Koeris also backed the former on this question because Koeris perceive themselves as the sub-caste of Kurmis. As a result of this, Samata Party was formed in 1994, on the 'vote bank' of Kurmis and Koeris.

Given the nature of social stratification in Bihar where a small number of 'twice-born' castes have controlled the resources and thus depriving the vast population of backward and lower castes, the 'politicisation of castes' (both backward and lower) was bound to

⁶⁶ For details see, Bihar Ballot: Expected Outcome. Indu Bharti. *Economic and Political Weekly*. March 24, 1990. pp. 595.

pay rich dividends to Laloo Prasad Yadav. More specifically, the electoral base of Laloo is from the middle/backward castes like Yadavs along with the lower castes. To understand the electoral mobilization of the caste, it is important to see the population of the respective castes.

The social universe in Bihar is quite fragmented with more than 135 Hindu and Muslim castes. But when reduced to six broad categories, five twice-born castes constitute 13.6 percent (*Brahmins* – 4.7 percent, *Bhumihar Brahmins* – 2.9 percent, *Rajputs* – 4.2 percent, *Kayasthas* – 1.2 percent and *Banias* – 0.6 percent), Upper *Shudras* or Other Backward Castes (OBCs) – 18.7 percent (*Yadavas* – 11 percent, *Kurmis* – 3.6 percent and *Koeris* – 4.1 percent), Lower *Shudras* – 32 percent, Muslims – 12.5 percent, Scheduled Castes – 14 percent and Scheduled Tribes, 9.1 percent (Roy, 1994: 224).

Therefore, the social universe of Bihar according to the population of each caste and communities, it shows that the numerical preponderance of the lower castes and its united front under the plank of 'social justice' is the safest way to success into the electoral politics. Laloo Prasad was very successful in uniting all lower and backward castes to challenge the monopoly of upper caste in political power. For this, he allotted a major share of seats to his supporters who were more often of backward and lower castes. And the major share was given to his community people Yadavs. The share of backward and lower castes increased to a significant extent when he was in power. This is reflected in Table 4.4 at next page.

Table 4.4: Caste wise breakup of members of Bihar Vidhan Sabha 1967-2000
(figures in absolute numbers)

Caste	1967	1969	1972	1977	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
Yadav	37	47	35	51	46	47	63	86	64
Kurmi	14	12	20	21	20	12	12	13	12
Koeri	13	13	8	6	12	18	18	27	22
Baniya	13	16	8	10	13	9	18	18	12
Total (A)	77	88	71	88	91	86	111	144	110
Lower Castes									
Kahar	1	--	1	--	--	--	1	3	1
Dhanuk	2	--	1	--	--	--	--	1	2
Tattma	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1
Nai	1	1	1	1	1	1	--	1	1
Mallah	--	2	1	--	2	2	2	1	4
Bhaant	--	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	--
Kharwaar	--	1	1	1	--	--	1	1	--
Noniaa	--	--	--	1	2	--	1	2	1
Badhai	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	--	--
Gangota	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	2	1
Kewat	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	4	--
Rajwaar	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	--
Paneri	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total (B)	5	5	6	4	5	3	6	16	11
Total (A+B)	82	93	77	92	96	89	117	160	121
Brahman	32	28	39	20	37	30	27	9	8
Bhumihar	26	36	44	40	39	38	34	18	19
Rajput	54	50	48	55	38	46	41	22	26
Kayasth	11	8	5	9	6	4	3	7	3
Total (C)	133	122	136	124	120	118	105	56	56

Source: pp. 37, *Bihar Main Chunav: Jaati, hinsa aur buth loot* by Srikant. Vani Prakashan, New Delhi (2005)

This is evident from the above Table A that the share of backward and lower castes increased significantly in the regime of Laloo Prasad Yadav and his political party RJD. There is also another viewpoint which does not accept this fact entirely in his favour as Hauser (1997) sees it in the historical process where there were many spokesmen for this cause. So, it will be more than unfair to give all credit for this process to him. But when we compare Laloo's regime and regime of other political leaders of backward castes; the representation of lower and backward caste is much significant in the former's regime.

Therefore, it is the year 1990s which marks the rise of backward caste politics in a real sense.

If we see the trends of representation of lower and upper caste in state government according to table A, then the 1990 state government had 105 upper caste MLAs which was less than the earlier one i.e. there were 118 upper caste members in 1985. At this point, one has to understand the political compulsion. This was due to the lack of clear majority for Laloo in assembly. But when he was in the majority, the share of the lower caste members jumped from 117 in 1990 to 160 in 1995. After the bifurcation of Bihar into Bihar and Jharkhand, there were 121 members of the lower and backward castes compared to 56 upper caste members. This process can be termed as horizontal mobilization of castes. Table 4.5 at next page shows the polarisation of social communities and political parties in between 1995-2004 in Bihar political arena.

Table 4.5: Polarisation of social communities and political parties, 1995-2004

Proportion of Voters among Different Castes Voting for Different parties	Lok Sabha 1995	Lok Sabha 1996	Lok Sabha 1998	Lok Sabha 1999	Vidhan Sabha 2000	Lok Sabha 2004
Yadavs voted for RJD	88*	81	74	76	80	68
Muslims voted for RJD (JD till 1996)	57	69	74	82	61	67
Upper castes voted for BJP	29	60	78	77	61	52
Kurmi and Koeri voted for the Samata	-	74	56	71	58	52
Dalit vote for RJD (JD till 1996)	49	31	37	43	33	32
Dalit vote for BJP	15	25	25	47	39	21

All figures are in percentage.

Note: The RJD contested the Lok Sabha elections (1998, 1999 and 2004) in alliance with the Congress. Figures for Muslims, Yadavs and dalits voted for RJD are for the RJD-Congress alliance. The BJP contested all the four Lok Sabha elections for which the data had been presented and the Assembly elections 2000 in alliance with the Samata/JD (U). Figures for the BJP support among different social communities are for the alliance. Similarly, figures for the kurmi-koeri support for the Samata are for the Samata+BJP alliance.

* Figures for 1991 Lok Sabha elections based on recall for the 1996 Lok Sabha survey. The 1995 survey data, not useful for such detailed analysis of castewise voting pattern.

Source: RJD needs an Alliance for Victory. Sanjay Kumar. *Economic and Political Weekly*. January 15, 2005. pp. 191.

As the Table 4.5 reflects that Yadavs got the maximum number of seats in Bihar legislative assembly during the Laloo regime. This can be explained in terms of numerical preponderance⁶⁷ and relatively strong economic position of this caste. This data reflects that Yadavs got more seats in proportion to their numbers, while Kurmis and Koeris could not capitalize as compared to Yadavs. This relative deprivation among

⁶⁷ Yadavs are most populous castes in Bihar. According to 1931 census, this community constitutes 11 percent population of the state, which further increased by the time and due to bifurcation of state into Jharkhand and Bihar in 2000.

Koeris and Kurmis resulted into the formation of Samata Party in 1994 under the leadership of Nitish Kumar, a Kurmi caste. It can be interpreted as the result of the increasing consolidation of Yadavs at the cost of rest of the backward and lower castes. This is partially true. But there is also a different viewpoint which argues that:

The Other Backward Class (OBC) vote bloc has split and this fragmentation explains more about the electoral results than the appeal of ideology, whether hindutva or Mandal. The Kurmis endorsed the BJP-Samata combine not because they developed a sudden love for Ram, but because many of them are upwardly mobile, wannabe upper castes who feel uncomfortable with Laloo Prasad's cultivation of poverty. It is estimated that Bihar today has more doctors and engineers from among the Kurmis than any other caste. They are also among relatively better off professional, more vulnerable in a *raj* where kidnapping for ransom is major industry. Therefore, the urge for law and order among Kurmis and rejection of Laloo-led lawlessness is understandable (Das, 1997: 20-21).

This account can be interpreted as the 'political sanskritisation' (Das, 1997) of Kurmis who find parity with upper castes and are in contradiction with the lower income group of OBCs including the poor Yadavs at the specific regions of Bihar where Kurmis are landlords such as Patna, Nalanda and Rohtas.⁶⁸ And this is also a fact that Kurmis are concentrated in the above regions mainly, and where they are not in rivalries with upper caste landlords because the latter are not found in the regions where the former are landlords. Therefore, it becomes more convenient for Kurmis to have an alliance with upper castes.

Going into the debates of politicization of castes by Laloo Prasad Yadav needs to be evaluated. He actually built himself from available caste solidarity. This caste solidarity was the result of continuous caste mobilization done by earlier backward and lower caste political leaders. Still, he is unmatched as not only among in his supporters but also among his opponents. There is lack of a leader with the kind of hold which he has on the masses supporters.

⁶⁸ See, Nathan, D. (1996). Pp. 167-68.

As an individual, he has successfully mobilized his backward and lower caste supporters along with Muslim minority community towards an equal social order. He effectively brought various splintered political parties who were fighting for this cause united under his charismatic leadership and swept the election into their favour. His form of authority over his supporters stems from his charismatic authority. According to Weber,

“.....the validity of claims to legitimacy may be based on 1) rational grounds – resting on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules.....2) Traditional grounds – resting on established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and legitimacy of those exercising authority under them or 3) Charismatic grounds – resting on devotion to exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of normative pattern of order revealed or ordained by the person (Weber, 1978: 213-214).

Laloo Prasad has got some charisma which despite various odds, ‘clicks’ with the masses. His ability to charm or influence people certainly helps him as a politician to achieve electoral success. The authority and political power of his party RJD and its ability for electoral success are largely based on his popularity and charisma. His emergence from the humble grass-root level and his gradual becoming of the sole representative of the backward castes in general and Yadav in particular has inspired and continued to do so in the subaltern masses.

The inspiration which the lower caste person takes from Laloo can also be understood in the notion of ‘caste as a state of mind’. The lower caste person psychologically relates with him and becomes assured of one thing that as long as Laloo is in the power, the dominance of upper caste will effectively be in check. Also the ‘rustic charisma’ of Laloo works very well in striking chord with his people. Therefore, the charisma of Laloo can be explained in terms of charismatic authority of Weber.

Chapter 5: Emerging Contradiction between Backward Castes and Dalits

5.1: Backward Castes and Dalits:

The dalit community is not homogenous. It consists of following 24 castes which are officially recognized as Scheduled Caste: *Bantar, Bauri, Bhogta, Bhumji, Chamar and Mochi, Chaupal, Dabgar, Dhobi, Dom and Dhangad, Dusadh and Dhari and Dhashi, Ghasi, Halakhor, Hari, Mehtar and Bhangi, Kanjar, Kurariar, Lalbegi, Mushar, Nat, Pan and Sawari, Pasi, Rajwar and Turi*. These caste groups are known to have remained for centuries at the bottom layer of society, living in a very degraded social condition (Jha, 2000). As they are placed at the bottom of caste hierarchy which is also intricately related to their position in agrarian social structure. Therefore, majority of them are agricultural labourers. One estimate says that almost half of the agricultural labourers are from Scheduled Castes (Sengupta, 1979: 90). In an estimate of recent past, roughly 70 percent of *Dalits*/Scheduled Castes of rural Bihar were observed to be below poverty line (Kumar in Jha, 2000:423). Among the castes, Chamar/Mochi are the largest in numbers while Dusadh comes next. Mushars come third in the ranges and are found mostly in districts of Munger and Saharsa and Purnea.⁶⁹

Similarly, it also has been discussed that 'backward castes' are not a homogenous group. They are divided into the peasant castes and, artisan and service castes. Peasant castes are mainly constituted by Yadavs, Koeris and Kurmis. And among the artisan and service castes: Barhais (Carpenter), Lohars (Blacksmith), Sonars (Goldsmith), Nais (Barbers), Kunhars (Potters), Kahars (Palanquin Bearers), Mallahs (Boatman), Machchuwara (Fisherman), etc. are major castes in Bihar.

The caste system articulates through surplus generating – but not enormously profitable – settled agriculture that needs the services of Brahmins and artisans in addition to agriculturalists. It is not surprising that largest single castes are those of agriculturalists -- Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris – and the largest number of

⁶⁹ Map 60. Major Scheduled Castes in Bihar. Census of India, 1991.

castes are those of people connected with various occupations around agriculture
(Das, 1992: 24-25).

It was these peasant caste groups which M.N. Srinivas had described as the 'dominant castes'. Earlier they were marginal to the local power structure and were mostly above the line of pollution. However, by 1960s the "backward" or middle level castes emerged as important players in regional or state level politics. This trend is evident from the analysis of the rise of backward caste politics in the previous chapter. If we see the bottom layer of agrarian structure, it indicates that almost half of the agricultural labourers are from Scheduled Castes (cited above). The rest include mainly the other backward castes like the *Mallah*, *Kahar*, *Tatma*, etc. Amongst the *Kurmis*, *Koeris* and *Yadavs* too the number of agricultural labourers is quite large. For example, the *Dhannuks* amongst the *Kurmis* are mostly engaged in this occupation (Sengupta, 1979: 90). But, it is also true that over a period of time *Yadavs*, *Koeris* and *Kurmis* consolidated their economic position. However, it shows that even amongst upper backward castes, there is greater differentiation in terms of economic position.

In this context, it will be noteworthy to examine the heterogeneity amongst the *Yadavs* in terms of socio-economic and political status. The examples of *Yadavs* would be more appropriate because of having the single largest population among the backward castes. And they also dominated the political scene of Bihar (when we talk about the 'rise of backward politics').

If we take a closer look at this community except the political elites among them, there is no evidence that *Yadavs* as a whole have become affluent and upwardly mobile. Condemned to ignorance, illiteracy and poverty for ages, most of them to this day, educationally and culturally lag behind their more fortunate counterparts belonging to more developed castes. Leaving aside the question of undisputed superiority of traditional upper castes in academic spheres, the spread of education among the community is even less than some other backward castes like *awaddhia Kurmi*, *Koeri* and *Bania* in some regions of Bihar (Gupta, 1992: 1304).

The urge to save and buy a small parcel of land in order to move a step above in the social ladder is quite evident among this community. The Yadavs are also slightly below in social hierarchy, particularly in South Bihar because of their pastoral origins. In a situation where the communal pasture lands in the villages have been by and large usurped by the bigger landlords, trespassing into the peasant's fields to feed the cattle has long been an essential ingredient of many a Yadav's daily struggle for survival. The need to face endless disputes and skirmishes that follow has given an aggressive edge to the community's character and strengthened its caste cohesion (Ibid: 1305). It is also difficult to characterize all Yadavs as kulaks. In terms of class composition, the Yadavs are actually one of the most composite castes in Bihar. All agrarian classes ranging from a thin crust big and powerful landowners to a large mass of agricultural labourers co-exist within the community.

A substantial section of the Yadavs are hardworking peasants who largely live on their own produce, hire some agricultural workers according to seasonal requirements to supplement their own labour and may and may not have surplus. Their conditions fairly approximates the definition of middle peasants as used by Mao Zedong, provided some allowance is made for a much greater user of hired labour (Ibid).

It will be however simplistic to explain the growing political ascendancy of the Yadavs in the state by reference to the rich strata alone. Numerical preponderance backed by requisite muscle power made them the natural leader of the backward caste upsurge against upper caste monopoly over power. It is also an unpleasant reality that the Yadavs or for that matter backward caste, might never had made it to governing circles without combating upper caste fire power at the polling booth. The intermediate position of Yadavs in the caste hierarchy above the Scheduled Castes and depressed backward castes (artisans and or service castes) and below the upper castes has admittedly given a shape to a duality in Yadav's behavior.

Generally speaking, the community had been in the forefront of the struggle against upper caste hegemony without being sympathetic to *dalit* assertion. Victimized and

humiliated at the hands of superior castes, they have been in turn found to indulge in oppression against *dalits* (Ibid). In south Bihar, the Yadavs have been victims of massacre at *Parsbigha* and *Choti-Chechni* and perpetrators of mass-killings at *Dohia* and *Nonhi-Nagwa*. This actually shows the community's dual character.

There are however important regional variations to this general behaviour. For example, in districts like *Madhepura* and *Saharsa* in north-eastern Bihar, the Yadavs have emerged as dominant caste and therefore the main vehicle of oppression.⁷⁰ In *Aurangabad*, *Bhojpur*, *Jehanabad* district of south Bihar, the *Yadavs* on the contrary have mostly been targets of upper caste oppression, and hence come closer to poor Scheduled Castes and lower backward castes to fight the common enemy. In *Bhojpur*, *Kurmis* and *Koeris* were also the targets of upper castes.

Here, it should be noted that it is misleading to say that backward castes as a whole have come into contradiction with *dalits*. It would be more appropriate to say that the upper layers of backward castes are in contradictions with *dalits*. At the same time, there is also indication that the "rich strata of *dalits* are also involved in atrocities on poor *dalits*" (Jha, 2000: 439). Among the incidents of violence against *Dalits*, there is one that occurred at *Arwal* (in *Jehanabad* district) in 1986 which deserves to be mentioned here for the understanding of the class contradictions among *dalits*.

The *Arwal* (in *Jehanabad* district) incident was the result of the conflict between one quite rich Dalit family whose head was a well placed government officer and a few other poor dalit families. There was a piece of public land (measuring only twenty seven decimals) which the poor *Dalit* families had under their possession. But, the said Dalit officer became tempted to grab it and then, he mobilized the state administration in his favour. The other party approached the *Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti*⁷¹ for help. The *Samiti* organized massive rally. The police opened fire on the crowd assembled in the

⁷⁰ The nature of oppression in Saharsa and Madhepura area is different from the south Bihar. The north-eastern region of Bihar is not engulfed by the incidents of massacres whereas south Bihar is mainly hot-bed of caste-class violence manifested in the form of massacres of the people.

⁷¹ The most popular open front of the *Party Unity* is *Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti* (MKSS), banned in 1986 and renamed *Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Parishad* (MKSP) in 1994. See Bela Bhatia (2005). Pp. 1537.

rally causing the loss of twenty two *Dalits* (Sinha in Jha, 2000: 439). This incident shows that the upper layers of *dalits* tend to behave with the Dalit masses in the same manner as upper layer of other caste groups behave with them. But, there are few examples like this. However, the contradiction between rich and poor *Dalits* may emerge in the near future.

After a brief description of the multiple caste-class contradiction which is emerging in Bihar. An attempt is made to highlight the nature of contradiction between backward castes and *Dalits*. This contradiction has mainly emerged with the 'rise of the kulaks' since late 1960 which is also a period when the upper backward castes made their way into the political power.

5.2: Growing Antagonism Between Backward castes and Dalits:

.....When, after the separation of Bihar and Orissa from Bengal, a provincial capital was set up in Patna in 1913, the bureaucratic impulse thus given to urban growth almost immediately produced chain effects in the form of a rise in the prosperity of the Yadava, Kurmi and Koeri tenants of Patna district who turned into suppliers of milk, grain and vegetables to the expanding urban market. This new-found prosperity of intermediate-caste middle and rich peasant was to have serious future implications for the Harijan agricultural labourers (Das, 1992: 29).

The above account of A.N. Das suggests that urban growth was an important reason for the prosperity of Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris tenants which was on the way since the beginning of the 20th century or colonial period. This also suggests the emergence of the class contradiction between upper backward castes and Dalits.

.....a section of backward castes is rich peasants who were ryots cultivators before 1952. After the zamindari abolition Act, they became owners of big landholdings. Through cultivation, employment and other sources their incomes have gone up. They purchased land from ex-landlords at very cheap rates and through various means; they continued to enlarge their holdings. With their developing economic position, their political ambition too has grown. These new-style landowners are

fiercely aggressive and despotic. They ruthlessly exploit the landless poor and middle peasants in numerous ways (Kohli, 1990: 234).

It has been discussed elsewhere that class dimension is important to understand the contradiction between different castes. As the focus of the study is to understand the rise of backward caste politics and its implication for Dalits, it is important to concentrate on the gradual rise of backward caste politics and the emerging contradiction between them. At the same time, it is also important to understand the contradiction between upper caste-class vs. lower caste-class (which includes backward castes and dalits).

Two case studies are given to illustrate the above stated types of contradictions. The first case study is the example of the confrontation between backward caste rich peasants as oppressors and Dalits as oppressed. The second one is the example of upper caste as oppressor and backward castes and Dalits as oppressed.

5.3: Case study I: Masaurhi

This was the period when 'Land Grab' movement was going on and this was resisted by landowners and the state both by legislative reform and repression.⁷² In this context, the experience of the Masaurhi-Punpun area in Patna district is a case which points towards the emerging contradiction between backward castes and Dalits. Das (1983) gives an account of this phenomenon.

Untill 1970, Madhuban village in Dhanarua Block of Patna district contained nine square miles of forest and. In that year, the government got the land cleared by local landless Harijan labourers with the avowed aim of settling them there. However, once the land was made fit for cultivation, the Yadav rich peasants of the area occupied it and started terrorizing the Harijan labourers, beating them up,

⁷² The 1970s 'Land Grab' movement initiated mainly by CPI fizzled out soon due to the inherent organizational inability of the Left parties to sustain it for the optimum results. However, this movement again resurfaced in the 1990s in form of 'Bhumi Mukti Andolan' (Land Libereation Movement) launched jointly by the CPI, CPI(M) and the Indian Peoples' Front. For detail see Bihars' Land Liberation Struggle by Mukul. Pg. 1780. *Economic and Political Weekly*. August 22, 1992. For an account of the earlier land struggle in naxalite belt, see A Land Struggle by D N at pg. 459. *Economic and Political Weekly*. March 5, 1988.

maiming them and raping their women folk.⁷³ This situation continued for several years but slowly resistance to oppression built up among the Harijans. On 9th May 1975, three Yadav landowners from the neighboring village were killed. After that, the village was declared 'Naxalite-infested' by the government, a police party was posted there and 18 Harijan labourers were arrested. The entire population of the nearby village, Deokuli, had a dispute with another village, Belabarah, in 1972 over an irrigation *bundh* (dam). The villagers of Deokuli got together and raised money for a legal battle against those of *Belabarah* in the courts. The funds thus raised were allegedly defalcated by a landowner belonging to the Awadhia Kurmi caste, who also oppressed the Harijans in many ways. When one of ploughmen fell ill during the paddy transplantation season in 1974, he took away the land traditionally given to such 'attached' labourers. On 16th March 1975 a Harijan boy, passing through the part of the village where Awadhias live, was surrounded by landowners and beaten to death, on 7th May 1975 more than a dozen landowners entered the Musahars (Harijan) *tola* and raped a number of Harijan women. When the Harijans finally resisted such atrocities, they were labeled 'Naxalites' (Das, 1983: 215-216).⁷⁴

When landless Dalits were getting organized for their rights, and fighting against the economic and social oppression inflicted by the landowners, the state machinery always extended its support to the latter. This shows the class character of the state. The landowners used the police and para-military forces to suppress the popular movement of landless Dalits in which many radical activists of landless Dalits were killed.⁷⁵ According

⁷³ According to Das, rape has been a fairly common mode of oppression on the rural poor in Bihar. Bihar Legislative Assembly Secretariat, Report of the Gahlor Inquiry Committee (Chairman: Hari Nath Mishra, Speaker Bihar Legislative Assembly), (Patna, 1973). Also, interview with P.H. Prasad, New York Times, 5th October, 1973.

⁷⁴ The raping of Harijan woman was a common occurrence and in this sport, the landowners were joined by Personnel of the police Camp. Rape is said to have become so widespread that it has become difficult to find husbands for the girls from this village. This was the story of Nema village of Punpun Block in Patna district where a struggle was launched by the landless and poor peasants – mostly Harijans – for their right to minimum wages prescribed by the government and homestead lands to which they were officially entitled. This struggle has been going on since 1967 and ever since then armed police had been posted in the village. See A.N. Das : Agrarian Changes from above and Below in Ranjit Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Delhi: Oxford University Publication. (1983).

⁷⁵ For details, see Indian Nation, 7th June 1975 which gives the account of the cross-fire between 18 'Naxalites' and about 300 CRP and BMP jawans. To liquidate naxalites out of the tola of one house, the jawans put all houses of tola on fire after three of their colleagues were hit by extremists bullets. Finally, when the 'naxalites' were surrendering, they were all shot down from point blank range. The report of the Indian Nation is quoted in A.N. Das (1983: 217).

to Nirmal Sengupta, in such cases the atrocities on *Harijans* are described as ‘excess of naxalites’:

There is a gulf of difference between these two characterizations. If it is found that the victim had only his immediate interest, or the most a feeling for his caste men, in mind, the case is dealt with sympathetically. His family may receive some compensation and the murderer may even get some punishment. But if it is found that the victim was prompted by the idea of class struggle, a dream of establishing ‘Garib Raj’, then the authorities rightly realize that he stood above the caste phenomenon. Then he is not called a ‘Harijan’ any more but is termed a ‘Naxalite’. The police as well as the Enquiry Committee constituted for the enquiry of the murder of four Dusadhs in village Chouri on 4th May 1973 justified and praised the killings on the ground that victims were Naxalites (Sengupta, 1979: 92).

The second case of Bhojpur is an example of class-conflict between upper caste landlords as the oppressor and Dalits and backward castes as oppressed. Although Masaurhi’s case tells a different story, where backward caste landlords are oppressor yet, both the incidents are similar in terms of the class character of the atrocities.

5.4: Case study II: Bhojpur

In order to understand the caste and class character of struggle in Bhojpur, it is important to have an understanding of the history of the movement and its leadership. In a recent study by Bela Bhatia (2005), the case study of *Ekwari* village is noteworthy. Bhumihars (about 250 households in 1995) are the major landowners in Ekwari. The largest landholdings in the village today are below 100 *bighas*. However, landowners in Ekwari are called zamindars by the labourers since they not only own a major share of the land but also retain overwhelming political control over village institutions such as gram panchayat. Bhatia gives the description of the history of struggle in Ekwari:

It was this insistence on maintaining political control that got the bhumihars in trouble in 1967. During the fourth state assembly elections that year, Jagdish

Mahato (an educated youth of Koeri caste) was severely beaten by the henchmen of the landlords for attempting to prevent them from rigging votes. Meanwhile, news of the naxalbari uprising (which took place the same year) had spread far and wide. Naxalite slogans calling for armed revolution had also started appearing on the walls of some towns of Bhojpur. The Naxalite message caught the imagination of Jagdish Mahto, who started looking for like-minded friends. In this endeavor, he was joined by Rameshwar Ahir, a yadav dacoit turned rebel who had returned to Ekwari after serving a 12-year sentence for murdering the constable. The izzat ki ladai (fight for dignity) had begun. At this stage, Jagdish Mahato is reported to have traveled to West Bengal in order to forge links with Naxalites leaders there. The Naxalites who subsequently came to Bhojpur later developed into present CPI (ML) Liberation.⁷⁶ Initially, the focus was on annihilation of oppressive landlords and their henchmen, and a fight against their samanti feudal attitudes and behaviour. Jagdish Mahato is said to have described this hangover from the past in the following words: "the landlord's moustache has got burnt but the twirl still remains". Jagdish Mahato and Rameshwar Ahir were killed in 1972 and 1975, respectively. Sometimes, fondly called Marx and Engel, these two founders of Naxalite movement in Bhojpur had no prior communist background (Bhatia, 2005: 1541-42).⁷⁷

The history of struggle in Ekwari village shows that in caste terms, the base of the movement consists of lower and intermediate castes.⁷⁸ In addition, in class terms, it consists overwhelmingly of the landless, small peasants with marginal holdings, and to lesser extent middle peasants. The grassroots leadership is also drawn from lower and intermediate castes.

In addition to the case above discussed of Ekwari village, the incident in Gurpa village in Bhojpur district is also noteworthy to identify that it is not only Dalits who are victims

⁷⁶ The Liberation group has been contesting elections since 1985. Until the 1995 elections, it was contesting under the banner of Indian People's Front (IPF), from 1995 onwards it started contesting as CPI (ML). See Bela Bhatia: The Naxalite movement in Central Bihar. *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 9, 2005. pp. 1536-37.

⁷⁷ For details see also Mukherjee, Kalyan and Rajendra Yadav (1980): *Bhojpur: Naxalism in the plains of Bihar*. Radhakrishna Prakashan, Delhi. Pp. 43-44 and 53-54.

⁷⁸ This includes not only the 'Scheduled castes', but also lower backward castes. It is important to note that while most Scheduled Castes families are landless, the converse is not true; a large proportion among the landless belong to lower backward castes. See Bela Bhatia (2005). Pp. 1537.

but the backward castes are also the victims of feudal oppression. Sengupta writes about the case of Gurpa village of Bhojpur district.

Following the proclamation of the Emergency, in Gurpa village of Bhojpur village, the Harijan and Yadav agricultural labourers attempted to reclaim lawfully their mortgaged land and reported to the local police that their crops had been looted by the landlords. For these 'audacities' their huts were set on fire – five Harijans, including a pregnant woman, were killed. Later in the same village, three Yadavs, who were recently freed from their service as bonded labourers, were also killed (Sengupta, 1979: 91).

The above account suggests that the fate of agricultural labourers as a class is same whether they belong to dalit castes or backward castes. While commenting on the increasing atrocities committed on the dalits⁷⁹ within a year of the establishment of Janata Party's regime, Arun Sinha (1982) gives a similar viewpoint:

An important first step in the direction of a better understanding on the situation would be to stop describing the major section of the state's agricultural proletariat as 'down trodden harijans'. There are other section of the agricultural proletariat consisting of the non-Scheduled lower castes, the backward castes and the intermediate caste who are as much exploited and oppressed.....No tears were shed over the major rural upheaval in Gurpa just because the labourers happened to be Yadavs, a backward caste, and not harijans. It is only when we see the harijans as landless peasants or sharecroppers that we can begin to understand the real character of so-called 'atrocities against 'harijans' (Sinha, 1982: 148).

Given the class character of the atrocities against Dalits and their struggle to achieve basic economic, social and political rights led to the formation of private caste armies by the landlords in order to suppress the movements of landless agricultural labourers. It

⁷⁹ Since March 1977, Bihar has earned the dubious distinction of accounting for the largest number of cases of 'atrocities against harijans' among all the states of India. The major outrages have occurred in Kargahar, Belchchi, Pathadda, Chhaundadano, Gopalpur and Dharampura. While in Kargahar, Pathadda, and Gopalpur the armed offensive of the landlords followed struggles for minimum wages; at Dharampura the issue was the occupancy rights of sharecroppers. In Belchchi and Chhaundadano, the massacres came as reprisal for challenging the absolute feudal power of the landlords. See Arun Sinha: *Class War, Not 'Atrocities Against Harijans'* in A.N. Das (ed.) *Agrarian movements in India: Studies on 20th Century Bihar*. Frank Cass: London (1982). Pp. 148.

should be noted that the formation of private caste armies started in the current phase of naxalite movement from 1977 onwards.⁸⁰ A list of private caste armies and their areas of respective operation is given at next page as table 5.1.

⁸⁰ The naxalite movement in Bihar can be divided into two phases: the formative phase from 1967 to 1977 and the current phase from 1977 onwards. Prior to the imposition of Emergency, it faced heavy state persecution and had to lie low. However, by the late 1970s, it had been able to reorganize itself and once again on uprising. The phase after 1977, therefore, saw the revival of the movement, significant reformulations of its political line, and the emergence of new naxalite groups. During the formative phase, land struggles initially sprung up in the Mushahari region of Mujaffarpur district in north Bihar, in parts of Bhojpur and Patna district in the then Central Bihar, and in Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Singhbhum and Dhanbad districts of south Bihar (now Jharkhand). These struggles were modeled after the naxalbari uprisings and were imitated by various members of All India Coordinating Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) or its successor, the CPI (ML), as well as the naxalite groups outside the AICCCR fold (mainly the Maoist Communist Centre). See Bela Bhati (2005).

Table 5.1: Major caste armies in Bihar

Name	Year of Formation	Caste Affiliation	Area of Operation
Kuer Sena	1979	Rajput	Bhojpur
Kisan Suraksha Samiti	1979	Kurmi	Patna, Jehanabad, Gaya
Bhumi Sena	1983	Kurmi	Patna, Nawada, Nalanda, Jehanabad
Lorik Sena	1983	Yadav	Patna, Jehanabad, Nalanda
Bramharshi Sena	1984	Bhumihar	Bhojpur, Aurangabad, Jehanabad
Kisan Sangh	1984	Rajput, Brahmin	Palamu, Aurangabad
Kisan Sewak Samaj	1985	Rajput	Palamu, Aurangabad
Sunlight Sena	1989	Pathan, Rajput	Palamu, Garhwa, Aurangabad, Gaya
Sawarna Liberation Front	1990	Bhumihar	Gaya, Jehanabad
Kisan Sangh	1990	Bhumihar	Patna, Bhojpur
Kisan Morcha	1989-90	Rajput	Bhojpur
Ganga Sena	1990	Rajput,	Bhojpur
Ranvir Sena	1994	Bhumihar	Bhojpur, Patna, Jehanabad, Rohtas, Aurangabad, Gaya
Gram Suraksha Parishad	1995	"	Bhojpur
Mazdoor Kisan Sangh	1996	"	Bettiah

Source: Prakash Louis, *People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar*, Delhi: Wordsmith (2002).

Source: http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/terroristoutfits/Private_armies.htm.

In the whole process of the emergence and activities of *sena* culture, the role of state was more biased than being the harbingers of law and order.⁸¹

The nexus between class power and the state compounds the oppression of the underclass in Bihar. There are two principal respects in which the operation of the state reinforces the connection between caste and class: (a) laws, such as land-reform laws or those pertaining to the payment of minimum wages, which are designed in principle to benefit the disadvantaged, are subverted because of the sway of vested interests over the state's politics and administration; and (b) wherever the underclass has been politicized and mobilized to demand the implementation of the laws designed to their benefit, they are subjected to brutal repression by the dominant caste militias and the police (Chakravarti 2004: 59).

State government supported the rise of the caste based armies to counter the 'extremism' problem.⁸² Deep inside the politics of the survival was at stake.⁸³ As was the case, the state as well as the bureaucracy and the police force were dominated by the upper caste-class combined people, and the radical activities of the naxal were disturbing the age-old feudal relations. Thus, the resulting struggle was between the state (along with its bureaucracy and police) and landless peasants who were often branded as 'naxals'. The state aimed to eliminate the latter in pretext of maintaining the law and order.⁸⁴

⁸¹ "Every sign of agrarian unrest, even peaceful moves to merely demand implementation of elementary laws relating to minimum wages or abolition of bonded labour, were exaggerated to represent 'naxalite' conspiracy to 'wage war on the state'. Thus a CPI(M)-led mass movement in east Champaran, an ethnic struggle led by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in Dhanbad, even CPI and occasional Socialist land agitations were tarred with the 'naxalite' brush. The media too played its part in this. The Indian Nation and Aryavarta, owned by the 'Maharajadhiraj' of Darbhanga were naturally pro-landlord, but even the Searchlight and Pradeep, owned by the Birlas and great champions of agrarian reform before independence, carried full-page alarmist articles." Pg.17, Landowners' Armies Take Over 'Law and Order' by Arvind N Das.. *Economic and Political Weekly*. January 4, 1986.

⁸² See Class Wars in Bhojpur—II by Arun Sinha, especially pg. 92. *Economic and Political Weekly* January 21, 1978

⁸³ This deep seated 'politics of survival' entrenched among the ruling class and caste has been aptly brought out in Bara Massacre and After by Krishna Chaitanya, pg. 761. *Economic and Political Weekly* April 11-18, 1992. The article based on the investigation carried out by a team of Shodh Madhyam, an independent research-cum-media centre based at Patna highlights the deep rooted caste bias of the political establishment.

⁸⁴ Detail account on this state-police-private caste army has been stingily brought out by fact finding team of the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR) investigating Arwal massacre of 1986. It states that Arwal massacre "was an attempt to terrorise and suppress the legal and democratic movement of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers in order to protect the landlords from their onslaught. The state government's allegation that the police fired in self-defence when an armed mob attacked the police station

The violence perpetuated on peasants and 'naxals' both by the State and private caste armies later on took shape of state sponsored activity. In 1986 Bindeshwari Dubey (the then Chief Minister of Bihar) announced the initiative to arm the landlords against the naxalites. It was in a sense to 'legalise' the Operation Task Force conducted in 1985 under which 200 gun licenses were issued by the administration to the landlords which later on reached to the private caste armies to counter the naxal activities. State progressively became a tool of systematic repression of the naxals and peasants.⁸⁵

In retaliation to this State sponsored act of violence against the Left, the MCC took charge and engineered the *Baghaura-Dalelchak* massacre of 54 *Rajputs* in the Madanpur region of Aurangabad in 1987.⁸⁶ In response to this, Rajputs and the Pathans jointly formed *Sunlight Sena*. At the same time, the Rajputs of Bhojpur set up the *Kunwar Sena*, named after the 1857 hero Kunwar Singh and the Brahmans set up the *Ganga Sena*. An unified venture in form of *Savarna Liberation Army* (SLA) was formed in late eighties having the support of all upper caste groups by Ramadhar Singh Diamond. It was responsible for 'mass rape' campaign engineered between March and July 1992 in Gaya and Jehanabad districts.⁸⁷

is utterly baseless." Pg. 949. Arwal Massacre: A Government Conspiracy? *Economic and Political Weekly* May 31, 1986. Also see Arwal Massacre: Part of Government Plan by Nilanjan Dutta at pg. 1146. *Economic and Political Weekly* July 5, 1986. "This is reflected by the fact that during the 80s the police began to openly support these militias like *Bhumi Sena*, *Lorik Sena*, *Brahmarshi Sena*, *Kuer Singh Sena*, etc., pitched against poor peasants. Even the Director General of Police of Bihar, Shashi Bhushan Sahay has admitted that much ['There was a tendency among the police functionaries to encourage the defence groups (the *senas*) to organize themselves in order to fight out the naxalites.....this was the very negation of police performance which actually resulted in the rise of different caste *senas* in Bihar.' Quotation from the confidential note of the Director General of Police of Bihar which was published in *Times of India*, Patna edition, May 1986, p. 1, captioned as 'Police Help for Private Armies'.]. As quoted in pg. 852, Agrarian Violence in Bihar by Pradhan H Prasad. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XXII, No 22, May 30, 1987. Also see Bihar: Collusion of State and Landlord Armies at pg. 1300 in *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 25, 1988.

⁸⁵ The state has come under severe criticism from various institutions fighting for democratic rights for its alleged role in 'eliminating' people in name of maintaining 'law and order'. These reports have been compiled in a book form titled *Repression and Resistance in India: Violation of Democratic Right of the Working Class, Rural Poor, Adivasis and Dalits*. Edited by A.R. Desai. Bombay: Popular Prakashan (1990). In the context of Bihar see pp. 143-231.

⁸⁶ However, the MCC being the mastermind of this caste violence has been refuted in Bihar: Caste Violence. Editorial. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pg. 913. June 13, 1987. Blaming Yadavs as mastermind of this massacre, the article concludes that the "Aurangabad carnage had a clear caste bias and the class factor was missing. The victims were not big landlords."

⁸⁷ The Savarna Liberation Army's 'mass rape' campaign, conducted between March and July 1992 in Gaya and Jehanabad districts, was one of the most heinous among these. More than 200 Dalit women between

The caste and class wars became very violent with the formation of the *Ranveer sena* in 1994 having the support of all upper caste landowners in Bhojpur.⁸⁸ It carried out various massacres against the dalit assertion countering the naxal movement. Unknown places like Ekwari, Nannaur, Bathe, Narainpur and Shankarbigaha got firmly etched on the minds of the people due to the massacre led by *Ranveer sena*. The Left retaliated with violence in places like Bhima and Senari.

Ranveer sena has carried out much carnage since its formation. The mass killing of 22 persons at Bathani Tola in July 11, 1996⁸⁹; Lakshmanpur-Bathe massacre in December 1, 1997⁹⁰ and massacre of 23 dalits in Shakarbigaha village in Jehanabad district on 25th January, 1999⁹¹ is still to be surpassed by any militant outfit (including Left outfits) indulging in violence.⁹² The Bihar State government banned the *Ranveer Sena* under severe public pressure after it massacred dalits in Sarathua in Bhojpur in July 1995.⁹³

the ages of six and 70 were raped by a group of activists of the Savarna Liberation Army. Each of these incidents was given publicity by the perpetrators of the crime. Ranvir Sena leaders claim that the operation was intended to avenge the killing of 34 Bhumihar landlords at Bara by the Maoist Coordination Centre (MCC). It was a 'lesson' to the Dalits, that if they tried to take on the landlords the women of their communities would be humiliated. Ranvir Sena activists claim with a macabre sense of glee that the operation was 'very effective'. The stigma attached to rape victims is such that the operation broke the morale of Dalits of many villages. A History of Massacres (Cover Story) by Venkitesh Ramakrishnan. *Frontline*, Vol. 16. No. 05. Feb. 27 - Mar. 12, 1999

Source: <http://www.flonnet.com/fl1605/16050300.htm>.

⁸⁸ The nomenclature 'Ranvir' has been adapted from the mythical figure Ranvir Baba. As the legend goes, during the late 19th century, Ranvir Baba, a retired military man and a resident of Belaur village in Bhojpur district, protected the rights of the Bhumihars, a land-owning upper caste of the State, against the Rajputs. It is said that, due to the activities of Ranvir Baba, the Bhumihars asserted their power in Bhojpur district.

⁸⁹ See State, Class and 'Sena' Nexus: Bathani Tola Massacre Arvind Sinha and Indu Sinha *Economic and Political Weekly* November 2, 1996. pp. 2908-2912.

⁹⁰ The most violent massacre carried till now by Ranvir Sena left 61 (19 men, 27 women and 15 children who were less than 10 years old) dead. For a detailed account based on observations, see Massacre on the Banks of the Sone by Bela Bhatia. Pg. 3242, *Economic and Political Weekly* December 20, 1997. Also see The Jehanabad Carnage by Kalyan Chaudhuri. *Frontline*, Vol. 14, No. 25. December 13 - 26, 1997. Also available online: <http://www.flonnet.com/fl1425/14250270.htm>

⁹¹ See Massacre in Shankarbigaha by Kalyan Chaudhuri. *Frontline*, Vol. 16, No. 04. February 13 - 26, 1999. Online Address: <http://www.flonnet.com/fl1604/16040370.htm>

⁹² "An analysis of these caste wars, as they are called, is best developed inductively.....has revealed four basic patterns of conflict. The first and the most important pattern involve direct fighting between the land-owning castes and the landless scheduled castes over socioeconomic issues. This frequently results in the deaths of members of the lower castes, and occasionally a member of the higher caste will be killed. Let us label these incidents of *caste-class conflict*. A second, related pattern is characterized by murders of members of the lower castes by the police. These are often called incidents of *police brutality*. A third and less frequent pattern involves almost random violence and killings between two or more castes. These are cases of *anarchic conflict*. Finally, there is a fourth pattern of increasing conflict that does not concern us directly in this study: looting and plundering by *dacoits*, the plain *criminal violence* that always increases

Table 5.2: Chronology of Massacres in Central Bihar (1977-2001)

Year	Place	District	Attackers' Caste/Class	Victims' Caste/Class	Casualty
1976	Akodi	Bhojpur	Upper backward/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
1977	Belchi	Patna	Upper backward/landlords	Scheduled caste/agri. labourers	14
	Kargha	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Brahampur	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/middle peasants	4
1978	Kaila	Jehanabad	Upper backward/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
1979	Samhauta	Rohtas	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	4
	Bajitpur	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
1980	Pipra	Patna	Upper backward/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	14
	Parasbigha	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste/agri. labourers	11
1981	Mathila	Bhojpur	Police	Liberation cadres	3
1982	Maini Bigha	Aurangabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	6
1983	Panania	Gaya	Police	MCC cadres	5
1984	Gagan Bigha	Rohtas	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	5
	Ambari	Aurangabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Danwar-Bihta	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	22
	Kharakpura	Aurangabad	Upper caste/Lorik Sena	SC/agri. labourers	6
1985	Kaithi Bigha	Aurangabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	10
	Kunai	Bhojpur	Police	Liberation cadres	2
1986	Neelampur	Gaya	Haare Ram group/Lorik Sena	SC/agri. labourers	5
	Gaini	Aurangabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	12
	Aminabad	Jehanabad	Upper	Muslims/Beedi	3

when law and order disintegrate." Pp. 226-227. *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability*. Atul Kohli. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1990).

⁹³ For a detail description of organization and functioning of Ranveer Sena see Bihar: Class War Spreads to New Areas by Prakash Louis. *Economic and Political Weekly* June 24-30, 2000. pp. 2206-11. Also see Singh, K.N. (2005) *Bihar Mein Niji Senaon ka Udbhav aur Vikas*. New Delhi: Vani Prakashan.

			caste/Brahmarshi Sena	workers	
	Jeenpura	Patna	Ramanand Yadav group/Lorik Sena	SC/agri. labourers	6
	Arwal	Jehanabad	Police	MKSS cadres	24
	Kansara	Jehanabad	Upper caste/Brahmarshi Sena	Backward caste/agri. labourers	8
	Parasdih	Aurangabad	Upper caste/Satyanendra Sena	SC/agri. labourers	5
	Darmian	Aurangabad	Upper backward/middle peasants	Upper caste/landlord	11
1987	Chotki-Chhechani	Aurangabad	Upper caste/Satyanendra Sena	Upper backward/Middle peasants	7
	Dalelchak-Bhagaura	Aurangabad	Upper backward/middle peasants	Upper caste/landlord	52
1988	Narhan	Jehanabad	Upper backward/dacoits	Upper backward/poor peasants	4
1989	Nonhi-Nagwan	Jehanabad	Ramashish-Rajdev group/Nagwan	Upper backward SC/agri. Labourers	18
	Daumha	Jehanabad	Ramashish-Rajdev group/Nagwan	Upper backward SC/agri. Labourers	9
1990	Dariyapur	Patna	Upper backward/Kisan Sangh	SC/agri. Labourers	5
1991	Tiskhora	Patna	Upper backward/Kisan Sangh	SC/agri. Labourers	15
	Dev-Sahara	Bhojpur	Upper caste/Jwala Singh group	SC/agri. Labourers	15
	Savanbigha	Jehanabad	Swarna Liberation Front/upper caste	SC/agri. Labourers	7
	Theendiha	Gaya	Sunlight Sena/upper caste	SC/agri. Labourers	7
	Mein-Barsima	Gaya	Swarna Liberation Front/upper caste	SC/agri. Labourers	10

1992	Bara	Gaya	Upper backward/middle peasants	Upper caste/landowners	34
	Chainpur	Rohtas	Police	PU cadres	4
	Ashabigha	Gaya	Police	MCC cadres	6
1993	Dadar	Rohtas	Police	Liberation cadres	3
	Ekwari	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	4
1994	Aghoura	Rohtas	Police	Party Unity	4
	Nadhi	Bhojpur	Police	Liberation cadres	9
	Matgharna	Gaya	Police	MCC	11
1995	Khopira	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Sarathua	Bhojpur	do	SC/agri. labourers	6
	Gulzarbiga	Aurangabad	Police	PU Cadres	4
1996	Chandi	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	4
	Pathalpura	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri- labourers	3
	Mathanbiga	Aurangabad	Police	MCC cadres	7
	Nanaur	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri- labourers	5
	Nadhi	Bhojpur	CPI-ML cadres	Upper caste/landlords	8
	Nadhi	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	9
	Morath	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Bathanitola	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC and Muslims/agri. labourers	22
	Purhara	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	4
	Khanet	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	5
	Ekwari	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	6
1997	Khanet	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Machil	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Haibaspur	Patna	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	10
	Akhopur	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	4
	Jalpura	Patna	PU cadres	Upper caste/landlords	11
	Indo	Patna	Police	PU cadres	6
	Ekwari	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri- labourers	10

	K-hadasin	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	8
	K-odihara	Patna	Police	PU cadres	2
	Katesar Nala	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	6
	Lakshmanpur-Bathe	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	58
	Chauram	Jehanabad	CPI(ML) Liberation	Upper caste/landlords	9
1998	Nagri	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	10
	Aiyara	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Sigori	Gaya	Police	MCC	6
	Rampur-Aiyara	Jehanabad	PU cadres	Upper caste/landlords	7
	Mahadevbigha	Gaya	Police	MCC cadres	4
1999	Shankarbigha	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	23
	Narayanpur	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	11
	Usri Bazar	Jehanabad	Liberation cadres	Upper caste/landlords	7
	Bheempura	Jehanabad	PW cadres	Upper caste/landlords	4
	Senari	Jehanabad	MCC cadres	Upper caste/landlords	35
	Sujathpur	Buxar	Police	Liberation cadres	16
	Sendani	Gaya	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste & SC	12
2000	Lakhisarai ^a	Lakhisarai	Backward caste/Contractors	SC/Sand workers	11
	Rajebigha ^b	Nawada	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste/Middle farmers	5
	Afsar ^c	Nawada	Backward caste/Middle farmers	Upper caste landlords	12
	Mianpur ^d	Aurangabad	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste and SC	35
	Dumariyan ^e	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste and SC	6
2001	Chironichi bigha	Gaya	MCC cadres	Police	6
	Kariambura	Jehanabad	Police	PW cadres	5

^a This massacre is not related to the agrarian struggle per se. It was an outcome of the struggle for hegemony over sand quarry in the Ganges and Sone riverbeds. In this incident the struggle for supremacy between two contenders for sand quarry—both from the same upper backward caste and supporters of political party currently ruling in Bihar—led to the killing of 11 labourers.

^b This massacre has a special significance to the agrarian movement going on in Bihar. Though not directly linked with the Naxalite movement, this massacre opened up once again the struggle between the forwards and the backwards. Its echo could be heard in the Mianpur massacre. Akhilesh Singh, the prime accused in this massacre, was an MLA in the Bihar Legislative Assembly.

For details on political leaders with criminal background, see 'Legitimising Gun Culture in Bihar', *The Hindu*, 23 June 2000, p. 9.

^c The Afsar massacre was a revenge killing by the backward castes, who were victims of Rajebigha massacre. Twelve Bhumihars were killed in Afsar village of Kashichak block of Nawada district. The victims were not involved in the Rajebigha massacre, but were relatives of the perpetrators of the Rajebigha massacre. This also brought to fore the political conflict that has been going on in Bihar between the ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal and its main rival, the Samata Party.

^d This was the first massacre committed by the Ranvir Sena in Aurangabad district. Until then, the presence of the Ranvir Sena in Aurangabad was considered to be nominal in comparison with its presence in other central Bihar districts. For details, see Louis 2000b.

^e This was the second massacre in Bhojpur district by the Ranvir Sena in two years. The sena originated in Bhojpur district but in course of time spread to other districts too. After the Dumariyan massacre, the struggle between the Ranvir Sena and the CPI(ML) Liberation became sharper. See Times of India, 11 September 2001, p. 1.

Source: Table 8.8, pp.242-246, *People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar*. Prakash Louis. New Delhi: Wordsmiths (2002)

[Online] Source: <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/terroristoutfits/massacres.htm>

The State sponsored private caste armies ruthlessly countered the peasant's assertion activities who were operating under the banner of Left parties. Here one thing to be pointed out that all massacres are not clearly based on the upper vs. lower caste or vice versa rather the picture is equally complex with the violence perpetuated by the rich upper backward caste i.e. kulak lobby on the poor peasants belonging to lower castes.⁹⁴

In this context, it would be noteworthy to quote the reflective argument of M.N. Srinivas:

⁹⁴ "When analyzing the social processes at work in Bihar (or for that matter, in any other part of India, with only the tribal areas being in some way excepted) it is not possible to use only categories of classes, like landlord, rich peasant, middle peasant or agricultural labourer; but it is also necessary to use the categories of caste. This is only an expression of the fact that Bihar (or India as a whole) has not yet overcome the caste structures that characterized feudalism in India. Semi-feudalism with, whatever development of capitalism has taken place, has modified these rural castes and introduced considerable difference in most of these castes. But for all the modification and differentiation, the caste structure still sits like a dead weight, holding back not merely the economic and political but also the cultural and moral development of

“There is a positive aspect of conflict between dominant (and high) castes on the one hand, and, the Scheduled Castes on the other, which is important, and needs to be mentioned. The bloodshed, death, rape and incendiarism have all to be viewed in the long run, as an integral part of the process of translating into reality the rights which the constitution of India grants to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. To say this is not to condone the savage attacks on the Scheduled Castes, but only to recognize the important fact that the conflict has a positive dimension.....If social conflict is indispensable to the improving of the living conditions of Scheduled Castes, then its presence is a healthier sign than its absence” (Srinivas, 2002: 383-384).⁹⁵

The negative aspect of social conflict is blood-shed on both sides e.g. oppressor and oppressed. The positive aspect of this can also be seen where Dalits and other deprived communities are organized to claim their social, economic and political rights. As Bhatia (2005: 1544) says when the poor struggle for minimum wages, or land reforms, they are asserting their constitutional right to justice. Similarly, women who used to be constantly exposed to arbitrary sexual harassment (even rape), and who now have the power to resist and even punish their aggressors can be seen to defend their constitutional rights to personal liberty and dignity.

society, and even putting its imprint on the new emerging classes.” Pg. 941. Problem of Unity in the Agrarian Struggle: Case of Bihar by DN in *Economic and Political Weekly*. May 7, 1988.

⁹⁵ *On Living in a Revolution*. (Collected essays). M.N. Srinivas. New Delhi: Oxford University Press (2002).

Chapter Six: Conclusion

What can we conclude from the discussion in all the three chapters? First and foremost, agrarian structure has close links with the social structure of Bihar which means that caste based inequality is reflected in the distribution of agricultural land, the most productive asset in any agrarian economy. If we go into the history of agrarian relations in Bihar since the Permanent Settlement of the colonial period, the zamindars and the tenure holders were exclusively drawn from the four upper castes of Bhumihar, Brahmins, Rajputs and Kayasthas. These castes controlled the economy and political power of rural Bihar. Among the upper castes also, a large number of households were peasants and tenants mostly from the Bhumihars. Where as upper middle castes were largely peasants and under-raiyats. They were also traders and agricultural laborers. Lower middle castes were largely agricultural labourers and artisans. Dalits were mainly the agricultural labourers.

However, with the devastating effects of Permanent Settlement, Bhumihars were the first who started militant peasant movement against this system and ultimately abolished it in 1950 (see Chapter 1). Therefore, the first phase of the agrarian movement benefited Bhumihars who mainly got entitlement to their lands. Meanwhile some of the upper middle castes also benefited from the abolition of this system. However, this section mainly benefited from the distress selling of land by the upper castes landlords following the land ceiling act of 1961. However, the upper middle castes such as Yadavs, Koeris and Kurmis could buy the lands in cheap rates because these castes accumulated incomes from the sell of the grain, vegetables and milk products with the increased urban growth.

Given the traditional caste occupation of the lower middle castes and the Dalits, they were somehow struggling for everyday survival, leaving aside the augmentation of their income to buy the lands in cheap rates; which was the result of the loopholes of land reforms in Bihar. Bhoodan and Gramdan movement of Binoba Bhave and Jayprakash Narayan were also not successful. In fact, former became a tool for landlords to evade the

land ceiling acts. In addition, the kind of lands gifted was actually barren and forested lands. In some cases, the gifted land was reoccupied by the landlords.

With this story of utter failure of the land reforms in Bihar, the green revolution also bypassed the state of Bihar in the pretext of incomplete land reforms. However, a sign of 'pale green revolution' can be seen in some parts of Bihar which largely benefited the upper backward castes such as Yadavs, Koeris and Kurmis who became the 'small capitalist farmers' i.e. 'kulaks'. Now with the rise of kulaks, two things were in the process of Bihar. Firstly, kulaks were fighting against the ruling class of upper castes in political arena. Secondly, they were also in contradiction with the landless Dalits and other backward castes at the village level.

However, it was not that the upper castes were not in contradiction with the Dalits and backward castes at the village level. In fact, the agrarian struggle in Bihar organized by the radical left was mostly against the upper caste landlords – including some of the upper backward castes rich peasants. Therefore, it should be understood that the common enemy of the backward castes and Dalits was the ruling class of the upper castes --- which resulted in the broader alliance of backward castes, Dalits and Muslims. Due to the numerical strength of these castes, it was easy for the lower castes to effectively challenge the monopoly of the upper castes in political arena.

If we closely look at the three phases of the rise of the backward caste politics (in Chapter 2) such as during the 1967, 1977 and 1990 onwards; it seems that the rise of kulaks among the backward castes contributed to the emergence of backward caste politics. However, the leadership of backward castes was mainly drawn from the class of the kulaks who were the landed gentry of the rural Bihar.

Therefore, with the gradual rise of backward castes in politics, this leadership did not protect the interests of Dalits. Infact, they have exploited the dalit masses when the latter have organized themselves to claim their rights on the lands, which were supposed to be distributed among them. The important example can be cited from the government of

Janata Party in 1977 when the atrocities against Dalits increased and the landowners got tacit support from the state to oppress and suppress the dalit masses.

However, it was not that the landowners of the upper castes and the upper backward castes do not have the support of the state (even before and after the Janata Party government of Karpoori Thakur) to suppress the popular movement of the Dalits and other backward castes. The most important point is that even the rise of backward caste politics culminated into the leadership of Laloo Prasad Yadav with the overwhelming support of the dalit communities. This government was also not able to protect the rights and dignities of dalit masses.

The most prominent issue related to the agrarian situation in Bihar is the presence of naxalite movement and the emergence of the private caste armies with the increasing onslaught of former in late 1970s. It has been pointed out that the private caste armies are formed by every landowning castes of Bihar whether it is upper or upper backward castes. Most prominent among these caste armies is the Ranvir Sena of Bhumihars. It should be noted that this sena was formed in 1994 (during the regime of Laloo Yadav).

It has been also shown in Chapter 3 that this Sena got the support of state in various massacres, most prominent among these is the Lakshampur-Bathe massacre where 58 dalit agricultural labourers were killed. Therefore, it is clear that no matter whether the state politics is dominated by the backward castes or upper castes, the atrocities against Dalit masses continued whenever they have organized to claim their social, economic and political rights. Mainstream political parties only gave promises to them and never fulfilled. Any state government never addressed the very important issue of the land reform. It was always sidelined because of the stakes of the political elites.

Dalit masses were organized under the banner of radical left organisation such as naxalite parties in order to claim their rights on common lands, demand for minimum wages. The naxalite parties have also fought for izzat (dignity) which was precious for dalit masses. In fact, economic exploitation of Dalits was always combined with their social

oppression by landed gentry. Their women were raped and the murder of Dalits became the favorite sport of the landowners of Bihar.

While mainstream political parties always neglected the rights of Dalits, it is the biggest contribution of the naxalite movement is that the Dalits are no longer vulnerable to the social oppression by their former masters. The confidence of agricultural labourers has increased remarkably and they have been able to fight many oppressive practices. The wages have increased, some *garmajurawa* (common land) land was reclaimed for housing purposes and some ceiling land is reclaimed and distributed among landless Dalits for agricultural purposes. However, to achieve this much has caused the immense sufferings of dalit masses resulted into a series of massacres in Bihar.

One of the major things which has been achieved by the Dalits is that they are now able to vote which previously was denied by the upper castes class. The naxalite cadres protected the dalit masses to the polling booths and ensured that they are not denied their voting rights. Dalit communities are now taking greater interests in politics and some of them have replaced their former masters in panchayat elections of 2001.

It has been pointed out that the migration and the peasant mobilization have been the important factors for changing the rural labour market and the social structure in the last three decades. Due to migration, there is shortage of agricultural labourer, which results into the increase in wage in north Bihar. Migration also decreased the economic dependence of Dalits on the dominant classes of upper and middle castes. It is noteworthy that remittance significantly contributes to the consumption needs of the rural poor. There is a significant trend that the downwardly mobile upper castes also responded to migration.

As there is less dependence of Dalits on the dominant classes of rural Bihar, they challenged the political dominance of the classes with their struggle to exercise their franchise. It is not that they only aspire for economic empowerment, social and political

empowerment are important issues for them, and to some extent they have been successful in realizing them.

Meanwhile, there is also an emerging ideological crisis with the naxalite movement, which was based on the contradiction between landed and landless class. This contradiction was clearly visible in late 1970s but now this is less visible in most of the villages because of the fragmentation of the landholdings. In addition, the agricultural activities have become less profitable. This is the reason that the upper castes youth also migrate for employment in the urban centers.

These changes in agrarian situation have an impact on politics in Bihar. Now, Dalits are less interested to join underground activity of naxalites. Moreover, they are increasingly joining the mainstream politics in most parts of rural Bihar. At the village level, they are fighting against the upper and middle castes in panchayat elections. Moreover, at the state level politics they compete for power. This is reflected in the political rivalries between Laloo Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan.

Having said this, it would be erroneous to conclude that the Dalits are majority in contradiction with the upper backward castes. If we closely look at the list of massacres of dalit agricultural laborers, out of 90 incidents the upper backward castes are involved in only 10 incidents related to the massacres of Dalits. There is also an indication that the influential Dalits are also involved in the killings of Dalits with the help of police. The Arwal incident is the example in this case.

This pattern of contradiction makes sense when it is seen in terms of the land distribution. The landlord and big peasants are still majorly drawn from the upper castes. Upper backward castes stand second in terms of average landholding. Moreover, among them the Kurmis are having parity with the upper castes in terms of landholding. Yadavs and Koeris have less average landholdings than Kurmis.

Further, during the 1990s the politics of India in general and Bihar in particular revolved around the issues of 'Mandal' and 'Mandir'. Laloo Yadav was able to capitalize on both these issues. The political impact of this electoral upheaval is interpreted as a kind of 'transfer of power' from upper castes to backward castes. This can be seen as a neo-rich phenomenon for upper backward castes which is not percolated to the lower backward castes and dalits. In fact, lower backward castes and dalits were at the periphery of political power, and they remained so even in this phase of democratic upsurge.

In spite of all the failings of Laloo Yadav, and admittedly there are many, he did stop L.K. Advani's 'Ram Rathayatra' and also managed to control the communal conflagration which might have engulfed Bihar as it consumed other parts of country. This was precisely the reason that Muslims overwhelmingly supported Janata Dal during the leadership of Laloo Yadav and later his personalized outfit, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

However, the malaise of Bihar is even deeper than communalism rooted in the very nature of state's political economy. As it is known that the Bihar's economy is stagnant for decades. In this situation, the sources of accumulation become primitive. This is because of little avenues for legitimate investment and whatever little investment is made there is little remunerative returns for that. Therefore, those in power devise the alternative method. Kidnapping, dacoity, loot and corruption are based on this economic rational. In this process of accumulation, there is a strong nexus between politicians, bureaucrats, contractors and criminals.

For the agricultural development in Bihar, there is a dire need of investment in infrastructure such as irrigation, rural electrification, roads, etc. For this to happen, there is a need of the mobilization of masses to break the nexus of above groups who appropriate most of the development funds. Apart from the discussion on political economy of the state, let us look at the competitive caste identities which is now taking place in Bihar. First of all, the regime of Laloo Yadav was interpreted by different caste groups as the Yadavasiation of Bihar politics which resulted into formation of different vote banks based on caste identities. In recent election of October-November 2005, while

Laloo Yadav was busy to hold M-Y combination, Nitish Kumar formed vote-bank of Kurmi-Koeri and upper castes which is reflected in an alliance with JD-U and BJP. Ramvilas Paswan competes with Laloo Yadav for Muslim vote bank with the promise of Muslim chief minister as well as consolidating dalit vote bank.

Now the question is how to comprehend the identity formation among lower backward caste? Is there lack of a broader identity among them because of the existence of various numerically small caste groups? As caste alliances are made on secular interests, they can also become a significant vote bank in electoral politics and articulate their demands.

A significant trend in the context of lower backward castes (who constitute a significant population nearly 32%) can be seen during the last assembly election in Bihar (October-November, 2005) when they overwhelmingly voted for NDA led by Nitish Kumar on the promise of 'development' and 'law and order'. However, the coming of NDA into power has given upper caste elements some breathing space and provided them with a strategies of survival by using the politics of coalition at the level of caste/community/class electoral alignments as well as inter-party legislative alliances. But, the question remains that to what extent the present government can fulfill the promise made to the deprived communities of Bihar? It appears that the promise of development by the Nitish Kumar's government is somewhat contradictory because of the existence of a majority of politicians who are having a criminal background and their main aim is to play politics to make money through the process of primitive accumulation.

Finally, it can be concluded that the class politics of Dalits and rural poor is majority weakened by the upper strata of different castes who use caste as a tool of mobilization for their own interests. The exploited classes of every caste and community is divided and they are not able to exert their concerted political power for their interests. They are not able to pressurize the state for land reforms, and break the nexus between politicians, bureaucrats and contractors who misappropriate most of the developmental funds. The worst sufferers are the dalit masses.

The nature of future work could be to analyse the complexities where radical left organizations are not able to make an alliance for the same objective of the upliftment of the downtrodden. While at the macro political level, we largely find the identity formation of upper backward castes such as 'Yadavs' and 'Kurmi-Koeri' which is reflected in the leadership and caste-based political parties such as RJD, Samata which later became JD(U). Dalit identity is also visible to some extent at the macro level similarly with their caste leadership and political party such as LJP. Now the question remains to interrogate the identity formation among the deprived castes or the lower backward castes among the backward castes. This question can be taken up by me in the near future or any scholar working on this subject.

Appendix I: Chronology of Chief Ministers and President Rules in Bihar

<u>Premiere.</u>	<u>Period</u>	
Md. Yunus	01 st April 1957	19 th July 1937
Dr. Srikrishan Singh	20 th July 1937	31 st October 1939
”	02 January 1946	28 th April 1952
<u>Chief Minister</u>		
Dr. Srikrishan Singh	29 th April 1952	31 st January 1961
Deep Narayan Singh (Care Taker)	01 st February 1961	18 th February 1961
Vinodanand Jha	18 th February 1961	01 st October 1961
Krishna Ballabh Sahai	02 nd October 1963	05 th March 1967
Mahamaya Prasad Sinha	05 th March 1967	28 th January 1968
Satish Prasad Singh	28 th January 1968	01 st February 1968
B.P. Mandal	01 st February 1968	22 nd March 1968
Bhola Paswan Shastri	22 nd March 1968	29 th June 1968
President Rule	29 th June 1968	26 th February 1969
Sardar Harihar Singh	26 th February 1969	22 nd June 1969
Bhola Paswan Shastri	22 nd June 1969	04 th July 1969
President Rule	04 th July 1969	16 th February 1970
Daroga Prasad Rai	16 th February 1970	22 nd December 1970
Karpoori Thakur	22 nd December 1970	02 nd June 1971
Bhola Paswan Shastri	02 nd June 1971	09 th January 1972
President Rule	09 th January 1972	19 th March 1972
Kedar Pandey	19 th March 1972	02 nd July 1973
Abdul Gafoor	02 nd July 1973	11 th April 1975
Dr. Jagannath Mishra	11 th April 1975	30 th April 1977
President Rule	30 th April 1977	24 th June 1977
Karpoori Thakur	24 th June 1977	21 st April 1979
Ram Sunder Das	21 st April 1979	17 th February 1979
President Rule	17 th February 1979	08 th June 1980
Dr. Jagannath Mishra	08 th June 1980	14 th August 1983
Chandra Shekhar Singh	14 th August 1983	12 th March 1985
Bindeshwari Dubey	12 th March 1985	13 th February 1988
Bhagwat Jha Ajad	14 th February 1988	10 th March 1989
Satyendra Narayan Singh	11 th March 1989	06 th December 1989
Dr. Jagannath Mishra	06 th December 1989	10 th March 1990
Laloo Prasad Yadav	10 th March 1990	28 th March 1995
President Rule	28 th March 1995	03 rd April 1995
Laloo Prasad Yadav	04 th April 1995	25 th July 1997
Rabri Devi	25 th July 1997	12 th February 1999
President Rule	12 th February 1999	08 th March 1999
Rabri Devi	08 th March 1999	06 th March 2005
President Rule	07 th March 2005	23 rd November 2005
Nitish Kumar	24 th November 2005	Till now

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