

Agrarian Unrest And Violence In Rural Bihar

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C E R T I F I C A T E

Certified that the dissertation entitled "AGRARIAN UNREST AND VIOLENCE IN RURAL BIHAR" by Mr. Vinod Kumar, has not been submitted for award of any degree to this or any other university. We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for consideration of award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Sociology of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

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CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION

India is predominately an agrarian society. Its historical and sociological dynamics and dimensions cannot be properly explained without going into the details of the social framework of agriculture. In order to understand the agrarian social structure one has to keep in view the factors like pattern of interaction among the hierarchically arranged categories, nature of division of labour, tools and techniques used in agriculture and organizational arrangement of production.

Historically, these all constituents of agrarian social structure have experienced so many remarkable changes. These changes have been brought about by the internal and external forces of the socio-political set up of the society. A major rupture has been witnessed in terms of ownership, control and use of the land during the British regime. After independence government has tried to bring about some noteworthy changes in regard to the distribution of land in order to achieve an egalitarian and socialistic pattern of society. Due to certain structural pitfalls and inherent loopholes,

the land reform legislations have not achieved the pronounced and fundamental objectives. Inequality in terms of the ownership and control of land is still persisting. On the other hand, consciousness and sense of deprivation among the lower strata of society is also increasing. Thus, the existence of inequality and its subsequent realization has given birth to the multiple forms of conflict, unrest and violence. Although agrarian unrest and violence is an all India Phenomenon, Bihar has become the most vulnerable citadel of unrest and violence.

In this dissertation attempts have been made to discuss the problem of 'Agrarian Unrest and Violence in Rural Bihar'. 'Agrarian Unrest and Violence' has been an 'ongoing' phenomenon in Bihar for a long time. But we find some kinds of variation in terms of the nature and intensity of violence over a period of time. For instance, before 1917, the form of unrest and violence was unorganized and spontaneous. It came from below and derived its inspiration, justification and symbols from the local values and religion. It lacked macro-perspective. After 1917, there was a fusion between the violence from below and its structural linkages with the polity of above.

Today, the intensity of unrest and violence is increasing. Various forms of violence and unrest have appeared on the socio-economic map of Bihar. Most of the rural areas in Bihar have become the repository of violence and unrest. The law and order situation is deteriorating. The state and its agencies are incapable of checking the incidents of violence. It seems that in Bihar state has been withered away without any revolution because it is not performing a positive and objective role to protect the interests of the downtrodden and deprived sections of population. Protection of the interests and privileges of the landlords and well off people has become the main task of the state. Therefore, at the present juncture, it has become an inevitable task for any researcher to keep in mind the role of state as a counter-revolutionary machinery while he is seeking the causes and effects of unrest and violence in the socio-cultural matrix of Bihar.

Here, violence and unrest has been conceptualized in terms of its structural connection with the other components of society. Its causes can be sought in the root of the structural arrangement of a particular society.

For us, violence is not an individual phenomenon; rather it is a social and collective response and reaction to a specific situation. It is structural both in its origin and continuation.

On the basis of available sources and materials, we have tried to answer certain questions such as: Why does violence erupt? How do different components of society help to generate and facilitate violence and unrest? What are the structural forces which compel the people to adopt violent means.

Although a student of sociology is not expected to provide any moral and normative prescription or proscription to any problem, it is too difficult to keep oneself aloof from occurrences taking place around without reacting normatively. It is because of this that we have tried to share agreement with those social scientists who have justified the proletarian and revolutionary violence. We hope that this valuational agreement will not question and hinder our cherished objective of an unprejudiced research.

It goes without saying that violence is universal phenomenon. No society is free from violence and unrest. But the nature, perception and degree of vulnerability of violence and unrest differs from place to place and

from time to time. Some societies are more violence prone and some are less. Some epochs of history are more violent than the others. Hence, it becomes logically necessary to keep in consideration the spatial and historical specificity of violence and unrest, otherwise our explanatory formulations will suffer from the fallacy of surface analysis.

In our analysis , we have not tried to draw any conceptual demarcation between 'unrest' and 'violence'. Both the terms denote the same meaning. 'Unrest and Violence' is the manifestation of the inherent stress and strains of the system. Its causes can be sought in the existing socio-political, economic and cultural sub-systems of the larger system of a particular period of history. It is generally believed that the transitional societies are more violence-prone than the developing and developed societies. This view has got certain empirical limitations. Resorting to violence as a means of protest depends upon the realization of the people that no other means can set them free from their century old subjugation. The ruling class uses violence to maintain its domination. Thus, revolutionary and counter revolutionary violence keeps on going in chain reaction.

Generally, violence from below emerges in response to the violence perpetrated by the ruling class. In a class-divided society the ruling class has to inflict violence upon the subject classes in order to perpetuate its class rule. In this situation, the subject class has no option except to answer in the same term. In this situation what they can do it no one is ready to listen to their language of sanity. At every point of history, the ruling class had got its own conception of the language of sanity. For it, the language of sanity implies that the subject should accept its oppressive hegemony without any voice of protest. Voice of protest is nothing but an unpardonable violence in the eyes of the ruling class.

Historically, it has been proved that no ruling class can survive by means of violence. It is situationally forced to go into the dustbin of history. But it does not mean that the successive ruling class will not use violence to legitimize its position. It is also structurally compelled to do the same. The chain of violence can be removed or reduced only when the society will be based on egalitarian orientation and fulfilled democratic-socialistic pattern and prescription. In nutshell, it can be stated that a class-divided society contains the seeds of violence. In such society the perpetration of violence by a ruling class is a perpetual thing.

The violence and unrest from below is the outcome of the violence inflicted by the ruling class. Violence from below is directly linked with consciousness from below. It represents all the features of 'subaltern movement'. Here, the term 'subaltern' has been used for the subordinate classes. Although subaltern is a loose notion and no strict and concrete definition of it is possible. However, in Indian context, we have used it to denote the position of subordination of the middle and poor peasantry and the proletariat. The poor and the proletarian classes are the main constituents of the subaltern class. Whether the middle peasantry will be included in it or not depends upon the situation and time.

In brief, we have tried to discuss some of the important characteristics of subaltern movements. Most of the subaltern movements are based on horizontal mobilization. They derive their strength from the traditional organization of kinship and territoriality. Violence is the part and parcel of the subaltern movement. It does not rely upon the legalistic and constitutional forms of mobilization. Along with these criteria, spontaneity is also one of the major characteristics of subaltern mobilization. We have also tried to examine such mobilization of peasantry in Bihar.

This dissertation has been divided into six chapters dealing with different dimensions of the said problem. Besides this, the next chapter entitled "Agrarian Structure, Complementarity and Contradictions: Some Theoretical Issues" deals with certain controversial but fundamental dimensions of agrarian structure in India. In order to understand the nature of agrarian unrest and violence, we have analysed the recent controversy over the "mode of production" in Indian agriculture. Further, we have also discussed the controversy regarding the 'Asiatic mode of production'. The issue of whether the term feudalism can be applied in Indian context or not has also been examined. We have tried to discuss the recent controversy over the prevailing mode of production in Indian agrarian structure.

In the same chapter, attempt has been made to explain the problem of 'Theoretical Conceptualization of peasantry and its place in agrarian social structure'. In this regard, we have discussed the controversy over the conceptualization of the peasantry. In the light of various theoretico-ideological shades we have analysed the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and have examined the 'middle' peasant thesis. In brief, attempts have been made to evaluate the epistemology

perception and consciousness of the peasants. Finally, attention has also been paid to the problem of the internal differentiation of peasantry.

Chapter 3 has been entitled as "Agrarian Relations and Peasant Movement in India : Past and Present". The main objective of this chapter is to analyse historically and sociologically the nature of agrarian relations and the causes and consequences of peasant movements in India. In this regard, we have taken three important periods of Indian history: Pre-British, British and the post-independence era. Besides a brief discussion on the agrarian relations prevailing during the medieval period, the land relations during the British region have been analysed. On the basis of evidences, the questions of How did land come into market and become a commodity have been answered. In the third phase, the impact of land-reform legislations and their inherent loopholes have been comprehended. Different peasant movements and their causes and consequences have also been elaborately examined. In this regard, we have concentrated on the peasant movements which took place before 1917 and the ones which appeared after 1917 and onwards. Finally, attempts

have been made in this chapter to conceptualize the peasant movements in India on the basis of pattern of mobilization, ideology and symbols, used by the participants. We have also drawn a bifurcation line between the peasant movements which are based on consciousness from below and those which are based on consciousness from above.

The next chapter is "Land Relations and Peasant Uprisings in pre-independent Bihar : A socio-historical profile". In this chapter attempts have been made to understand the impact of permanent settlement on the agrarian structure of Bihar. The unprecedented changes brought about by the introduction of permanent settlement have been examined minutely. Different peasant uprisings which took place during the British period have also been elaborated. Special attention is given on the Kisan Sabha movement, the first peasant movement in the history of Bihar which brought the peasantry under one organized banner to launch a movement against the landlordism. It paved the way for the future movements.

The chapter 5 provides analysis of the "Nature of Agrarian Conflict and Violence in Contemporary Rural Bihar".

In this chapter, we have tried to discuss different theories of violence. (Then, on the basis of the different ^{the} theoretical formulations, we have described the causes and factors which facilitate violence in society.) Why have the agrarian structure in Bihar and its socio-economic set up become violence prone and disharmonic has elaborately been examined. Besides, providing summary of the earlier chapters, some emerging trends regarding agrarian relations, violence and conflict have been analysed. Finally, we have also tried to understand the causes and consequences of the Naxalite Movements found in some parts of the state.

Since the field work is not desirable for the M.Phil. dissertation, the entire analysis is based on the secondary sources. From the methodological point of view, we will use both the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of the problem. However, we are incapable of utilising the "unconscious model" prevailing over the cognitive map of the natives. Our model will remain by and large a conscious model. Regarding the ideological-theoretical orientation effort has been made to remain objective and rational. At this juncture of initial research, commitment to a particular ideology may give birth to a distorted perception of social reality. Therefore, one has

to keep oneself aloof from any ideological commitment at least in the field of social research. But it is not any easy endeavour. Due to the patterns of upbringing and socialization everyone has got some normative and valuational orientations. He can not discard these values completely. He can only minimise and reduce the inclusion and imposition of his own values upon the research work.

Every research has got some practical objectives. It helps in social engineering and restructuring of society. Keeping this purpose in mind, the present topic has been selected for the M.Phil. dissertation.

CHAPTER - 2AGRARIAN STRUCTURE, COMPLEMENTARITY AND
CONTRADICTIONS: SOME THEORETICAL ISSUES

Theoretically, Agrarian structure is not a static and descriptive phenomenon. Rather, it is an analytical dynamic concept. It changes from time to time and from one socio-political system to another. The systematic history of agrarian structure in India came into existence when the lineage system was replaced by the state. In its long historical journey the agrarian system has undergone so many remarkable changes in accordance with the situational demands posed by the civil society and its corresponding state craft. Thus, we find a close relationship between the pattern of agrarian structure and socio-political set up existing at a particular epoch of history. Here, it does not seem to be necessary to analyse the relationship between agrarian structure and socio-political system in terms of super-bare-relationship. Our submission is that both of these phenomenon are interrelated and one cannot be understood without other. The role of dominant and determinant structure depends upon time and situation.

This chapter will not portrary the historical details of Indian agrarian structure. Only recent debates and controversies over the mode of production in Indian agriculture would be taken into consideration. This debate contains

two phases and numerous strands of opinion. In the first, there was controversy over the Feudal versus Asiatic mode of production. With regard the first debate, some important questions have been raised. These first questions are: whether the agrarian relationship in India could be considered to be feudal in character, and if so, what was the nature of this feudalism? In what way was it different from the feudalism that had existed in India in the earlier phases? And, what were the changes, if any, that were taking place in this feudal structure.¹

In answer to these questions, Nurul Hasan states categorically that Indian agrarian system during the medieval period can only be described as feudalism if we accept a totally modified definition of the term. "It is mainly a system (1) in which the major source of production is agriculture; (2) in which a substantial share of the surplus produce is appropriated by a class which held power militarily; (3) in which the economic power of the class which appropriated surplus is based not only on the military strength of that class but

1. Saiyid Nurul Hasan, Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India, (Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1973), pp.1

also on the role that class is playing in the production process, whether of agricultural production or the production of subsidiary handicrafts; and (4) in which this dominating class, in spite of changes within its fold, is, by and large, a fairly closed group."² Contrary to this in the Western European sense of term, Indian socio-economic system does not contain any characteristic of feudalism. On this issue Hasan shares agreement with R.S. Sharma that the word feudalism should be used to understand certain attributes of a particular phase of Indian social system. It is also noteworthy that the system has undergone important changes over a period of time.

Hasan along with some other social scientists has rejected the notion of "Asiatic mode of production" which is the part and parcel of Marxian Scheme of the oriental despotism. He believes that there is very little evidence of the existence of what was deemed to be communal ownership or what was the village community. It was really the community of the proprietors in a village, especially where the village happened to be "bhayyachare" village or a village

2. Ibid., pp. 1-2.

coparcenaries. Otherwise, in the sense of the village commune or the village community holding rights over land as a whole we have hardly any evidence.³ In the same manner, the concept of 'oriental despotism' has been questioned.

RECENT CONTROVERSY OVER THE "MODE OF PRODUCTION"

There is no agreement among the social scientists on characterization of the existing mode of production in Indian agriculture. Some social scientists opine that Indian agrarian system is capitalistic in nature while others think that still it is pre-capitalist system. The concepts like feudalism, colonialism, post-colonialism and dual mode of production have also been used respectively in terms of the characterization of Indian agrarian social system.

The first and the foremost pioneer of the recent debate is Daniel Thorner. In 1970, he stated very firmly that an advanced agricultural economy has emerged in Indian country side which can be compared to the advanced industrial sector because it is profitable and expanding. He concludes that in the country side, and especially in Punjab, a group of "gentleman farmers" has emerged. Here, the term "gentleman farmers" stands for those farmers who were

3. Ibid., p.2

earlier in other high economic professions such as industry, business, money lending etc.⁴

Thorner's view has not remained as an all-accepted notion. It has provoked others to examine the issue in detail. In this connection, Ashok Rudra was the first who took initiative. He has openly rejected the explanation and characterization of Indian agriculture given by Thorner. In order to evaluate the inherent logic of Thorner's argument, Ashok Rudra and some of his intellectual colleagues carried out a sample survey of big farmers in Punjab but did not find any phenomenon of capitalist farmers in Punjab. They also concluded that the phenomenon of "gentleman farmers" is not a general but a rare feature in the country side.⁵

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4. For details, see, Alice Thorner, "Semi-Feudalism or Capitalism Contemporary Debate on Classes and Mode of Production in India", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XVII, No. 49, (December 1982), pp. 1962-1963.
 5. Ashok Rudra et.al, "Big Farmers of Punjab: Some Preliminary Findings of a Sample Survey", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. IV(1969), 39, Review of Agriculture, pp. 143-146.

Further, Rudra's analysis of mode of production has been emphatically rejected by Utsa Patnaik. She considers his approach 'unhistoric' and logically unsound. It can be applicable only in a situation when capitalism has become a mature and dominant mode of production. In her opinion, the development of capitalism is a complex and time taking process and it requires a particular kind of socio-economic conditions. It is wrong to assume that this complex process will complete its long journey overnight. After her field survey of 66 big farmers of the five States of Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Mysore, Madras and Gujrat, Patnaik concluded that though in varying degree, the capitalist forces were emerging in these regions. Looking at the situation in Punjab, in the same theoretical framework⁶, she has tried to answer tentatively the question relating to the extent and nature of development of the capitalist tendency within Indian agriculture. In her opinion, the capitalist path in India's agriculture is one dominated by a socially narrow-based 'landlord-capitalism' with semi-feudal features, of caste subordination of workers, which is capable of raising the level of

6. Utsa Patnaik, "Capitalist Development for Agriculture" Economic and Political Weekly, Vol VI, (Review of Agriculture, 1971), pp. 123-130.

productive forces only under certain exceptional conditions, and which acts as a long-run fetter on agricultural growth, and hence on the overall growth of the economy.⁷

Paresh Chattopadhyaya has extended this debate further. In his view, Rudra's analysis is theoretically weak and so is the case with the argument of Patnaik who has tried to evolve a new definition of capitalism which is not compatible with the true Marxian theoretical schema.

Chattopadhyaya has followed Lenin's definition of capitalism which he considers the supreme stage of commodity production. In this process of production, labour power itself turns into a commodity that can be sold and purchased in the competitive market. Chattopadhyaya's argument denotes that the existence of sophisticated instruments of production is not necessary for identifying capitalism. Even the

7. Utsa Patnaik, The Agrarian Question and the Development of Capitalism in India, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.38.

capitalist mode of production for which only capital as a relation is required, the existence of 'modern equipment' would only indicate higher level of capitalism.⁸

Contrary to this, it has been argued that Indian agriculture is still semi-feudal in nature. For instance, Bhaduri has highlighted four major characteristics of semi-feudalism. These are: share cropping, perpetual indebtedness of the small tenants, concentration of two modes of exploitation, i.e. USURY and landownership in the hands of the same economic class, and lack of accessibility to the market for the small tenants.⁹ Bhaduri asserts that the prevalence of semi-feudalism is the chief cause of backwardness and exploitation in our agrarian social system. It has become the greatest obstacle to the development of Indian agriculture. Finally, he concludes that close

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8. Paresh Chattopadhyaya, "On the Question of Mode of Production in Indian Agriculture A Preliminary Note", Economic and Political Weekly, VII, (Review of Agriculture, 1977), pp. 39-46.
9. Amit Bhaduri, "A Study of Agricultural Backwardness under Conditions of Semi-Feudalism", Economic Journal, LXXXVI, (1973), pp. 120-137.

to the existence of semi-feudal relations, the introduction of improved and advanced technology in agriculture has become a remote possibility.

On the basis of the data from some villages in Bihar, Prasad has shown that the utilization of irrigation facilities decreased with the increased size of landholdings. Attached labourers are preferred by the big landlords. Indebtness is a general phenomenon. Share cropping is widely prevailed. The pattern of wages is so bad and exploitative that the poor people are compelled to fall into the evil grip of debt. The main cause of the perpetuation of indebtness lies in the fact that the landlords do not want to get back the initial amount in order to consume the fruit of interest. His study also indicates that almost all the semi-proletariat households are deficit ones in the sense that their bare minimum consumption expenditures exceed their incomes. Thus, they are forced to take consumption loans both in cash and kind from the big landowning classes. The stipulated rates of interest on these loans are very high and leave aside the loan, even the full payment of interest is beyond the means of semi-proletariat. 10

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10. H. Pradhan Prasad, "Reactionary Role of Consumer's Capital in Rural India", Economic and Political Weekly, (Special Number, August, 1974) p. 1305.

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In fact, the landowning classes use the debt obligation to force upon direct producers in agriculture a system of unequal exchanges and thereby derive enormous economic benefits in such forms as cheap and assured labour and better arms for leasing out land. Talking about the feature of the contemporary existing land relations, Prasad also emphasizes that the characteristic of this set up which we may call semi-feudal is that an indissoluble bond between the semi-proletariat and his overlord is maintained by resort to Usury.¹¹ Now, a question also arises regarding the distinction between the semi-proletariat and proletariat (between semi-feudalism and capitalism). On this question, Prasad informs us that the proletariat as a class is found in a capitalist set up where it is free to sell his labour power. On the other hand, in a semi-feudal set up de facto it is not free to sell its labour power.¹²

The Indian agrarian set up is, thus, considered a good example of semi-feudal mode of production. We are reminded that it is wrong to believe that rural India is

11. H. Pradhan Prasad, Ibid., p.1305.

12. Ibid., p.1305.

passing through a capitalistic form of transformation. In fact, it is still semi-feudal maintained by the forces of imperialism.¹³ Although on broader generalization Chandra shares agreement with Bhaduri's characterization of semi-feudalism, he also highlights certain points which have been overlooked by Bhaduri. In his opinion, Bhaduri has exaggerated the effect of semi-feudal relations as an in way of the introduction of sophisticated tools and technology in agriculture. Secondly, he believes that Bhaduri has overlooked the impact of large scale unemployment in the country side. For Chandra, unemployment is one of the most important reasons of the continuity of semi-feudal relations in Indian agriculture. Ranjit Sau has supported the analytical stand that the existing mode of agrarian relations in India is semi feudal. Like Chandra, he also accepts that the chief factor for the perpetuation of semi-feudalism is the intensity of unemployment. Alongwith unemployment there are also some other factors which are responsible for the continuation of semi-feudal

13. Birmal K. Chandra, "Farm Efficiency Under Semi-Feudalism: A Critique of Marginal Theories and Some Marxist Formulations", Economic and Political Weekly, IX Nos 32, 33 and 34, 1974, pp. 1309-31.

relations. One such factor is "the determination of small peasants to continue with cultivation".¹⁴

There are some other social scientists¹⁵ who derive inspirations from the theoretical formulation of A.G. Frank, Hamza Alavi is one of them. Alavi has tried to evaluate the mode of production in Indian agriculture in terms of its link with the developed countries. He argues that the classical Marxist analysis of the development of capitalism in Europe cannot explain the development of capitalism in colonial social formations. The "peripheral capitalism" in these countries differs structurally from "metropolitan capitalism" as appropriation of surplus value and accumulation of capital takes place in the metropolis.¹⁶

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14. Ranjit Sau, "Farm Efficiency under Semi-Feudalism: A Critique of Marginalist Theories and Some Marxist Formulations. A Comment", Economic and Political Weekly, X, 13 (Review of Agriculture, 1975) pp. 18-21.
15. This line of argument has been put forward by Andre Gunder Frank (1973), Jairus Banaji (1972), Ranjit Sau (1973), Hamza Alavi (1975) and Harry Cleaver (1973), For details see, A.N. Das, Agrarian Unrest and Socio Economic Change in Bihar, 1900-1980 (Manohar, Delhi, 1983) p.5.
16. Hamza Alavi, "Structure of Colonial Formations", Economic and Political Weekly (Annual Number, March, 1981), p. 475.

In order to understand the intrinsic features of colonial socio-economic formation, Alavi has tried to comprehend the very concept of mode of production. For him, mode of production is the logically and mutually coordinated articulation of: (a) a determinate type ownership of means of production; (b) a determinate form of appropriation of the economic surplus; (c) a determinate degree of development of the division of labour; and (d) a determinate level of development of productive forces.¹⁷

Keeping in mind the above mentioned constituents of mode of production, Alavi has distinguished the "metropolis capitalism" from the peripheral one. The distinction is made on the basis of (1) Generalized commodity production, and (2) extended reproduction of capital. He explains that in the non-colonized metropolitan countries generalized commodity production is an integrated process of development, in industry as well as in agriculture; and especially in the case of former, of the production of capital goods as well as consumer's good. But to Alavi, that is not the case in peripheral

17. Alavi Hamza, Ibid., p.476.

capitalism, which brings about a disarticulated form of generalized commodity production as contrasted with the integrated form in metropolitan capitalism. Another fact in this process of production is that the circuit of generalized commodity production in peripheral capitalist societies is not internally complete as in the case of the metropolitan capitalism. The peripheral capitalism fulfills its structural conditions of generalized commodity production only by virtue of its link with the metropolis.

The same process can be repeated in terms of extended reproduction of capital. It has been confirmed that in the metropolitan economies the generated surplus value contributes to capital accumulation. On the other hand, the surplus value that is generated in the periphery is extracted by the metropolis and it leads to accumulation of capital in the metropolis. Now, it becomes obvious that the structural condition of periphery that determines that the development of capitalism is completed by virtue of the interconnection of the peripheral capitalist society with the metropolis. Alavi's analysis suggests that at the present juncture, capitalism has become a worldwide interlocking system. But it does not lead us to conclude that the structure of capitalism is equal

as well as similar all over the world. In fact, both the metropolis and peripheral capitalisms have got some specific structural components and conditions. He has repeatedly argued that the structure and dynamics of development of the periphery capitalism is quite distinct from that of metropolis.¹⁸

Now, on the basis of above discussion, one may enumerate three strands of opinions regarding the nature of agrarian relations in India. The first line of argument consists the views of Ashok Rudra, Utsa Patnaik and Paresh Chattopadhyaya. This line revolves around the theoretical issue of the logical identification of the capitalist mode of production and subsequently the concrete question of whether, when, and to what extent a capitalist mode has penetrated in the Indian agriculture.¹⁹

The second line of argument has been put forward by Pradhan H. Prasad, Amit Bhaduri and Nirmal K. Chandra. This line of argument has tried to understand a particular mode of production on the basis of certain attributes

18. For details see, Hamza Alavi, Ibid., P.479.

19. N. Arvind Das, Agrarian Unrest and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar, 1900-1980, Delhi Manohar, 1983, p.

and indicators. The scholars are of the view that sharecropping signifies feudal relationship while wage labour is the prime feature of the capitalist mode of production. The main limitation of this line of argument is that it identifies a particular mode of production by highlighting one or two features of it. As it has been seen that mode of production is a complex process, it involves many attributes and internal-external dynamics. So, by pointing out one or two attributes, a mode of production cannot be comprehended in its totality. Finally, the third line of argument which takes its inspiration from the theoretical paradigm of A.G. Frank has been applied and elaborated by Hamza Alavi, Ranjit Sau and others. Mentions have already been made that today's capitalism cannot be understood in isolation. Capitalism in one country has got certain structural linkages with the capitalism of other country. Thus, the argument has tried to explain the process of capitalism in terms of metropolis and periphery.

A minute study of all these strands of opinion with regard to the issue of mode of production makes it clear that only the interaction and interplay of the economic forces have been highlighted by the proponents of all these schools. The creative dimension of people

has been completely overlooked. A proper analysis of a mode of production existing at a particular epoch of history cannot be made only on the basis of objective criteria but also on the basis of people's subjective and cognitive reaction towards the concrete situation in which and upon which they are acting. In Prasad's formulations the subjective and behavioural aspects of the ~~land~~ ^{land}owners and money-lenders have been depicted but the response from below is missing here substantially. By overlooking the roles, functions and responses of the people, all these social scientists have presented only the half dimensions of the mode of production.

To sum up this issue, we can say that due to the long colonial subjugation and the impact of neo-colonialism and imperialism a clear picture of any single dominant mode of production has not yet appeared on the vast map of Indian agrarian social structure. Undoubtedly, to some extent the pre-capitalist or feudal relations have been replaced by the emerging capitalist tendencies. But it does not lead us to conclude that the feudal mode of exploitation, share cropping, tenancy, localized nature of production and unfree labour have been completely replaced by the wage labour, free labour, generalized commodity production, profit-making attitude

and a free and competitive market economy. Depeasantization and proletarianization have also not taken place on large scale in the agrarian economy. In the Indian context, situation has become much complex. Due to specific historical circumstances and existing socio-political compulsions the cases of regional variations and uneven development have become the part and parcel of the overall developmental process. Therefore, at this crucial, complex, confused and transitional moments, it is desirable for every participant of the said debate to take into account the various elements and constituents of the mode of production. These are: nature of the forces of production, consciousness from below as well as from above, character of class alignments and also policies and the attitudes of the state. Only then we will be fully aware of the prevailing agrarian relations and the intensity of tensions, unrest and violence taking place within the matrix of the agrarian social structure in India.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF PEASANTRY AND ITS PLACE IN AGRARIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Peasantry is an important component of the agrarian social structure. Hence, the complementarity and contradictions of agrarian structure cannot be studied

without a proper understanding of the peasantry. Specifically in Indian context, the question of agrarian unrest and rural violence is directly linked with the epistemology, functions and consciousness of the peasants. Here, it becomes necessary for us to go into details of the theoretical conceptualization of peasantry and its place in agrarian social structure. Our experience shows that there is no unanimity among the students of social sciences with regard to the conceptualization and revolutionary role of the peasantry.

Broadly speaking, there are two distinct schools of thought in social sciences which provide us with conceptual explanations of the peasantry. One school derives its theoretical inspiration from Robert Redfield and his disciples. The champion of another school was Karl Marx and his disciples.

Redfield has defined peasantry as a small and homogenous community. It is totally different from industrial society. While industrial society is full of contradictions, conflict and cleavages, the peasant society lacks these attributes. It can roughly be compared with Tonnies, concept of *Gemeinschaft*. There are some social scientists who do not accept Redfield's

concept of peasantry. They believe that peasant community is often characterized by various forms of conflicting interests and orientations.²⁰ However, Redfield's study of peasantry makes us aware of the two fundamental characteristics of peasant society. First, the concept of peasant consists of those small holders who cultivate their own land and consequently their position is economically independent. Second, the peasants are living in the relation of opposition to the elites of agrarian structure.²¹

An epoch-making initiative on the question of 'peasantry' has been taken by Karl Marx in his thesis on peasantry. Initially, Marx was of the opinion that the peasantry could be a possible ally of the industrial proletariat in the latter's struggle against the bourgeoisie. But his expectation was shattered when the French peasantry did not support the working class at the time of the 1848 revolution.²² Hence, Marx has criticized the

20. For details see, Andre Beteille, Six Essays in Comparative Sociology (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974).

21. Robert Redfield, Peasant Society and Culture : An Anthropological Approach to Socialization, Chicago: 1956.

22. Karl Marx, The Class Struggle in France (1848-50)

peasantry and called it as 'peti-bourgeois' class struggling to restore the old property relations within the framework of the new social order.²³ Caricaturing the peasants as a "sack of potatoes" that lack interconnections, common political identity and organization, Marx even depicted them as "representing barbarism in the midst of civilization".²⁴ As compared to Marx, Engels has provided a more coherent view of the peasantry and its internal dynamics of stratification and differentiation. According to him, the natural ally of the urban industrial proletariat will be farm labourers.²⁵ However, Engels was not convinced that the 'tenant farmers' or 'peasant-proprietors' will play any revolutionary role in the overall transformation of the capitalist society. Thus, like Marx, Engels has also considered peasantry as internally split, unorganized and politically impotent unless mobilized by the organized working class.²⁶

23. Karl Marx and F. Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, (Moscow, Progress, 1969), pp. 51-57, 80-82.

24. See, D.N. Dhanagare, Peasant Movements in India, 1920-1950, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983.)

25. F. Engels, The Peasant War in Germany, London: 1969, pp. 14-16.

26. Ibid., p.16.

The classical Marxian conception of peasantry has been modified by Lenin. It is assumed that the Russian experience prevailed upon Lenin and his Bolshevik Party to draw the peasantry and the working class in an alliance that finally carried out the October Revolution.²⁷

Regarding the internal stratification of peasantry, Lenin talks about three classes in between rural proletariat and the rich peasants. These are: the semi-proletarians, the small peasants and the middle peasants. But in the last instance, "the process of depeasantization" resulting from the capitalist development in agriculture sweeps away the middle peasant category and reinforces the extreme ones, namely the "peasant-bourgeoisie" and "rural-proletariat".²⁸

The Chinese experience has challenged the classical Marxian conception of the peasantry modified by Lenin. In the Chinese case the peasantry has not only participated, in large number, in the struggle but it has now provided a large part of leadership.²⁹ As far as the portrayal of the

27. D.N. Dhanagare, op. cit., p.3.

28. V.I. Lenin, Collected Works (XXXI), (Moscow: Progress Publishing House, 1980), pp. 152-64.

29. For details see, Jean Chesneaus, Peasant Revolts in China, 1840-1949, London:

internal differentiation of peasantry goes, Mao has thought that there will be classes namely, the poor peasant and the middle peasant which exist between the proletariat and the rich peasantry. According to him, the middle peasants fully depend on their own labour. This class does not exploit the other sections of society. It has been seen that in many cases they are exploited by others. Mao does not deny the fact that some affluent 'middle peasants' do exploit others to a small extent but it is not their regular source of income. 30

It is also worth noting here that Lenin's and Mao's theoretico-practical schema of rural classes has got two different historico-situational connotations. While Lenin's description is based on the presupposition of capitalist relations of production in agriculture, Mao's schema is adequate enough to encompass and comprehend the "pre-capitalist", "quasi-feudal" landlord and tenant relations along with the capitalist relations of production. Mao's evaluation implies that the middle peasant (i.e. owner-peasant) has got typical "petty bourgeois" predilections and is afraid of revolution whereas tenant-peasant is more revolutionary. 31

30. Mao Tse Tung, Selected Works I, (Peking, Foreign Language Press, 1980), p.138.

31. See, D.N. Dhanagare, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

It means Mao has not assigned any revolutionary role to the middle peasant. In fact, he has visualized a multi class 'joint dictatorship of all the revolutionary classes (and presumably these include all the strata of peasantry) after the establishment of what he called the near democracy - the first stage of the revolution or any movement. But there is no indication that Mao has deviated much from the Marxist - Leninist's emphasise on the proletarian leadership of revolutionary movement.³²

Unlike the classical Marxian formulation on peasantry Fanon has seen the greatest possibility of revolutionary potentiality in the peasantry. In his view, it is the peasantry which will play the 'vanguard role' in the process of decolonization in the third world countries. He feels that in the colonial countries peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The starving peasants, outside the class system, are the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays. For them, there is no compromise, no possible coming to terms.³³ In fact, Fanon's theoretical

32. For details see, Mao Tse Tung, Selected Works, Vol IV (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1977), pp. 347-52.

33. Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, (Harmondsworth, Pelican, 1971), p.47.

position will help us to understand the role of peasantry in the different agrarian movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Before elaborating the "middle peasant thesis", we would like to discuss the view of Barrington Moore. Moore's analytical framework is Marxian to a greater extent but some times he takes slightly different approach also. He has tried to switch over from class-exploitation to the power structure of a given social system. However, Moore does not dispute over the thesis of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry but argues that the concrete manifestation of this revolutionary potentials is largely based on the structure of power alignments and class alliances in a given society at a particular time.³⁴

Moore has formulated three ideal type routs to radical change and modernization. These are: (1) the bourgeois-democratic revolution (as it took place in England, France, and America); (2) the Fascist revolution (as in Germany and Japan); and (3) the communist revolution (like the Russian or the Chinese revolutions). While the peasantry has

34. D.N. Dhanagare, op. cit., p.4.

confoundingly traversed each of these routes elsewhere, the Indian peasantry has not. So, Moore, has raised the question as to why the caste of India should not conform to any of his three paradigms and why should it stand out as an exception.³⁵ In his opinion, the Indian peasantry is by nature traditionally docile and passive. It is because the peasant life in India is existing in the midst of peculiar village organization, caste sanctions and a particular type of religious - ethical precept is dominating over it. No change has taken place in the peasant's socio-cultural climate over the past centuries. It is these unchanged forces which have prevented peasant discontent from developing into the extreme form of class antagonism and, thus, immunised the Indian peasant against any potential rebellions impulse.³⁶ The main reason of Moore's unimpressive characterization of Indian peasantry is that he searched for a revolutionary phenomenon that could well stand as a parallel to any of the three ideal types.³⁷

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35. Jr Barrington Moore, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in Making of the Modern World (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966), pp. 314-15.
36. Barrington, Moore, *ibid.*, pp. 413-14.
37. D.N. Dhangaare, op.cit., p.5:

A recent debate known as 'Middle Peasant thesis' has provoked a lot of controversy among the social scientists. The main pioneers of the debate are Hamza Alava and Eric Wolf. First of all, Alavi has tried to present three-fold classification of peasantry: the poor peasants, middle peasants and rich peasants as stated earlier. The poor peasants do not own any patch of land. They cultivate the land of the landowning classes for their survival. The main constituents of this category are the sharecroppers and landless labourers. This class is inhumanly exploited by the landlords and rich peasantry. Middle peasants possess some land and largely depend upon their family labour. The class of rich peasants is constituted by the landlords whose survival mainly depends upon the exploitation of poor peasants.

In terms of conceptualization of peasantry as a class, Alavi has taken a structural position and, hence, he has defined it in relations of production. He has been widely acknowledged for his 'middle peasant thesis'. In order to trace out the revolutionary potential of peasantry, he has divided it into two factions: those who are vertically organized and enveloping masters and dependents, and those by independent holders, the middle peasantry. The vertically organized section of peasantry

is an exploited and faction-ridden category. It lacks class solidarity as it is vertically aligned with the masters through factional ties. In the beginning, the poor peasants are the least militant. But as the anti-landlord and anti-rich peasant sentiment is built up by the middle peasant, the potential revolutionary energy of the poor peasant will be transformed into an actual revolutionary force. In order to make the poor peasants realized of their potential revolutionary energy, paths are to be shown by the middle peasant. Once they feel that their master's hegemony can be broken they will be in the forefront of any revolution. In actuality, once the poor peasants take up the revolutionary role, the middle peasant will withdraw.³⁸

Eric Wolf is the second protagonist of this thesis. A similarity can be viewed between the conclusion of Hamza Alavi and Eric Wolf. Wolf opines that due to their economic dependence on the landowning classes the poor

38. For details see T.K. Oommen, From Mobilization to Institutionalization, (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1985), pp. 10-11.

peasantry and proletarians cannot challenge the domination of their class enemy. They can do so only when they are aided by an external force. In most of the cases, the external force would be a revolutionary political party. On the other hand, the middle peasant who is economically self-sufficient enjoys the requisite tactical freedom to defy the landlord and it is he who generally takes the initiative to rebel.³⁹

The 'middle peasant thesis' has been challenged by a number of social scientists. Pouchepadass in Indian situation specifically considers the dominant peasantry as the chief initiator of struggle. He defines dominant peasantry as 'the oligarchy of rich and well off peasants belonging to either as owners or as tenants the bulk of the landrights in each village --- a category which includes the whole group of peasants of respectable caste, who hold enough land so that they can supply the needs of their families without having to go out for work for anyone class.'⁴⁰

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39. T.K. Oomen, *Ibid.*, p.11. Also see, Eric Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century (London: Faber and Faber, 1971). For comprehensive reference, see, Hamza Alavi, Peasants and Revolution, Socialist Register, (London: The Mulin Press, 1965).
40. See, J. Pouchepadass, "Peasant Classes in Twentieth Century Agrarian Movement in India" in E.J. Hobsbawm, et.al.(ed.), Peasants in History: Essays in Honour of Daniel Thorner, (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1980), p.147.

In regard to the revolutionary potential of a class we cannot make any universally valid prediction. Shanin has correctly remarked, "... the whole question of the revolutionary potential of a certain social class must be treated as historical that is, temporary, relative and changing."⁴¹

Now, we will discuss and elaborate the question of internal stratification, differentiation and the complex problem of the conceptualization of peasantry. In this regard, Shanin's conceptual paradigm needs to be mentioned here. Shanin has defined peasantry on the basis of four criteria: (1) The peasant family farm as the basic unit of multidimensional social organization; (2) land-husbandry as the main means of livelihood directly providing the major parts of the consumption needs; (3) the specific traditional culture related to way of life of small communities; and (4) the underdog position -- the domination of peasantry by the outsiders.⁴²

Some students of sociology and social anthropology have also tried to draw a conceptual bifurcation among the peasantry, tribes and the agricultural labourers. Regarding this proposed differentiation, we can safely remark

41. T. Shanin, "Class and Revolution", Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 1(2), 1970, pp. 26-27.

42. T. Shanin (ed.), Peasant and Peasant Societies: Selected Readings, Penguin, 1971 (see introduction).

that difference between the peasants and tribes are based on the distinction of two societies, while the difference between peasantry and the agricultural labourers symbolises the distinction existing between two classes. More precisely attempts have been made to find out subtle differences between the peasants and tribes on the one hand and peasantry and agricultural labourers on the other. For instance, Beteille has drawn a demarcation line between tribes and the Hindu peasants whereas Bailey has tried to differentiate tribes from castes. In his differentiation Beteille has pointed out (1) The relative isolation of tribes as compared to caste-peasants, (2) the difference of language and dialect, and (3) that the tribal society is characterised by Animism while the Hindu peasants believe in Hinduism.⁴³

For Bailey, caste society is organic and hierarchical while the main feature of tribal society is 'segmentary' and 'equalitarian' in nature.⁴⁴

Beteille has divided the Indian agrarian population on the basis of ownership, control and use of land.

43. Andre Beteille, op. cit., pp. 60-71.

44. F.G. Bailey, "Tribe and caste in India", Contributions to Indian Sociology, No. V, 1961, pp. 7-19.

According to him, the social framework of Indian agriculture can be understood by keeping in mind the pattern of interaction and interrelation of all these categories. He puts his categorization in the order of (1) Non-cultivating owners and tenure holders, (2) Owner-cultivator and cultivating tenants with recognized rights of tenancy, and (3) Sharecroppers and agricultural labourers. As far as the identification of peasantry goes, only the people of categories and (2) come within the definitional framework of peasantry. People who constitute category(1) have been excluded from the peasantry. It is too difficult a task to define peasantry. Although on the surface level, peasantry looks homogenous, in reality it is internally differentiated and stratified.

How to differentiate the different segments of peasantry is a complex question. Efforts have been made to differentiate peasantry on the basis of certain criteria like, the utilization of land, repayment capacity, tenancy, ownership of assets, credit from bank, etc. It has also been conceded that the peasant world is hierarchically arranged. Such line of argument identifies the categories like rich, middle and poor strata among the peasantry.

Among the rich peasants emergence of capitalistic tendencies has been confirmed. This line of argument attempts to visualize the internal stratification of peasantry on the basis of: (i) owner-cultivators, (ii) largely owner-cultivators and (iii) poor peasants.⁴⁵

Recently, some Marxists scholars have portrayed the internal differentiation of Indian peasantry. For instance, Mencher⁴⁶ thinks that at this crucial juncture, it has become important to understand in detail the socio-economic class structure in rural areas because still there is no satisfactory theory which can explain why various types of peasants Associations have developed in certain places and not in others. According to her, the population which derives its main subsistence from land, in one way or another, may be classified into six groups: (1) the landless, (2) poor peasants, (3) middle peasants (4) rich farmers (5) rich farmers, capitalist farmers and traditional landlords, and (6) interminate class

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45. Aswani Smith and Azay Tankaa, "Agrarian Transition and the differentiation of the Peasantry: a Study of a Western UP Village", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. VII, no. 14, April, 1972, pp. 712-23.
46. P. Joan Mencher, "Problems in Analysing Rural Class Structure", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol 35, August 31, 1974, p. 1495.

of large landholders.⁴⁷ By identifying these categories, she tried to seek answers to questions of the contradictions within the present agrarian system and its weak spots.⁴⁸

Patnaik also has discussed three criteria for the identification of classes. These criteria are:

(1) The resource-endowment i.e. possession of means of production, (2) the nature of labour use, i.e. whether exploited or reexploited and self employed, and (3) the production of retained surplus above subsistence needs as compared to breaking even deficit situation which entails borrowing. On the basis of these criteria, Patnaik has divided peasantry into three categories: rich, middle and poor. According to her, the rich peasants can do manual work but as they are economically well off, they can hire wage labour. The middle peasants include all those persons who are self-sufficient and self-employed whereas the poor peasants do wage-labour and take other's land on lease.⁴⁹

47. Ibid., pp. 1497-1500.

48. Ibid., p. 1501.

49. Utsa Patnaik, "Class Differentiation within the Peasantry An approach to analysis of Indian Agriculture" Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XI, pp. 82-101.

In the whole of North India P. Pardhan has differentiated peasantry into middle and poor categories. The middle peasants largely depend on the wage-labour while the poor peasants generally depend on their family labour.⁵⁰

John Hariss' classification of peasantry has also been suggested: (i) rich peasants, (ii) independent middle peasants; and (iii) poor peasants. The peasants who belong to the first category produce more than their family consumption need. (The quantity has been assumed 2.4 times more than family consumption). The peasants second category produce 1-2 times more than their family consumption. This group of peasants mainly depends upon the family labour but in some unusual circumstances they do work on wages on other's farm. The poor peasants depend chiefly on the wage labour for their survival because their small patch of land is not adequate to provide them with consumption articles.⁵¹

Apart from above mentioned names, some other names have also figured largely on the question of the

50. P. Pardhan, "On Class Relations in India", Economic and Political Weekly, XIV, 1979, pp. 857-60.

51. John Hariss, "Why Poor People Remain Poor in Rural South India", Social Scientist, VIII, 1979, pp. 20-47.

classification and stratification of peasantry living in the sociological convass of Indian agriculture. As we know that Daniel Thorner is the pioneer figure in the field of theretic-conceptual categorization of Indian agrarian population.

Besides , Thorner has taken various criteria such as types of income, the nature of rights, and the extent of field works actually performed. Keeping in mind these criteria, he has presented three broad Nativistic categorization of India agrarian population: "Malik", "Kisan", and "Mazdoor". According to him, the prime source of income of Maliks is their property rights in the soil. They use hire-labour for the cultivation of land. Due to certain ascriptive reasons, manual labour is taboo for them. The Kisans, on the other hand, depend upon family farm and the use of family labour. They do not produce surplus. Finally, the mazdoor class is constituted of share croppers and tenants at will. This group is exploited and is poverty-stricken. Since Thorner's three basic categories have been expressed in relations to production, in his sense it corresponds to the Marxian model. But Thorner has not clarified his theoretical orientations in his discussion.⁵²

52. For details see, Daniel Thorner, The Agrarian Prospect in India, Delhi: Delhi University Press:1956.

On the basis of nature of peasantry and various peasant movements carried out in India, a five-fold classification of peasantry has been suggested by Dhangare. The first category is of landlords who largely depend upon rents collected from their tenants. The second category includes rich peasants. The middle peasants constitute the third category. The peasants in this category are economically self-sufficient. Poor peasants come within the fourth category. People of this category have got small patches of land but that is not enough for their survival. Therefore, they rent the holdings of others to carry their livelihood. The last category consists of those who are landless and their survival depends upon others' land. Although Dhanagare has used the Marxist model, he feels that some risks are involved in using this model in a traditional society like India. But this may not be regarded as a barrier if any meaningful historical and comparative sociology of peasant movements is to be evolved.⁵³

A brief review of above mentioned discussion reveals that social scientists have not yet resolved the controversy over mode of production. There is also no

53. D.N. Dhanagare, op. cit., p.16.

unanimity on the question of theoretical conceptualization of peasantry and its revolutionary potential. Most of the studies on mode of production lack a macro-perspective. Therefore, it may be submitted here that any analyst of the issues of mode of production should not rely on the data collected from a particular region. Instead, one has to analyse the phenomenon in totality keeping in mind the macro-perspective. The agrarian social structure, at present, is not an autonomous entity. It has got some inseparable linkages and connections with the industrial and socio-political set up. What is desirable at this juncture is a comparative and integrated analysis of all the major components of the vast macro social structure. Only then, some praxis-oriented formulations can be evolved which may help the understanding and restructuring of the present society.

In the second part of this chapter, certain "theoretical" issues regarding the conceptualization and internal stratification of peasantry have been elaborated in order to understand the complementarity and contradictions of the Indian agrarian structure. Brief definitions have not been mentioned because the issues are so complex and wide that a brief definition cannot highlight properly their internal and external dimension. Throughout the chapter,

attempts have been made to conceptualize the ongoing issues of mode of production and peasantry on the basis of certain comprehensive attributes and broader generalizations

On the problematic schema of revolutionary potentiality of the peasantry, Hamza Alavi's and Eric Wolf's theoretical formulations have been examined. In this regard, we can say that no concrete predictions can be made about the revolutionary potential of any class. It is historico-specific. Here, one can agree with Shanin that.... the whole question of the revolutionary potential of certain social class must be taken as historical that is , temporary, relative and changing? On this question, the second line of argument has been put forward by Pouchepadass who considers the dominant peasantry as a revolutionary class. This position has also been questioned by some students of sociology. Some empirical fallacies have been pointed out in Pouchepadass's thesis. Dr. T. Koommen has rightly commented that the very notion of dominant caste, excepting that the former category may be occasionally constituted by the multiplicity of dominant castes. If the crucial identity of the category is discerned in terms of caste it is confusing to refer to it as peasantry.⁵⁴ Now one can argue that only a economically and socially deprived section can initiate any revolutionary struggle. We would not

54. Oommen, T.K., op. cit., p.14.

like to contradict this argument. What we only want to assert is that in the raw sense deprivation in itself is not an adequate factor for any revolutionary struggle rather it is the realization of deprivation that generates revolutionary potential in any class. And the realization of deprivation is historically time and space-bound.

AGRARIAN RELATIONS AND PEASANT MOVEMENT IN INDIAA SOCIO - HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

The question of agrarian transformation (whether successful or culminated into agrarian unrest and violence) cannot be answered without tracing out its historical genesis. Although we find some similarities in agrarian problems in certain Asian countries, our main concern here is to discuss the problem, with its long historical journey, in Indian context only. For analytical clarity the periodization of agrarian relations has been made as the pre-British, the British and post-independent eras. Here, the pre-British phase denotes the agrarian relations existing during the medieval period.

The Agrarian Structure of Mughal India

A brief review of the literature done in the previous chapter show that the students of medieval history are not in agreement regarding the characterization of agrarian relations of that period. The European writers think that the sole proprietor of soil during the medieval period was the king. But their views have been contested on the basis of some regulations adopted during the reigns of Akbar and Jahangir. For instance, Habis states that the occupancy rights of peasants was inviolable during the said period. According to him, peasants' rights on

land was hereditary. But there was no question of free alienation - the right to abandon or dispose of the land as its holder might choose - which is an essential feature of modern proprietary right. If in one sense the land belonged to the peasant, in another sense the peasant belonged to the land. He could not, (unless perhaps bound to be a successor) leave it or refuse to cultivate it.¹ Further, he writes that the peasants of Mughal India enjoyed a right which, in British India, was conferred on some sections of the peasants only in some provinces by special Tenancy Act, viz., the Permanent and Hereditary rights of occupancy. In certain circumstances one can consider this right of proprietary in nature. But as Habib has pointed out a proprietor must be a free agent and he must possess the right of free alienation. It means, the right to alienate one's land according to own choice is the chief criterion of proprietorship.

Historical evidences confirm that during the Mughal regime the peasant could not legally abandon his land and was really a near serf. As far as the ownership of land was concerned, the king was not the owner of soil, neither was the peasant. So, a single owner of land could

1. Irfan Habib, Agrarian System of Mughal India, (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), p.115.

not be located especially in Ryotvari areas. There were different rights over the land and its produce and not one exclusive right of property.²

In regard to the classification of population of that period, evidences show that three classes were the chief components of agrarian society. These were : small group of Zamindars, money-lenders and grain merchants in Class I, the rich peasants in Class II, and the small peasants and landless labourers in Class III.³ For the class of Zamindars the nativistic category like "Malik", or the "Milkiyat" right was in currency. But Zamindars of that period should not be confused with the landed properietor of the colonial era. In the words of Habib; "The Zamindars might formally be termed as 'Malik' and his right termed 'Milkiyat', but nothing will be more inaccurate than to imagine him to be like landed properietor of the colonial era, paying the land tax and collecting rents fixed by himself from his tenants at will".⁴ The

2. For details see, Irfan Habib, *ibid*, p-118.

3. Irfan Habib, "Agrarian Relations and Land Revenue" in the *Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. I* (ed) by Tapan Ray Chaudhuri and Irfan Habib (Orient Longman in association with cambridge ununiversity Press, 1982) p- 235-260. Also see, Irfan Habib, "The Peasant in Indian History", *Social Scientist Marx Centenary, Vol.I* (Social Scientist Press, Trivandrum), pp- 19-62.

4. Irfan Habib, *op. cit.*, p-2, pp- 143-4.

Zamindar class was neither coherent nor similar in all areas. It was internally divided and narrowly bound by its caste and localities.

It is wrong to assume that due to prevalence of strong vertical ties or the absence of organized consciousness among the lower stratum of society, the Mughal regime did not face any challenge from below. At that point of time, there was inhuman exploitation of the peasants by the imperial administration and the Jagirdars. In this grim situation, there was no choice left to the peasants but to face starvation or slavery, or to resort to armed resistance.⁵ There were some of alliance between the Zamindars and the peasants but this does not indicate that Zamindars were sympathetic towards their peasants. In actuality, there were situational forces which used to compel the Zamindars to take the peasantry into confidence. In other words the position of Zamindars in the unequal contest with the imperial power compelled them to adopt a conciliatory attitude towards their peasantry whose support would have been indispensable in their defence as well as in fight.⁶

A question arises as "what was the structural position of the village community during the medieval

5. Ibid, p.329.

6. Irfan Habib, *ibid*; p.336.

period". The view regarding the self-sufficient nature of the village community has been challenged with some concrete evidences. According to Habib, though a large share of the village produce was taken to the urban market, the villages hardly received anything in return from the towns. Thus, the village was deeply affected by the requirements of commodity production (i.e. production for the market) and yet had to provide all its own needs from within itself. Thus, conditions of money economy and self-sufficiency existed side by side.⁷

However, the Mughal system was feudal and pre-capitalist in character. In Hasan's opinion, the agricultural economy of medieval period was characterised by two important forms, the free peasant economy and the tenant-cultivator economy. There was a large group of free peasant cultivators during the medieval period. We cannot be sure whether they used to do cultivation themselves or not but this class was largely responsible for carrying on the cultivations. There was a class of Zamindars existing during the said regime period. Evidences entail that there was a class of self-cultivating peasants. Many of the peasants proprietors also gave out their land on a share cropping basis. It means, a fullfledged share-cropping class was one of the chief constituents of the agrarian society during the medieval period. One

7. Ibid; pp.118-19.

worth mentioning fact of that period is the vital role of the caste system played in the organization of the agro-social system. According to Hasan, "The taboo regarding ploughing by higher caste people made it necessary that there should be a considerable body of agricultural labourers for ploughing and performing other agricultural services, leaving rest of the process of cultivation to the peasant proprietors".⁸ The peasant proprietors had got the right to sell their property and the hereditary succession among the Malikis was also prevalent at that time.⁹

The second important component of agrarian system was the tenant cultivator economy, as stated earlier. There was a close relationship between the free tenant economy and tenant cultivator economy through out the medieval regime. Due to the political factors, a free peasant could easily become a tenant and a tenant could easily become a free peasant depending on the military and the class situation in any given village or locality or the type of given administration.¹⁰ According to Habib, this process of transformation can be understood by citing the examples of the Meenas of Rajasthan and Jats of the adjoining areas of Delhi. Meenas were previously

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8. S. Nurul Hasan, Thought on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India, New Delhi: People Publishing House, 1973, p.21.
9. S. Nurul Hasan, *ibid*; p-22.
10. *Ibid*; p-24.

free peasant proprietors but in course of time they had been reduced to the status of tenants and landless labourers. In the similar manner, the jats became the free peasant proprietors by suppressing the right of the Ahirs. Thus, over a period of time the peasant economy due to certain politico-social factors gave birth to the tenant economy. Then, the main difference between the peasant proprietors and the tenants was that unlike the former the latter had got no right to sell or alienate their land.

Hierarchical, the whole system was consisted of a number of fluctuating landed classes. The primary Zamindars were supposed to be at the apex of the hierarchy as they had got proprietary rights over agricultural as well as habitational rights. All cultivable lands were under the possession of one or the other type of the primary Zamindars. One of the important characteristics of this class was that their rights were hereditary and alienable. However, their positions were fluctuating and unstable and most of them were between the superior Zamindars and the state, on the one hand, and the peasantry on the other. They were constantly struggling to improve their position and, thus, came frequently in clashes with both sides.¹¹

11. S. Nurul Hasan, *ibid*; / .29.

The second category of Zamindars were those whose rights were based on some kinds of services and obligations.

In the medieval period, there was frequent use of the term 'Khidmat' which stood for a kind of Zamindari based on service - obligation. According to Hasan, "Zamindari could be both Malgujari (collecting revenue) as well as 'Khidmatgujari' (rendering services or obligations) - where it is Malgujari it is a primary right, where it is 'Khidmatgujari' it is an intermediary right or an intermediary obligation".¹² The Zamindars of the intermediary right consisted of Chadhris, Taluqdars, Qanungoes, Pattedars, Deshmukhs, Desois, Despandes, etc. The very existence of these intermediaries shows that the whole country was under the possession of one or the other type of intermediary Zamindars.¹³ As far as the main functions of the intermediaries Zamindars are concerned, these included the evaluation and assessment, collection and submission of the revenue, looking after the law and order problems with the help of troops, maintaining irrigation facilities, etc.

The empire, the chieftain, the intermediary and primary Zamindars, the free peasant proprietors, the tenants and the landless labourers constituted the agrarian

12. Nurul Hasan, *ibid*; p.29.

13. *Ibid*; p.31.

social structure in Mughal India. The structure on micro level was maintained through the interactions and interrelationship of these categories. But such relation was neither permanently harmonic nor perpetually disharmonic. Rather, the nature and character of relationship was completely situational and time bound. There were, however, some intrinsic contradictions in the whole system. In many cases the interests of Zamindars were not compatible with the interests of the empire. In the same way, the interest of Zamindars was incompatible with the interest of peasantry and other sections who were at the bottom of the socio-politico and economic hierarchy. Sometimes attempts were initiated by the empire to resolve the inherent structural contradictions of the system though absorbing the ruling chiefs into imperial nobility and the administrative hierarchy.¹⁴ Although during the Moghul period some steps were taken to protect the fundamental interests of the various classes of the agrarian system, the system was not free from conflicts and contradictions.

14. S. Nurul Hasan, op. cit., p.34.

of the government revenue demand, and the increased Raiyatis rental because of the extension of area under cultivation, and the enhanced rate of rent in the future for the new settlements with Ryots."¹⁵ At the same time, Cornwallis assumed that the Zamindars would adopt positive attitude towards the problems of agriculture, invest a part of their income in making agricultural facilities available to the tenants, and adopt entrepreneurial attitude towards the material condition of the peasantry with view to increasing agricultural productivity pushing up, in turn, the rate of the rent.¹⁶

In order to protect the material exploitation of tenants, the patta regulation was enacted. It stipulated fixity of rent and protection of tenants from the Zamindars' discretion to eject them, to provide them benefits of the increased production, to give them freedom in making production decisions and to put the ban on levying on

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15. Girish Mishra, Agrarian problems of permanent settlement: A Case Study of Champaran, New Delhi: People Publishing House p.7. For details also see, Rakesh Gupta, Bihar Peasantry and the Kisan Sabha, New Delhi : People Publishing House, 1982) p.2.
16. Rakesh Gupta, *ibid*; p.2.

abwabs from them.¹⁷ But the permanent settlement could not protectfully the interest of the tenants. The whole provisions of this settlement were based on certain philosophical background of its initiator. The provision makers of the settlement were of the opinion that the introduction of private property, through the said settlement, would create stability and peace in the civil society. This perception of Cornwallis was very close to the conception of political society which envisages landed property as an agency for preserving order in society.¹⁸ Keeping this in mind the British Government had conferred the status of proprietors on the Zamindars. The status of proprietorship included rights of transfer and inheritance. In nutshell, the permanent settlement was the structural requisite for the growth of capitalism in 'metropolis' (the Great Britain).

The second was the system of Ryotwari introduced in Madras, Bombay (including Gujrat) and Brar regions. Theoretically, under this system the Ryots were provided with hereditary rights over land. They were also assigned the right to sell and mortgage. In these areas the Ryots

17. Rakesh Gupta, *ibid*; p.2.

18. Eric Stokes, The English Utilitarians and India, p. 5, (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1982).

were directly linked with the state. There was no intermediary in between the Ryots and the state. The tenenats in principle could not, be evicted from their holdings as long as they were in a position to pay revenue. The Ryotwari system was based on the principle that after every twenty or thirty years, unlike general expectation, the Ryotwari system did not bring about a situation in which the peasants could enjoy full ownership. In fact, in course of time the state itself became the biggest Zamindar. The Ryots' rights of ownership of land were negated by three factors: (1) in most areas the fixed land revenue was exorbitant and the Ryot was hardly left with bare maintenance even in the best of seasons. For instance, in Madras the government's claim in the earlier settlement was fixed as high as 45-55% of gross production. The situation was equally bad in Bombay. (2) The government retained the rights to enhance to law revenue at will (3) The Ryot had to pay revenue even when his produce was partially or wholly destroyed by droughts or floods.¹⁹

Finally, the third was the Mahalwari System which was a modified version of the Zamindari system. It was introduced in the Gangetic valley, thenorth-west province, parts of Central India, and in Punjab. The main feature

19. Bipan Chandra, Modern India, New Delhi: NCERT, 1971, p.105.

of the system was that revenue settlement was done village by village or estate by estate with the respective landlords. In some cases the heads of the families were supposed to be the landlords of the village or the estate, and they were the parties with whom the land settlement was to be made. Like the Ryotwari system, in this system also there was provision of the periodical revenue revision.

Thus, the British in India, through the adoption of the above mentioned land settlements had made land a commodity which could be freely purchased and sold. Not only that but due to the introduction of some new land settlements the stability and continuity of the Indian villages were shaken. In fact, the entire structure of the rural society began to break.²⁰ A close analysis of all the three land settlements indicates that due to certain in built factors the Zamindari system had become dominant in all of them. Consequently, the entire agrarian structure of that period started revolving around the network of the Zamindars-tenants relationship which was oppressive in nature. After the revolt of 1857 there was tremendous increase in the power of Zamindars.

20. Bipan Chandra, *ibid*; p.105.

Due to their cooperation and loyalty towards the British Raj the Zamindars became the closest allies of the British regime and they were benefited both materially and politically. Thus, the post-revolt period was the period of 'landlords' paradise.²¹

Thorner and Thorner²² have tried to explain the events of the British regime in terms of a broader and total developmental cycle. They stated that during the time of the British rule attempts were made to link the country side with the coastal towns and ports. The main motive behind this was to draw the agricultural produce of the country side into the world capitalist market. So, the period witnessed an unprecedented shift from food crops to commercial crops. But this shift was very unplanned. There was lack of credit facilities. As a result, the needy peasants were situationally compelled to go to the moneylenders who charged high interest and, thus, pocketed the vast economic surplus generated in the country side. Soon the moneylenders, besides supplying credits, spread their tentacles over a wider realm of agricultural activities and transactions.

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21. Barrington Moore (Jr) Social Origin of Dictatorships and Democracy, Penguin, 1969, p.353.
22. For details, see, Daniel Thorner and Alice Thorner, Land and labour in India, (London: Asia Publishing House, 1962, pp.54-55.

It is widely acknowledged that the land settlements and the other so-called components of capitalism were imposed on the primordial ties oriented-vertically organized Indian society. The major consequence of the land settlement was that the routine process of transformation from a backward pre-industrial economy to a developed industrial economy was interrupted. Subsequently, the transformation of pre-capitalist agrarian relations into fullfledged capitalist agrarian relations could not occur in India in the same way as it occurred in many independent countries of the west. Here, the land tenure was adapted and modified to suit the economic and political requirements of the British economy.²³ The new system had a very adverse effect on the existing socio-economic set up. There was excessive pressure of population on land because there were no alternative avenues of employment for the ruined artisans and the disposed and poverty ridden peasantry. They had to fall back on land as tenants-at-will, share-croppers, and farm-servants to work on highly exploitative terms.²⁴

23. P.C. Joshi, "Land Reform in India" in A.R. Desai (ed. Rural Sociology in India, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1969, p.444.

24. Ibid., p.446.

Land Reforms in Post-Independent India

The British had left India with a fractured, ruined and refractory agrarian society. In Thorner's words, "The agrarian system of that period was characterised by a built-in-depressor." The 'built-in-depressor' was a prime factor of stagnation and backwardness of agriculture in India. After independence the main task of our government was to restructure and reorganize the agrarian relations so that we would achieve our cherished goal of equality and elimination of poverty. Keeping these objectives in mind the Congress Economic Programme Committee (1947-48) brought into notice certain proposals for agrarian reforms. The Committee (a) enunciated the principle that land should be held for use (as opposed to profit) as a source of employment. The use of land of those, who are either land holders or otherwise unable for any period to exercise the right of cultivating them, must come to rest in the village cooperative committee subject to the condition that the original holder or his successor will be entitled to come back to the land for genuine cultivation. (b) the committee further urged that in agriculture limit should be fixed for the maximum size of holding... the surplus land over such a maximum should be acquired and placed at the disposal of village cooperative.²⁵

25. P.C. Joshi, op.cit., p.452.

Some other committees which paved the way for the forthcoming agrarian reforms were instituted by the government of India. Important among these committees were: one headed by Nehru²⁶ in 1947, and the other headed by J.C. Kumarappa in 1948.²⁷ Main recommendations of these committees laid emphasis on the abolition of intermediaries or intermediary classes. "Land to the tiller" was also one of the most important recommendations of the committees. An economic sub-committee formed by the Congress Party in 1950²⁸ submitted a memorandum to the Conference of the Chief Ministers and the Presidents of the Congress Party's state Committees. In the same year, various states enacted many laws and regulations regarding land reforms. The comprehensive framework of the official land policy was set out, for the first time, in the First Five Year Plan. In the plan an attempt was made to indicate the broad common approach for the land reforms programmes. The plan also envisaged the main stages in which the reforms were to be carried out. In relation to land reforms, all the state governments were

26. For details see Charles Betellheim, *India Independent*, (London: Macvibbon and Kee, London, 1968), p.180.

27. *Ibid.*, p.131.

28. Charles Betellheim,, *Ibid*, pp.181-182.

guided by the same principle but the situational specificities in these states were also taken into consideration.

As indicated above, the land relations were not uniform all over the country. In some, states, there was Zamindari system, in others Ryotwari and Mahalwari systems. In order to evolve a uniform pattern of land relations all the states enacted laws regarding (a) Abolition of intermediaries or intermediary classes; (b) Regulation of rents; and (c) Limiting the size of landed properties and holdings through putting ceiling. Since the prime objective of the land reform was to abolition of the intermediaries, The Zamindari system was abolished during 1947-1956, and it paved the way for the disappearance of the Zamindars. In practice, the Zamindars certainly became weak and ineffective as far as their intermediary roles and functions were concerned but their economic and cultural hegemony had not disintegrated in substantial degree.

It is an uncontested fact that the formulations and partial implementation of certain laws cannot bring forth equality in a society which has been a citadel of multiple forms of inequalities since the last two thousand years or so. In fact, problems of land reforms are structural and can be resolved only through structural changes. The laws relating to the land reforms have not

been successful because of the fact that the political elites themselves have not shown commitments to get them implemented as these go against their class interest. In fact, both the state and laws work according to whims of the dominant classes and state works as an instrument in the hands of such classes.

However, in 1961 the government has imposed ceiling on land holdings with a view to have an egalitarian land distribution. Undoubtedly, this was an admirable and desirable step to reduce the concentration of land in the few hands but, like the previous laws, it was also full of loopholes. The loopholes were : (1) related to the unit of identification. It has been discerned that in most of the cases the unit of land ceiling was an individual rather than a family. (2) in some states large scale transfer of land took place before the implementation of ceiling and this transfer was not declared null and void after the ceiling was implemented. Due to these loopholes concentration of land had not been reduced to the stipulated extent. "The fact is that 90% of the civil use fullness of a programme of ceiling upon landholdings has been by and large a failure in our country."

29. Quoted in G. Kotovsky's, Agrarian Reforms in India, Trans. from Russian by K.J. Lamkin, Delhi, People Publishing House, 1964) p.111.

The third step in the direction of land reform was the Tenancy Reforms Act. The main recommendations, in the First Five Year Plan, regarding tenancy reforms were: (1) The confirmation of the right of occupancy on all tenants subject to the owner's right to resume a limited area for personal cultivation. (2) Resumption for personal cultivation should be permitted for the number of family holdings not exceeding three, which could be cultivated by adult workers belonging to the landlord's family with the assistance of agricultural labour to the extent customary among those who cultivate their own lands. (3) The owners should exercise the right of resumption for personal cultivation within a period of five years. (4) The tenants of non-resumable area or areas in which the landlord fails to exercise the right of resumption within five years should get the right of purchase, the price being determined in terms of the multiples of the rental value of land and payment being made in instalment. Government may establish direct contact with the tenants of the non-resumable area. (5) And, a rate of rent exceeding one fourth or one fifth of the produce should be regarded as requiring special justification.³⁰

30. P.C. Joshi, op.cit., p.456.

In brief, the main objectives of the tenancy legislation were, "to serve the rights of occupancy to the tenants, to protect them from eviction from the seized plots, and to fix maximum payable rates of rents. Along with these, the legislation also provided for the rights of tenants under certain conditions to acquire ownership of their plots.³¹ This measure has also not functioned in a desirable direction. It has become the source of eviction of the tenants as a large number of tenants were evicted from lands after the enactment of this law. In other words, "As regards tenancy legislation proper, its effect has been that tenants have lost more than they have acquired.³² All the land reform measures have been a fiasco. Its main drawback lies in its halting, and unsatisfactory and half-hearted implementation in most parts of the country.³³ Secondly, the ruling class, drawn generally from the upper strata of society enacted the legislation in such manner that there were rooms for many loopholes. Neither the national nor the regional elites wanted to improve the conditions of the downtrodden.

31. See Kotovosky, *op.cit.*, p.456.

32. *Ibid.*, p.139; see also Daniel Thorner, *op.cit.*, p.479.

33. P.S. Appu, "Tenancy Reforms in India", *Economic and Political Weekly.*, vol. X, nos. 33-35, 1975, pp.1360-61

Even today, they function for the perpetuation of the status-quo.

The above discussed land reform measures were only one aspect of the whole process that came into existence after independence. A comprehensive study of different dimensions of land reorganization indicates that four types of experiments have been made to alter the uneven pattern of distribution of landholding. These experiments are: (1) Land reforms "from above" have been enacted by the state legislatures and implemented by the agencies of the state government under the overall guidance of the Central Government. The legislations like Abolition of Zamindari Act; Ceiling on Land Holdings, Tenancy Act, etc. come under this type of land reforms. (2) Land reform has also been initiated from below through militant peasants actions like those of Telangana and Naxalbari movements, and also, to some extent, the land grab movements in some parts of the country. (3) Land reform from above has also taken place through legislative enactments combined with peasant mobilization. The cases of controlled land seizure in West Bengal under the United Front Government and of the protection of poor peasants in Kerala under the Congress supported C.P.I. ministry. (4) And finally the land reform from below has occurred through persuasion of landlords and peaceful

pressures by peasants as has happened in the cases of Bhudan and Gramdan.³⁴

Most of the social scientists have devoted their attention to the evaluation of land reform legislations and their implementation from above and have undermined the importance of land reform experiments from below. However, efforts have been made to conceptualise some of these experiments under the rubric of social movement. For instance, it is said that the Bhudan movement was "so original in its conception, so novel in its method and so revolutionary as to its objective that special effort has to be made to understand and to place it into proper perspective."³⁵

Various types of changes initiated and generated by land reforms have been analysed comprehensively. It has been found that the ownership of land has not shifted

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34. P.C. Joshi, "Evaluation of Land Reforms", Some problems of India's Economic Policy edited by Charan D. Wadhwa (ed.) Tata Mcgraw Hall Publishing Company, New Delhi: 1977, p.435. For details, also see, P.C. Joshi, Land Reforms in India: Trends and Perspective, (Bombay: Allied, 1975).
35. D.R. Gadgil, Agrarian Reform : Planning and Economic Policy in India, Poona : Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, 1972.

so much as the shift has been witnessed in the power structure. Power has shifted much more decisively from the traditional elite of village to the hands of the new popular leaders.³⁶ One should not, however, emphasize too much on the divergence between political and economic power. Although numerical strength has become an increasingly important basis of power, by itself it does not count for very much. The small tenants and landless labourers and those who are on the border line between them have as yet very little power. Far from being able to manoeuvre for benefit and privileges they are generally not even able to get for themselves what they are entitled to".³⁷

The implementation of land reforms is not uniform. It varies from region to region. And the understanding of regional variation gives an insight into real factors retarding or facilitating change.³⁸

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36. Andre Beteille, Caste, Class and Power, (Changing Pattern of Stratification in a Tanjor Village, Berkeley, 1965), p.199.
37. Andre Beteille, *ibid.*, pp.201-205.
38. V.M. Dandekar, Working of Bombay Tenancy Act, 1948, Report of Investigation, (Gokhale Onstitute of Politics and Economics, Poona, 1957), p.IV.

In the ultimate analysis, the question of land reforms is linked with two different perspectives of agrarian reconstruction. For analytical purpose, these perspectives are : (1) Perspective of peasant agriculture within a cooperative framework; and (2) perspective regulated capitalist agriculture. The first perspective is based on comprehensive land reforms whereas the second perspective takes into consideration the question of land reforms on a limited scale - "Protective land reforms". It intends to give relief to share croppers, tenants-at-will and marginal farmers who many otherwise be ousted from land by large producers.³⁹ However, on objective evaluation of land reforms cannot be done without an indepth study of the contradictions between an emerging capitalist sector and the peasant sector.⁴⁰

Agrarian Unrest and Peasant Movements in India

Historically, India has a long tradition of the agrarian unrest and peasant movements. Peasants and

39. Evaluation of land reforms, P.C. Joshi, p.452, some Problems of India's Economic Policy, (ed.), by Charan D. Wadhwa.

40. Ibid., p.453.

subaltern classes have been raising voices against the ruthless exploitation and boegy of atrocities perpetrated upon them by the ruling elites in different parts of the country. But over a period of time some substantial changes have been discerned in the patterns of mobilization, use of symbolic pools and the nature and orientation of leadership within the vast canvas of ongoing social movements in India. As far as the pattern of mobilization in the peasants' movements of medieval era was concerned, it was based on traditional signs and symbols. The caste, community and other primordial ties were playing very eminent role in rousing the peasants to act collectively in the defence of their interests. The Jat revolt was the clearest instance of how an essentially peasant rebellion proceeded along the caste line. The role of the traditional signs and symbols has also been seen in the revolt of the Satnamis and Sikhs during the Mughal period.⁴¹

However, in all cases the traditional categories like caste, community and other primodial ties were providing not only positive direction to the peasant revolts but in many cases they became the greatest barrier in the way of successful revolt. In other words, "while the ties of caste and religious communities helped to enlarge the

41. Irfan Habib, *ibid.*, pp.332-33.

scale of peasant uprisings, they also tended to cloud or obscure their class nature."⁴² However, in some cases of agrarian movements during the medieval period the Zamindars sided with the peasant rebellions. Such things cropped up when there was a conflict between the Zamindars and the supreme imperial power. These events were the peculiar examples of merger of the risings of the oppressed with oppressor the war between the two oppressing classes.⁴³ It means there was alliance between the Zamindars and their peasants to oppose the supremacy of emperors. One should also not forget the minute differences among the various revolts of that period. For instance, there were differences among the Jats, Satnamis and Sikh rebellions on the use of various symbols, linkages, etc. for mobilization. Thus, the agrarian system of that time was full of stress, strains, contradictions, conflicts and antagonisms. There were conflicts of interests among the various groups of landed classes which ultimately led to the collapse of the whole system.

During the British period also a large number of peasant uprisings took place. Here it may not possible

42. Ibid., p.

43. Irfan Habib, *ibid.*, p.333.

to go into the details of all those uprisings; instead, we shall concentrate on only some of them to arrive at a general conclusion. Our endeavour is also limited because of the existing theoretical prejudices and inadequacy of the elitist historiography. Besides, in most of the writings the roles of the general masses and the subaltern have been neglected as it is thought that the entire consciousness behind the peasant uprisings and Indian nationalism was exclusively or predominantly elite achievement. In this connection, Guha writes that "in the colonialist and neocolonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators' policies, institutions and culture, nationalist and the neo-nationalist writings - to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas."⁴⁴

Further, in most of the cases consciousness from below has not been emphasised properly, whether it is a particular movement or the nationalism as such Guha mentions clearly that in the elitist historiography the politics of the people has not been given adequate attention. According to him, "For parallel to the domain of elitist politics there existed through out the colonial

44. Ranjit Guha (ed.), Subaltern Studies, vol.I, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982, p.4.

period another domain of Indian politics (politics of the people as an autonomous domain) in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the landowning population and the intermediate strata in town and country side, i.e., the people." The second feature applicable to the most of the social movements and agrarian unrest of the colonial period was the pattern of mobilization. In the realm of the elite politics the process of mobilization was vertical while in the case of subaltern movements the pattern of mobilization was horizontally organized. The elite politics laid emphasis on the modern institutional signs and symbols but, as stated earlier, the subaltern movements derived their inspiration and energy from the traditional organizations like kindship, territoriality or class associations depending on the level of consciousness of the people involved. The elite politics relied more on legal and constitutional means whereas violence was the part and parcel of the subaltern movements. Further, the former was more cautious and controlled and the latter was more spontaneous. Thus, the peasants uprisings of the colonial period were based on popular mobilization.⁴⁵ It, however, does not imply that there was no interaction between these two dichotomous

45. Ibid., pp.4-5.

realms of politics. In fact, in many instances, attempts were made from the above (elites) to integrate the subaltern politics.

Now, without going into the historical details of every movements of the colonial era, we would highlight certain dimensions of some of the movements which took place between 1925 and 1970s. We have selected this period because after 1915 there started an intensive interaction between the subaltern and modern politics. A number of studies have been conducted to find out the general causes, consequences and perspectives of the agrarian unrest and peasant movements that took place during this period.⁴⁶ Siddiqui, for instance, has tried to analyse the historical genesis of the Kisan Sabha and the Eka (unity) movement in northern UP. According to him, there was a close relationship between the Kisan Sabha, Eka movement and Indian nationalism. But due to certain reasons the Kisan Sabha and the movements did not

46. M.H. Siddiqui, Agrarian Unrest in North India: the United Provinces (1918-22), New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1928; D.N. Banerjee, op. cit., Gyan Pandey, "Rallying round the Cow: Sectarian Strife in the Bhojpur Region (1888-1917)" in R. Guha, (ed.) op.cit., T.K. Oommen, op.cit., Arvind N. Dass (ed.), Agrarian Relations in India, New Delhi: Manohar, 1979.

last long. Siddiqui asserts that their spontaneous origin was the proof of the exploitation of the peasantry by the Raj and the landlord.⁴⁷ Over a period of time, peasants themselves became the part and parcel of national movement which had its own goals and objectives. But the national politics was incapable of incorporating the overall interest of the peasantry. Further, we find that the Raj itself came heavily upon the peasant movements. Thus, the peasant movements had to face two types of challenges: one, from its own structural limitation and, two, from the Raj. It has been stated that "within the constraint of an ideology that disallowed higher forms of peasant organization, suppressed by the might the Raj in perpetual fear of "Bolshevik" activities and incapable of evolving its own ideology and a wider organization, these peasant movements vanished as suddenly as they had appeared."⁴⁸

Further, Dhanagre has examined the causes and consequences of agrarian unrest and peasant-uprisings on the basis of a number of peasant movements (Mopals Rebellion

47. M.H. Siddiqui, op. cit., p.279.

48. Police Department Files No.358/1926, pp. 29-33 quoted in M.H. Siddiqui, p.219.

Agrarian Agitation and Congress politics in 1920-22 and 1930-31; peasant organization and the left wing in India, 1925-47, The Tebhaga Movement in Bengal, 1946-47, and finally social origins of the peasant insurrection in Telangana 1946-51) that took place during 1920-51 in different parts of the country. He has tried to classify the various forms of peasant resistance on the basis of goals, ideology and methods of organization. His categorisation is as follows: (1) In the first category, those movements have been included which were nativistic or restorative movements and rebellions. These movements aimed at driving out the british and at restoring earlier rulers and social relations. Despite their transformative orientations, all these movements had got revivalistic and backward looking ideology and inclination.⁴⁹

(2) The second type of movements were religious or millenarian which were committed mainly to liberate a region or an ethnic group under a new form of authority. These movements had got certain distinctivve features such as collective orientation and a forward looking religious

49. For details, see Ralf Linton, "Nativistic Movements", American Anthropologists, Vol. 43, 1943, p.273. Also see, Dhanagare , op.cit. p-213.

ideology. As far as their goals were concerned, they were totalistic. The peasants' reaction in this regard was spontaneous and sudden. It has been argued that these movements were prone to fission because they breach rebellions against established authority.⁵⁰

(3) Social banditry has also been an important form of protest in the peasant societies. It flourished in remote and inaccessible areas and during the pauperisation and economic crisis. But its goals were narrow and reformatory and not revolutionary in spirit.⁵¹

(4) There are numerous instances of mass insurrections of peasants for the redressal of their specific grievances. These insurrections were basically secular in character and have no single charismatic leader who may initially be reformatory involving peaceful mass boycott or demonstrations but may end up with fiercely fought revolts when uprisings are made against them.⁵²

Some peasant movements have been characterized as terrorist which involves actual use for threat of violence

50. See Norman Cohen, The Pursuit of the millenarian, London: 1970, pp. 13-16.

51. For details see E.J. Hobsbawn, Primitive Rebels (Manchester University Press, 1959) also see his Bandits, pp.13-23.

52. See, Kathleen Gough, Peasant Uprisings in India, pp. 1331-1412.

coupled with vengeance and ideas of meeting out collective justice.⁵³

Lastly, there is liberal reformist agitation whose main characteristic is that it only relies on symbolic protests. It does not question the very structure of the legitimate authority nor does it aim at any fundamental transformation in social relations.⁵⁴

In Dhanagare's opinion, the first two types of movements are transformative while the last four types are fundamentally reformative.⁵⁵ However, he thinks that the above categorisation denotes only the ideal types and, so, it is not necessary that concrete manifestations of social movements all will be similar in their contents and forms. Not only that but there is a continuous journey of a movement from one type to another. For example, Moplah rebellion started as a millenarian, then

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53. See Georges Sorel Reflection on Violence, London: Collier Macmillan, 1961, pp.90-92.
54. D.N. Dhanagare, op.cit., pp.213-14.
55. Dhanagare's typology coincides with one mentioned by Mukherji and Oommen. See, P.N. Mukherjee and T.K. Oommen, "Socialological issues in the analysis social movements in Independent India, Socialological Bulletin 26(1), (March, 1977) pp. 14-37. Parthan N. Mukharji Social Movements and social Change" - towards a conceptual clarification and theoretical framework socialological Bulletin-26(1) (March 1977, pp.38-59.

it became the case of social banditry and lastly it converted into terrorism.⁵⁶ Similarly, the agrarian movements led under the leadership of Mahatama Gandhi may fall in the sixth category because their fundamental political outlook was reformist and their ideology was based on conflict within the regime rather than conflict over the regime. ~~the~~

The peasant movements like the Tebhaga and Telangana movements, which were inspired and led by the Communists, were the direct manifestations of mass insurrections. In the case of Telangana movement some attributes of social banditry and terrorism had emerged and this movement also took some symbols which made it similar to the millenarian kind of movement. But in actuality, the movements had got revolutionary orientations in their pattern of mobilization, adherence to a particular ideology, and the issues for which these were launched. Yet, there were some distinctions in their basic orientations. For instance, in the case of the Tebhaga movement the issue was specific and it did not reconcile with the macro ideological as well organizational pattern of the Kisan Sabha. On the other hand, in the Telangana insurrection

56. D.N. Dhanagare, op.cit.

there was a coherent and well thought direction in terms of its ideology, pattern of mobilization, and the strategy. This confluence of the unity of ideology, coherent organization and unity of action has made the Telangana movement a watershed in the history of peasant movements in India. In fact, the Telangana movement was the only movement which was based on the conflict over the regime.

To sum up this chapter, it can be said that during the colonial regime India had witnessed a number of peasant movements. All these movements were the concrete manifestations of the gory details of the exploitation of peasantry. But due to certain structural-cum-external reasons most of the movements had not acquired an all-India character. Undoubtedly, the Telangana movement has become the source of inspiration for the future peasant movement(s) in India if the various types of social inequality in general and the problems of peasantry in particular are not properly managed well in time.

CHAPTER - 4LAND RELATIONS AND PEASANT-UPR ISINGS IN
PRE-INDEPENDENT BIHAR : A SOCIO-HISTORICAL PROFILE

During the colonial regime Bihar was under the permanent settlement. The permanent settlement was introduced in Patna, Bhagalpur sub-divisions, in some parts of Hazaribagh, Manbhum district, a few estates of Singhbhum and in the Chota Nagpur sub-divisions. One can find various kinds of landholdings in these areas. The whole system was hierarchically arranged. At the apex of the hierarchy there was the state. In the middle of the hierarchy there were Zamindars, tenure-holders, and under-tenure holders. These categories of middle hierarchy were the foundation stone of the whole system. Their main function was to extract shares of the produce from the land. This was done in order to meet the obligation of fixed revenue to the state and also to save a good deal of share for own consumption. At the bottom of the hierarchy, there were the peasants who had got very limited rights on land. There were also landless labourers without any ownership of land.

Even before the introduction of the permanent settlement there were Zaindars in Bihar. But they were, in no sense, owners of the land. Instead, they used to receive a share

of the produce from a defined land-area on collection of revenue due to the Mughal authorities in the pre-British period.¹ After introduction of the permanent settlement the old system of land relations had undergone metamorphosis change. The Zamindars were provided with absolute rights to collect rents from land produce and they were also in a position to fix their own terms with their tenants. In this settlement the rights of the genuine cultivators were not taken into account. Hence, birth of an intermediary class. Consequently, a vicious chain of exploitation of the toiling cultivators by the non-cultivating class of Zamindars emerged on the socio-economic map of Bihar. The cultivators were situationally forced to hand over the large part of their produce to a "parasitic class" of intermediary drawn from the upper castes.

In fact, pre-independent Bihar was characterized by a close coincidence of agrarian and social hierarchy. The big Zamindars belonged to the upper castes. The loose stratum of peasantry was constituted by the castes middle in the social hierarchy. The landless labourers belonged to the untouchable castes. In nutshell, the agro-social hierarchy of Bihar after the permanent settlement appears

1. B. Chaudhari in Dharma Kumar (ed.), The Cambridge Economic History of India, Vol. II, (Edinburg: Orient Longman, 1982), pp. 93-105.

between the peasants and the landlords. These steps were taken in the middle of the nineteenth century. But no concrete outcome could be achieved as the institutional framework of the settlement was still in favour of the Zamindars. Within that framework, it was not possible to protect the interests of the peasants. The degree of state-intervention was not enough to protect the interests of the peasants. The degree of state-intervention was not enough to protect the peasants from various forms of exploitation. The landlords also came forward to oppose all such moves which were favouring the underdogs. For instance, the landlords had opposed the passage of the Bengal Tenancy Act.³ Since the Zamindars were the closest ally of the Raj, the British Government did not want to go against their interest. As a result, no provisions of the Act of 1885 were implemented and all talks of tenant's protection were in a fiasco. The tenants remained the subject of inhuman exploitation and maltreatment. It was not that the tenants

3. The Maharaja of Darbhanga, Sir Lakshmeshwar Singh opposed the Act in the old Imperial Legislative Council. For details also see, Girish Mishra, Agrarian Problems of Permanent Settlement: A case study of Champaran, (People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978), p.235. Sir Ganesh Dutt Singh had also opposed the Bill. See Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates, Vol. II, Part I, 1938.

were passive and were not reacting against their said plight. On many occasions they raised their strong voice against their subjugation but in the absence a solid organization their grievances remained unnoticed.

In the present century there have been some movements of the tenants and peasantry. These movements have also paved the way for the future agrarian movements in Bihar. A debate was going on about the nature of the social movements which had occurred in the Pre-independent period in the country. The crux of the debate is whether these movements were political or pre-political. However, the distinctions between the agrarian movements of the pre-independent and post-independent periods can be made on the basis of (a) objectives of the movements; (b) pattern of participation and mobilization, and (c) movement against whom.⁴ The peasant movements of pre-independent India was launched, by and large, against the British. As far as the identification of class enemy was concerned, it was the colonial rulers who were the prime

4. For details see, T.K. Oommen, *From Mobilization to Institutionalization* (Popular, Bombay, 1985), pp. 10-11.

enemies and the indigenous feudal lords were the secondary one. In terms of pre-political and political controversy the peasant struggles in colonial countries were essentially political revolts viewed in terms of the primacy of goals they pursued.⁵ After independence a substantial change has been discerned in terms of the objective and the pattern of mobilization of the different categories of population of agrarian society. During this era different political organizations have started mobilizing the peasants. The movements are directed against the landlords. The main objective of these movements is to bring about an equalitarian distribution of economic resources.

The peasant movements of pre-independent period were not class-struggle in the exact Marxian sense because class struggle presupposes the replacement of the 'class in itself' by 'class for itself'. It was not the case during the pre-independent India. That time caste, community and other primordialities played very

5. For details see, D. Hardiman, "The Roots of Rural Agitation in India, 1914-1947", Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 8(3), 1981, pp. 317-80.

important role in the mobilization of various categories of agrarian society as mentioned above.

Of the peasant movements that occurred in pre-independent Bihar, the Champaran Satyagraha was the milestone as during this movement an unprecedented interaction between an unorganized consciousness of the peasant world-politics and organized consciousness of the modern politics took place. After this, the peasants also came within the fold of an anti-colonial struggle. Their interests and objectives became subordinate to the anti-colonial macro-struggle. There were also some movements in which there was primacy of peasant's interests over the fundamental political objective of the Congress. For instance, the movements which were launched under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati in Bihar laid main emphasis on the interests and aspirations of the peasantry. These movements were the peasant movements in exact sense because in them there was primacy of peasant's interest over all other national political objectives. During the Kisan Sabha movement also the selection, alliance and adoption of political parties were made with a view to fulfil the grievances of peasantry.

In order to analyse the agrarian situation in pre-independent Bihar, it is necessary to discuss briefly the socio-historical backgrounds of some of the peasant

movements which took place during that period. In actuality, the agrarian unrest and movements were generated and brought up by biased land policies of the Britishers. The whole agrarian system was full of strains and contradictions. There was multi layered exploitation of Ryots as they were exploited by the Sarkar (Government), the Sahukar (money lender) and the Zamindar. These three classes were bracketed with each other. But due to certain objective factors, the peasants were not in a position to identify the priorities of their enemies. Therefore, in some cases they attacked all the three and in others they attacked only those with whom they used to interact in their day to day life.

Before the Champaran Satyagrah all the peasant movements were guided by consciousness from below. In these movements the pattern of mobilization, adherence to ideology, and the use of symbolic pools were quite indigenous. The movements like that of Kols, Santhals, etc. can be cited. The Kol insurrection which came into prominence in 1831 was the natural outcome of the exploitation of the Kol tribe by the outsiders. In this insurrection the local Thekedars (contractors) were made the target. Their homes were plundered and set on fire. This movement can be compared with the 'subaltern' movements.

Another important peasant uprising of that period was the Santhal rebellion of 1855-56. Birbhum, Bankura and Singhbhum were the focal points of the movement. It was pitted against the Bengali and Baniya moneylenders and also against the British Raj. Guha writes, "The Santhals made it obvious that they intended to spare no person or property associated with Sarkar, Sahukar or Zamindar, and this established, within a matter of days, a well defined domain of insurgency in which their operations had a free play between all these categories of their foe and were permuted in all possible ways."⁶ The movement challenged the mighty domination of the British Raj. In order to suppress it the Government left no stone unturned. Although the movement was suppressed ruthlessly, its impact continued for a long time. Again, during 1871-1882, a strong uprising known as the Kherwar movement (movement launched by the Kherwar tribe) took place. It had derived its energy from the traditional cultural ethics of tribes in order to fight against the enemy. Some Gurus (priests) who had spearheaded the movement convinced

6. For details, see, Ranjit Guha, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1983.

the people that the coming age would be the golden one. K.S. Singh states that the villages of Sidu and Kantu, leaders of the Santhal insurrection, became the shrines where hundreds of the Santhals flocked to worship the heroes who were canonized by the Kherwars.⁷

The most important movement of this period was the Birsa Munda movement. It occurred during 1860s under the leadership of Birsa Munda. The area of influence of this movement was wider than the previous uprisings. The movement had shaken the roots of the British Raj. Each and every components of the Raj were attacked. It was a consciously organized and well patterned movement and its participants were well aware of their main enemies. Their local enemy were the Dikus (the outsiders) who were being patronized by the British Raj. Therefore, the participants decided that they would first kill the local Sahukars and Zamindars, and then they would attack the British-officials (in the nativistic term these British officials were known as the Hakims). Birsa, the leaders of the movement, categorically declared that the Raj is mine and not of the Hakims. We will kill zamindars and thekedars, and then will go to Ranchi and then

7. K.S. Singh, Birsa Munda and his movement (1874-1901), Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1983, p.28.

kill the Hakim.⁸ Unfortunately, the declaration of Birsa did not come true as he was arrested and the movement collapsed.

In all above mentioned movements , there appeared certain similarities. All these movements were based on mobilization from below. The leaders of the movements were indigenous. The local values, signs and symbols had been used to mobilize the people. No external leaders and indealogy played any worthnoting role. The movements were fundamentally launched against the outsiders and their patrons.

A minute study of the tribal uprisings in Bihar indicates that religion was the sole organizing factor behind them. However, it does not mean that the consciousness behind the uprisings was false. Religion always does not give birth to false consciousness. Sometimes, it plays very important role in unifying the people. Gramsci has pointed out that religion is not self-deception(or false consciousness) but is, for the subaltern, a specific way of rationalising the world and real life. It provides the general framework

8. For details see, Singh K.S., The Dust Storm in the Hanging Mist Calcutta, 1966.

for real political activity among the people especially in the absence of a socialist party responsive to their needs.⁹ Thus, we find that the tribal uprisings were based on true consciousness and stark reality of life. It was also quite natural for the participants that they were justifying their activities by tenants of religion. Since religion was the only source of rationalization for their uprisings, their movements would naturally be full of religious overtones. The leaders of the movements were treated as the true incarnations of God. For instance, Birsa was regarded as 'Bhagwan' by his followers. It was believed that God had inspired him to do something for the emancipation of his followers. Finally, the indigenous religion-rationality of the natives was the prime mover of all the above mentioned insurrections.

In all the movements violence was used as an appropriate means to achieve the cherished goals. This was so as the violence was the only means available to the participants through which they could achieve their perceived objectives. They perceived that it was only through the violence they could set themselves free from their inhuman conditions and subjugation. They came to

9. See, Antonio Gramsci, Selections from Prison Notebooks, (New York: International Publishers, 1975), pp.326-327. For details also see, Alasair Davidson, Gramsci the peasantry and popular culture", Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol.II, No. 4, July 1984.

realize that as they were enslaved through the use of violence , they could emancipate themselves by the same means. Thus, it is obvious that the selection of means in tribal insurrections was done on the basis of the day to day raw experiences of life. Here, Fanon's assertion seems to be valid that the use of violence is the only unifying force for the peasants subjugated by the colonial rule.¹⁰

Now , we would like to analyse these agrarian movements in Bihar which were based on the mobilization from above. Mobilization from above is closely linked with the consciousness from above. It also involves external leadership and macro perspective. Mention has already been made that the Champaran Satyagraha was the first movement which brought an unorganized consciousness of the peasants closer to the modern organized political consciousness. It was the first event in which an unprecedented fusion of organized and unorganized consciousness was discerned. The movement was started against the exploitation of the Raiyats on indigo plantation. There were various systems like Tinkathia(one-sixth of land), "Sharabishi(rent enhancement)

10. For details see, Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1984.

and collection of 'abwabs' (illegal cesses) made the life of the indigo raiyat unbearable. The whole scenario of the oppressive system could be understood by some comments made by Mahtma Gandhi: 'It is inconceivable that the ryots would agree to an enormous increase in their rents against freedom from liability to grow indigo....under the Tinkathia system the ryot has been obliged to give his best land for landlord's crops; in some cases the land in front of his house has been so used, he has been obliged to give his best time and energy also to it, so that very little time has been left for growing his own crops."¹¹

Mahtma Gandhi went there and started his Satyagraha in 1917. As a result of his Satyagraha, an enquiry committee was instituted. Finally, the exploitative system like 'Tinkathia' and 'Sharabeshi' was declared illegal. A compromise was made between these two polar opposite entites. Actually, Gandhi became a bridge between the British officials and the peasants.

11. For details see, Mahatma Gandhi, Collected Works, (New Delhi: Publication Division, 1958), Vol XIII, p.385.

Although the movement was characterized as one with the macro modern political perspective and content, the local nativistic world view had also been taken into consideration in the mobilization. However, the movement was organized by the local leaders like Raj Kumar Shukla, Khendar Prasad Kai, Sant Rant, etc., drawn from the rich peasantry who called upon Mahatma Gandhi to provide reinforcement to the movement.¹²

The reason behind the sources of the Satyagraha was the typical Indian outlook of the Mahatma. His linguistic discourse, his dress, and his simplicity influenced the people deeply. According to Ponchepadass, the Mahatma appeared to the peasants, thanks to his simple language and "inpretentious outlook", as one of their kind, and the auster discipline of life which he imposed on his young fellow-workers did not fail to impress them favourably.¹³ In such a situation peasants started identifying themselves with Mahatma Gandhi. In the case of the Champaran Satyagraha another question might be asked: whether the unorganized politics of the

12. Jacques Ponchepadass, "Local Leaders and the Intelligentsia in the Champaran Satyagraha", Contributions to Indian Sociology, New Series, No.8, November 1974, p. 71.

13. Jacques Ponchepadass, Ibid., p.84.

peasants world was dominating over the organized politics of the modern world or the vice-versa. In fact, there was no question of domination of one over another. There was a fusion of the former with the latter. It is a fact that the methods, symbols and signs which were used in the movement belonged to the peasants world.

KISAN SABHA MOVEMENT IN BIHAR

Every social movement originates out of certain historical necessity. A movement manifests that the system is passing through some structural stress and strains. The Kisan Sabha movement in Bihar was not an exception to this. The Champaran Satyagraha did not bring about any substantial change in the exploitative agrarian structure of Bihar. In the same way, the civil disobedience movement did not achieve any worth noting objective. The naked exploitation of peasantry was going on. The national political programme of the Congress Party did not put the burning problems of Kisans and ryots on its agenda. There was no single and integrated trends of politics. On the one hand, the unorganized politics of peasants world

was persisting and on the other hand, the organized world of politics was also existing in a particular realm of national struggle.

In this situation of the dual politics and ruthless exploitation, the Kisan Sabha movement came into existence. The movement was started under the banner of the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha, formed at Sone Pur in 1929. Its founding father was Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. He was the president of the organization alongwith Srikrishna Sinha who was the first general secretary.¹⁴ The Sabha had tremendous support of the people. It's membership was increasing by leaps and bounds. It had been estimated that its membership increased from 80,000 in 1935 to 2,50,000 in 1938.¹⁵ The movement was supported and participated by all sections of the peasantry. It was because of the fact

14. For details see, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Mera Jeevan Sangharsh (Hindi), Bihta, 1952, pp.339-49.

15.

that the Sabha was representing the interests and aspirations of the Kisans, the ryots and the landless labourers. It's main objective was to launch an all out attack against those sections of people who were exploiting the Kisans and the Khet Majdoors. In one of his illustrations, the Swami had pointed about the sad plight of the ryots and other sections of the underdogs. He wrote, "For Sahukars and Zamindars the peasant is 'Kamdhenu'.¹⁶

The movement was against the exploitative agrarian structure and it wanted to save the peasantry from various forms of exploitation such as economic, social and cultural. It was by the peasantry and for the peasantry. It was a peasants organization (including that of the Khet Mazdoors) against landlords, moneylenders and the Britishers. But it cannot be said that it was an organized class struggle as it did not use any modern class based ideological symbols to mobilize its support. It used the symbols and ethos of the peasants world to get them convinced that they were oppressed.

16. Sahajanand Saraswati, "Kisan Kya Kara? in Sahajanand (Hindi) Papers , New Delhi.

Hence, they should fight against their deplorable existential condition. Thus, its basic structure was based on the peasants world politics.

As far as the character and social background of the leaders of the movement was concerned, they were the leaders of the Kisans and other oppressed categories of agrarian society. It does not mean that those leaders were unaware of the dynamics and methods of the organized politics of the modern world. In fact, the life journey of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati indicates that he was well aware of both types of politics, the traditional as well as modern. He began his life as a Bhumihaar leader and finally became the founding father of the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha, as mentioned above. Later on, he also studied Marxism and tried his best to visualize the existing problem of peasantry within the materialistic framework.¹⁷ But through out his life he remained committed to cause of the peasantry. He used the modern political organizations to better the conditions of the peasantry.

17. See , Sahajanand Saraswati(1952), op. cit., pp. 59-95.

The movement launched by him was fundamentally different from the Champaran Satyagraha. For instance, in case of the Champaran Satyagraha, the unorganized politics of the peasants world was used to strengthen the anti colonial struggle at the macro level whereas in case of the Kisan Sabha movement, the modern organized political perspective was put on the agenda for the emancipation of the peasantry and the landless labourers.

It has already been mentioned that the Kisan Sabha movement was formed to fight against the exploitation of the peasantry and the landless labourers by the Zamindars and the Sahukars. Here, some questions can be raised about the objective situations which facilitated the formation and growth of the Kisan Sabha. The questions are: How and why was the Kisan Sabha formed? What were the factors which facilitated the rise of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha? Answers to these questions can be examined in terms of (1) the agrarian crisis in Bihar which created the immediate problem of protection of tenants from high rents, rent arrears, land eviction and rural indebtedness; (2) the attitude of the British towards the tenancy legislation during the twenties; (3) the role of the Zamindars in

Bihar; (4) role of the Bihari intelligentsia; and (5) rising peasant consciousness.¹⁸

In order to oppose the Kisan Sabha, the Zamindars formed a united party. There was a concrete initiative on the part of the Zamindars to organize themselves to face the challenges posed by the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha. A number of big Zamindars gathered on 4 September 1932 at Ranchi under the leadership of Maharaja of Darbhanga¹⁹ to form a party. Although, they considered it as a constitutional party²⁰ with broader perspectives, in reality its main aim was to oppose the Congress and the peasant movements in Bihar. The British Government had extended its support to this party.

Upto the independence , the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha had done a lot of work to organize the peasantry so that a strong struggle could be launched against the mighty zamindars. The movement

18. See, Rakesh Gupta, op. cit., p.77.

19. See, K.K. Dutta, History of Freedom Movement in Bihar, Vol. II, Patna, 1957, p. 244.

20. The Report of Proceedings of the Conference, held at Ranchi , on 4 September 1932, p. 5. Also see, Rakesh Gupta, op. cit., p. 80.

was launched phase-wise. The first may be regarded as the organizational-agitational phase(1929-35), the second as the phase of struggle(1936-39), the third phase included the period of the second world war and the last phase incorporated the peasants upsurge of the post-war period.²¹ In the first phase, attempts were made to consolidate the organizational network of the Sabha. The direct confrontation between the landlords and the tenants was not put on the agenda of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha. It is said that in the first phase the pattern of action of the Kisan Sabha was under the influence of the Gandhite mould of class compromise, with the reformist understanding of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati.²² However, during this period, to make the people aware of the programme of the Sabha, a number of meetings and programs were organized to highlight the demands and grievances of the peasantry of the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha and conducted numerous inquiries in Gaya, Dharbanga, Purnea, etc. The most intensive inquiry was carried out in Gaya. After this enquiry a booklet published with the title of Gaya Ke Kisano Ki Karam Kahani.

21. Rakesh Gupta, Ibid., p.88.

22. Ibid., p. 89. Also see, Sahajanand Swami Saraswati, Op.cit., 1952, pp. 320-23.

According to the report of this enquiry, attempts were made to establish district Kisan Sabhas with a body of workers who would try to inculcate the fighting spirits among the oppressed peasantry so that they could oppose vehemently the illegal appropriation of their produce. It was also mentioned in the said pamphlet that in future the tenants would be taught about their rights and to get the rents reduced under the Bihar Tenancy Act.²³ Apart from the consolidation of organization some agitations were also launched against the unbearable amount of rent.

The second phase which included the period 1936-39 was full of sharp struggle. In the meanwhile the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha had prepared a comprehensive manifesto to generate consciousness among the leaders and participants of the struggle. It was during this phase that the Kisan Sabha launched an active struggle over the issue of the 'baksht' lands and eviction of land from the peasants. The struggle was launched first in 1936 in the district of Monghyr and then, it

23. Rakesh Gupta, op.cit., p.99. For details see also Sahajanan Saraswati, 'Gaya Zila Ke Kisans ki Karm Kahani' (Hindi) Published by Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha.

spread in Gaya, Shahabad and Patna. However, the struggle was more acute in the Barahiya Tal of Monghyr district where in 1936, some leaders of the Kisan Sabha started organizing the tenants of this area. Over a period of time, the peasants of Monghyr got organized due to the consistent attempts of the Kisan Sabha. The organizational strength of the Sabha had been conformed by a demonstration on 23 August 1937 in which around twenty thousand peasants took part. The demonstration took place before the Assembly in Patna with the slogans, "Give us bread, we are hungry, give us water, we are thirsty, remit all our agricultural loans, down with Zamindars".²⁴ Despite since re efforts of the Kisan Sabha, the movement launched during this phase did not achieve its target primarily because of the Second World War which, in fact disrupted the direction and tempo of the movement.

Besides the third phase in which the priority of the national issue over rode all other issues in the fourth phase which continued from 1945 to 1947, the

24. See, Amrit Bazar Patrika, 24 August, 1937.

peasants in Bihar again started opposing the exploitators and their patrons. The Bakasht issue again caught up momentum. At this time, the main active leader behind this movement was Karyanand Sharma. During this phase again, the events of forcible cultivation and inter-group fighting had been seen in some parts of Bihar. The Bakast struggle continued in Bihar till the abolition of the Zamindari. The struggle was, in a way, successful in getting some reliefs to the peasants which would perhaps have not been possible otherwise.

We may conclude by saying that the Kisan Sabha movement contributed a lot to strengthen the peasant movement in Bihar. It's leaders like Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Karyanand Sharma, Jadunandan Sharma and Kisor Prasad Sinha had played important historic roles in bringing about an unbreakable spirit of struggle and a new ideological consciousness among the peasantry. The rise of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha and its history represented, at the microspic level, the process of spontaneous awakening, growing class consciousness and emerging local, regional and provincial organizations of peasants. It's ideological position moved from the Congress to the Congress Socialist and, finally, to the Communist understanding.²⁵

25. See, Rakesh Gupta, Ibid., p.130.

NATURE OF AGRARIAN CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY
RURAL BIHAR

Violence and conflict has become a regular feature of rural society in Bihar. Very often these violence and conflicts occur on the issue of unequal distribution of material resources, namely, land and property. Sometimes it appears as conflict based on caste and sometimes on ^Cclass-line is dividing the entire rural population into a number of warring factions. However, the violence is concentrated more in some regions like South and Central Bihar. In this chapter we will examine the nature and intensity of violence generated by a number of agrarian movements like the Kisan Sabha movement, land grab movement and ongoing Naxalite movement in some parts of rural Bihar. Before discussing the nature of agrarian conflict and violence in contemporary rural Bihar, it is necessary to examine some theoretical explanations about conflict and violence. Generally, the explanatory scheme of violence involves three important dimensions: what is the objective behind an act of violence? Who are the participants in it? and, lastly, against whom is violence directed? One can not answer these questions without being aware of the socio-economic formation of a society in which violence takes place. Since the objective conditions and targets of violence differ from society to society, the situational

realities should be taken into account while analysing violence.

Conflict and Violence : Some Theoretical Explanations

There are numerous theories of violence. The most important theories are: the conspiracy theory, the gun theory, and the theory of relative deprivation. Here, we shall mention briefly the major properties of these theories with the view that these may help us understand properly the different types of conflict and violence taking place in the contemporary rural society in Bihar.

It is said that in most of the countries violence takes place due to the conspiracy of the CIA or KGB because these agencies do not want that the political and social stability should prevail there. This may be accepted as the conspiracy theory. But for the present purpose, such view is irrelevant, although in some cases of social and political violence the involvement of foreign hands cannot be ruled out. Further, the proponents of the gun theory believe that prevalence of arms and weapon is the main cause of violence. Hence, some people in America strongly advocate for a systematic federal gun control and regulation of gun traffic.¹ But in our view gun may not be the cause but a means to commit violence. If

1. For details see, H.L. Nieburg, Political Violence : The Behaviour Process, New York: St. Martin Press, 1969

causes are ripen for violence, the act of violence can be committed even without any gun.

There are some people who are privileged and others are deprived of. The theory of relative deprivation starts with the premise that relative deprivation is the sole cause of violence in modern era. Here, relative deprivation has been defined as "perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities. The feeling of deprivation also generates discontentment. Psychological as well as group conflict theory suggests that greater the intensity of discontent the more likely is violence".² Not only that but the violence is also attributed to 'frustration-aggression' which means that frustration leads to some form of aggression or violence. But sociologically speaking, frustration may result from relative deprivation where a person may be deprived of in relation to the other person(s).

The causes of violence may be social, political, economic and cultural. It has been seen that social change, by its very nature, leads to social conflict among various groups and forces in society. According to Lapieri, "Any change always involves considerable stress, both individual and collective..., in the process being accomplishing the change produces its own stresses

2. For details see, Robert Ted Gurr, Why men rebel, Princeton, 1970.

and strains, discontent, frustrations, ~~disillusions~~ and disappointments".³ Further, regarding why do people use violent means, Johnson writes, "Social violence is the appropriate response to intrasigent resistance, it occurs because known methods of non-violent change are blocked by the ruling elite."⁴ Thus, both social change and conflict or violence are dialectically linked with each other.

The political causes of violence refer to those factors which are directly linked with the distribution of political power. These causes include various forms of the political system (imperialism, autocracy, etc.), divergent interests of political parties, repressive laws, political corruption, police brutalistics, etc. However, in most of the times political violence occurs due to economic crisis. The unequal distribution of economic resources may give birth to violence. When ever an existing mode of production is in the process of disintegration, a new mode of production is bound to emerge. In this situation, some sections of society may become violent.

3. Richard T. Lapiere, *Social Change*, New York, 1965, p.478.

4. Charmers Johnson, *Revolution and the Social system*, Stanford, 1964, p.6.

It may, however, be said that a transitional society is more violence-prone than the traditional and the modern ones. This is so because in such society all the vertical and organic components become incompatible with each other. This may also be regarded as an inter-phase in the transition of a harmonic society to the disharmonic one. The disharmonic societies are characterized by the absence of coincidence between normative and existential orders. This absence of coincidence leads to violence, conflict and antagonism in the society.

Further, violence can be classified as revolutionary and counter revolutionary. The revolutionary violence aims at overthrowing the existing social order whereas the perpetuation of status quo is the sole motive of a counter-revolutionary violence. Sorel has called the revolutionary violence as the "Proletarian violence" committed by the organized and conscious workers against the owner and the state. Sorel has also called it 'syndicalist violence' which, according to him, is perpetrated in the course of strikes by proletarians who desire to overthrow the state".⁵ The revolutionary change is possible because the "Proletarian violence not only makes the future revolution certain, but it seems also to be the only means by which the

5. For details see, Georges Sorel, Reflection on violence, London, 1915, p.125.

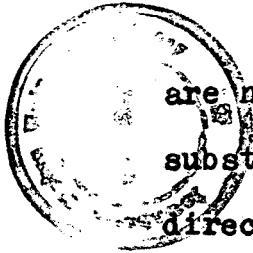
European nations as stupefied by humanitarianism can recover their former energy."⁶ Thus, Sorel has glorified the proletarian violence as Fanon has glorified the violence by the native people against the settlers. Not only that but Fanon also opines that the colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence.⁷ For him, both colonialization and decolonialisation are violent processes. Those people who are kept in subjugation by violence can set themselves free only through violence and there is no other way of emancipation.

In the Gandhian framework, three types of violence have been talked about. These are: violence of the establishment, violence of protest, and counter violence. The Institutions of modern society provide infrastructure through which the violence of establishment emanates. It generates inequality, exploitation, deprivation and discrimination. The violence of establishment is, however, perpetrated not only by the state or the economic institutions but is also enshrined in all big establishments including universities, law courts,

6. Georges Sorel, *ibid.*, p.90.

7. Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1984, p.67.

Parliament and developmental plans.⁸ Even the present form of democracy present in many countries is regarded as an expanded oligarchy and the main source of perpetration of tyranny. Similarly, majority vote in democracy is a violence against the minority vote.⁹



The violence of protest and counter violence are new phenomena. Their quantum is increasing and a substantial change has also been witnessed in their direction. Grossly political in content, these are no longer pathological behaviours. Political decision-makers have been the targets of this new incarnation of violence. Thus, violence is the best available means through which subaltern class express their anger and grievances.

Violence and Conflict in Rural Bihar

It has already been mentioned in the previous chapter that before the Champaran Satyagrah (1917) most of the peasant struggles in India were violent in their orientation. There are numerous examples when the consciousness from below has been manifested through violent means.

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8. Sujata Das Mathur, "Gandhian Analysis : Three Faces of Violence" in Udayan Sharma (ed.), Violence Erupts, Delhi: Radha Krishna Prakashan, 1978, p.14.
9. Sujata Das Mathur, *ibid.*

Even after the Champaran Satyagraha, whenever control of the organized politics was at low ebb, there were incidents of violence, though the movement was supposed to be non-violent.¹⁰

Then, why is the peasant world's unorganized politics characterized by violence? The first and the foremost cause of this is the non-availability of modern devices of political protest. In fact, the non-violent means and methods of modern political culture have been alien to the peasant world. In the absence of the modern political means and mobilization from above, any subaltern struggle would naturally become a violent uprising. The second reason of the violent politics of the peasant world is the ~~existential~~ dilemma of peasantry itself. The existential ~~conditions~~ of peasantry is full of violence and physical coercion. The whole relationship of superordination and subordination is maintained through the illegitimate use of physical force. On the basis of their concrete experiences the peasants have also learnt that their subjugation can be brought to end only by using violence

10. For details see, Stephen Hemmingam, "Quite India in Bihar and the Eastern United Provinces: The Dual Revolt" in Ranjit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi: 1983, pp. 130-178.

against their masters, as stated earlier. Their experiences have taught them to perceive the rule of law and the slogan of equality and liberty as some kinds of instruments imprisoned in the hands of the 'Karindas' and the 'Henchmen' of the Zamindars. Thus, they are convinced that the system which is based on direct physical coercion and inhuman exploitation can be removed by physical force only. The use of violence by the oppressor "at a certain stage of embryonic development of consciousness increases that consciousness, for the section are an indication that between oppressors and oppressed every thing can be solved by force."¹¹

More specifically, the history of agrarian unrest and violence in the twentieth century Bihar can be divided into two phases : the first phase continued during 1930s-1940s and onwards. During this period some attempts had been made in the beginning by the national capitalists and the middle classes to utilize the force of peasantry against the British imperialism. Later, pattern of struggle had undergone some remarkable change. In this period a struggle was launched by the substantial tenants against the Zamindars. The struggle of second phase, was directed against the rich peasants, landlords and the state. In this phase the nature and

11. Franz Fanon, op.cit., p.56.

direction of fight was totally different from the first. There was no external enemy. Since the struggle was internal, the internal dynamics of the system played the most important part in it.

After independence, there was no manifest struggle, for a long time, in the agrarian matrix of India. It does mean that the causes of conflict were gone into the green room of societal drama. Undoubtedly, causes were there but these were in the latent form. The situation was relatively calm and quiet. But this calm and quiet condition of the peasants world did not continue for a long time. In the late 1960s and 1970s, a number of agrarian unrests were witnessed in Bihar. During this period, the government's emphasis was on the 'green revolution' and on some other institutional infrastructures to make the Indian agriculture viable and self-sufficient. In nutshell, the green revolution aimed at transforming the technological base of agriculture so that peace and prosperity would prevail among all sections of the agrarian population.

However, due to certain structural drawbacks the green revolution did not change substantially the existing socio-economic realities in Bihar. If any section of the agrarian population was benefited from the green

revolution, it were certainly the well-to-do peasants. By the middle of the 1960s there persisted serious social and economic inequalities and the widening gap between the relatively few affluent farmers and the large body of the small land holders and agricultural workers.¹² In the meanwhile, due to the population growth, the pressure on land was also increasing. The whole situation was characterized by an extreme form of poverty and all measures of agrarian reforms, including the green revolution proved fruitless in Bihar. On the other hand the landlords were becoming prosperous as the implemented programmes were more favourable to the larger-owner-farmer than the smaller tenant farmer. The share-croppers and the landless labourers were almost deprived of the benefits resulting into widened disparities accentuating social tensions.¹³ These social tensions started exhibiting themselves in a number of sporadic agrarian movements and the setting up of small organizations.¹⁴ Some of the revolutionary struggles carried out by these organizations

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12. For details, See, Arvind, N. Das, in Ranjit Guha (ed.), op.cit., p.232.
13. For details, see, India, New Delhi: Government of India,
14. Arivind N. Das, op.cit., p.202.

in rural Bihar are given below.

It is necessary, at this stage, to concentrate on some of the theoretical dimensions of the agrarian conflict and violence taken place in the post-independence period in Bihar. In the post-independent Bihar, the peasant movements have got two orientations and forms. The first form may be characterized by an absence of any organization and political ideology emanating from the lack of unity of interests; ideology and action. There were a number of struggles which were sporadic and manifested in the form of social banditry. The best example of social banditry was the case of the Gangotas of Bhagalpur Diara.¹⁵ Then, the question is why did the Gangotas become social bandits? Why did they not come forward within the framework of an organized agrarian movement? The reasons for this can be attributed to their improper socialization as they were not aware of the modern democratic political culture. They were neglected by the politicians because of the prevalence of the vote Bank Politics and very class character of the state.

15. For comprehensive reference see, Kalyan Mukherjee, "The Gangotas", Illustrated Weekly of India, June, 9-1985, p.22.

Secondly, they were dispossessed of their lands by the local landlords drawn from the Bhumihar caste who inhumanly and grossly exploited them.

In this situation, the consciousness from below was bound to emerge among the downtrodden Gangotas. They raised arms against their century's old chains. Their mode of functioning and attacking was very similar to the subaltern pattern of movements. They resorted to the violent means as they were preached by their leaders to be violent to get rid of their centuries old bondage. Apparently, their leaders were regarded criminals but in actuality they were not because they were historically conditioned and structurally forced to use violence and illegitimate means. Another feature of Bhagalpur Diara is that caste has often been confused with class. This is so as the mobilization and counter mobilization has been made on the basis of caste and other primordial ties. Thus, the fight between the Gangotas and the Bhumihars is based on the caste line rather than the class line (landlord versus landless labourers). Though on the surface level, it seemed to be a caste conflict but on the deeper analysis it becomes obvious that the basic cause of the conflict was economic. A perfect study of this phenomenon should take into account both the basic cause and the pattern of mobilization.

The only difference between the Gangotas and the Naxalites and the Communists of other varieties is that the former lacks a fulfilled class oriented ideological consciousness while the latter have cherished and internalized it. Not only that but in the movements launched by the Communists and other political parties in Bihar one finds a balanced unity between interests, consciousness and action. At the same time, the "mobilization from above" is also one of the most important features of these movements. This was evident in the 'land grab movement', organized in 1970 by the C.P.I., the Praja Socialist Party and the Sanjukt Socialist Party in Bihar.¹⁶

The Naxalite Movement in Bhojpur

The 'politicization' of the peasants and landless labourers engaged actively in the land grab movement has also served as a pretext for its repression in the name of fighting the Naxalism¹⁷ spread over Bhojpur, Rohtas, Patna, Nalanda, Jehanabad and some other districts of south Bihar. Here, we may briefly discuss the nature and intensity of Naxalite movement in these districts. The area covered by the two big Zamindar houses of Jagdishpur and Dumraon

16. For details see, The Indian Nation, August 10-17, 1970.

17. Arvind N. Das, *ibid.*, p.215.

in Bhojpur district has a long historical tradition of agrarian unrest. The Kisans of this area took part even in the mutiny of 1857 under the leadership of Kunwar Singh and Amarjit Singh. After that, the British administration under took some steps to modernize the agriculture and thereby put check on the future peasant-uprisings in the area, Besides the Indian Penal Code was introduced and the agriculture was modernized through the construction of the Some Canal System in the late nineteenth century.¹⁸ All these developments led to commercialization of agriculture with non egalitarian agrarian social structure. Since the lands remain concentrated into a few hands the whole development process has led to a great deal of rental incomes to the Zamindars and also brought about an economic instability to the general masses.

The second remarkable development was the emergence of an unprecedented process of depeasatrization at the bottom and internal differentiation of peasantry at the higher and middle levels. Due to the deep process of depeasatrization, the poor people left their native place and went elsewhere to seek their fortune. Finally,

18. For details see, John Beames, Memoirs of a Bengal Civilization, London, 1961; and Kalyan Mukherji et.al., Bhojpur : A Socio-Economic Survey (unpublished report), National Labour Institute, New Delhi, 1978.

an agrarian unrest took place but the lower and depressed classes people did not participate in it as it was led by the upper and rich peasantry. However, the last peasant uprising in Bhojpur during the 1960s and 1970s was actively participated by the exploited, oppressed and downtrodden people, and poor and landless peasants. Thus, the leadership of peasant movements in Bhojpur has undergone a metamorphosis change over a period of time. In fact, it has shifted from the Zamindars - junkers and Kulaks and to the poor masses.¹⁹

The socio-economic profile of Bhojpur shows that only 1.5 per cent of the rural population constituted by the rich peasants and landlords owns more than 15.2 per cent of land.²⁰ The rest 84.8 per cent land is under the possession of small peasants who are not in a position to keep their lands intact. Due to the high canal irrigation rates and high rate of investment on modern agricultural output and equipments, they are situationally forced to sell their ancestral lands to the rich people.²¹ As a result, a new type of capitalist ethos has emerged in agrarian social structure. Due to this ethos the new contractual elements of feudal mode of production have

19. Arvind N. Das, op.cit., p.221

20. See, Agricultural census of India, 1970-71, New Delhi.

21. See, village surveys carried out by the National Labour Institute, New Delhi and A.N. Sinha Institute, Patna, 1975-77.

been replaced by the contractual elements of capitalism.

This rupture of traditional ties between land owner and landless labourers has given birth to present agrarian unrest in Bhojpur.

In the meanwhile, an external variable like Naxalism has appeared on the socio-economic matrix of Bhojpur. Among the noted Naxalite leaders were Satya Narayan Sinha and Kesho Prasad besides the grassroot leaders like Jagdish Mahto and others. Jagdish Mahto formed the 'Kisan Majdoor Sangram Samity' to resist the exploitation and atrocities perpetrated on the peasants and wage earners by the landlords. Even before the formation of the organization some worth noting events like the peasants' seizure of crops took place under the leadership of S.N. Sinha in the Buxar Diara.

The first conference of the CPI (ML) was convened by Charu Mazumdar at Nathpur village.²² Besides, mass meetings, demonstrations and rallies were organized by local intellectuals to protect the Harijans from the cruel oppression of Zamindars and rich peasants. A demand for a separate 'safe homeland' for the Harizans was also put on the agenda. A systematic attempt was made to articulate the resentment, discontent and sense of deprivation of the Harizans into the broader framework of the Marxist-Leninist-

22. See, Proceedings of Bihar state conference of the CPI (ML), 1970 (Mimco); also see, Arvind N. Das, op.cit., p.222.

Maocist ideology. The gravity of situation and the government attitude towards the movement can be understood by quoting an illustration from the DIG (Naxalite), "When the first rumblings of conflict between the landed person and the landless (were) meant to be heard (these were) drowned in the meaningless, though not irrelevant in the caste-ridden state, quibbles over Harijans and the upper castes. For, very few persons have by now gone into the interior which had bad communications and a poor administrators failed to discern the correct perspective.

There were enough materials and men to tell the inner story but there was no one to respond to the same.²³

The apex body of the state machinery was indifferent and apathetic to the whole tragic story. Then naturally, the lower level officers were at liberty to take any arbitrary step. The lower level officials like Darogas and Inspectors were bracketed with local landlords. They came heavily upon the poor peasants. They started an all out attack upon the peasant and Khet-Mazdoors.²⁴ At this crucial juncture, it was not possible to resolve the ongoing conflict. The trail of violence has become the routine-bound occurrence of day to day life.

23. B.N. Sinha, "From Naxalbari to Ekwari", Searchlight, June 11, 1975.

24. For details see, Samajik Varta, 16-31 December 1977, and Frontier, 14 January 1978.

Within a short duration of time the Naxalite movement along with Emwari a village in Bhojpur with (the first focal point of movement) also engulfed the surrounding villages of Dullamchak, Agiaon, Berath, Baruhi and Chauri. The police and landlords were trying to suppress the movement by any means. After the government's proclamation of Emergency (during 1975-77) the 'Operation Thunder' was launched as a counter insurgency measure to repress the movement. The biased attitude of government was proved by its announcement in 1976 that every adult belonging to dominant class would be provided with guns for protection against anti-social elements and the shooting and firing training centre was inaugurated by Dr. Jagannath Mishr, the then Chief Minister of Bihar. There was even some talk of an aerial bombardment of Naxalite infested areas.²⁵ Thus, the Naxalite movement was becoming a great threat to the system based on exploitation of man by man. All sections of exploiter including the state power wanted to destroy the very root of the movement.

It is wrong to assume that Naxalite movement is a mere economic struggle. It has taken its roots into

25. Arvind N. Das, op.cit., p.225.

It has been seen that in Bihar roughly one caste-cum-class carnage has been perpetrated in every fourth months over the last nine years. Almost all cases of the rural violence have occurred in zone of South-West Bihar consisting the areas of Bhojpur, Gaya, Nawada, Nalanda, Aurangabad, Jahanabad and Patna. It is also a note worthy fact that to counter the violence from below, the landlords have set up numerous caste based senas (arrives) : Bhumi Sena (Kurmis), Brahmaarshi Sena (Bhumihars), Kuar Sena (Rajputs) and Lorik Sena (Yadavas). Among the radical left organizations operating in Bihar are : the Vinod Mishra faction of the CPI (ML), the Maoist-Communist Centre (MCC), and the Party unity group, which works through the Mazadoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (MKSS) led by the charismatic leadership (as known perceived) of Dr. Vinayan. In one of the reports from Bihar, it has been pointed out that not all the clashes in the region take place between the senas and the various Naxalite groups, but certainly much of the tension in the area can be directly traced to the juxtaposition of these two violently opposed forces.

The area has become violence Prone. According to the Delhi-based People's Union for Democratic Rights (which has sent several investigating teams to the area), some 190 rural people have been killed in atrocities in the South Zone of Bihar between January 1980 to October 1986.

various dimensions such as social, political and cultural. The struggle in Bhojpur has been transformed from a mere economic struggle to a struggle for - 'ijjat ki larai' (the fight for dignity). In the words of Kamleshwari Devi, the widow of Jagdish Mahato (Master), "if I do not get ijat (dignity), what is the point of living."²⁶ However, the main cause of Naxalite movement in Bhojpur is the intensity of the exploitation of the rural poor peasants and proletariat by the landlords and rich peasantry. Although this is a centuries' old phenomenon, its degree has not been reduced even after the abolition of zamindari and enactment of various other land reforms laws in Bhojpur. In the words of Mukherjee, "the form of exploitation changed from 'abwab', 'Salam', and 'dola' to bonded labour, low wages and frequent rapes of women folk."²⁷

It has already been mentioned that at present the Naxalite movement is not only confined to the Bhojpur but also engulfed most of the districts like Patna, Nalanda, Jahanabad, Gaya and Aurangabad in south Bihar. According to B.N. Sinha (DIG) Naxalite, "The Cult of violence in Bihar as also in the belt from Sahar to Mokamah has its two

26. Ibid., p.226.

27. See, Kalyan Mukherji and R.S. Yadav, Bhojpur: Naxalism in the plains of Bihar, Radha Krishana Prakashan, Delhi: 1986.

phases : The first between 1967 to 1971 was very much marked in the north phase and since 1972 to the present times is writ large in Bhojpur, Patna, Nalanda, Giridih, Hazaribagh and Dhanbad.²⁸

Now, a question arises why the Naxalite movement is going on in Bihar in spite of the repression on the part of government. When we analyse the genesis of the Naxalite movement it becomes clear that Bihar has a long tradition of violent peasant movement. Most of the violent peasant movements are the direct manifestation of consciousness from below, as stated earlier. The Naxalite movement has been successful in articulating the consciousness from below within its ideological fold. The exploited sections of population identify their interests and aspirations with the Naxalites.

Today, Bihar has become a seat of violence and counter-violence. Besides the Naxalite movement the state has witnessed, since 1977 so many barbaric carnages like Belchi (1977), Paras Bigha (1980), Pipra (1980), Gaini (1982), Kithi Bigha (1985), Arwal (1986), Kansara (1986), and Darmia (1986) and also some massacres in Aurangabad district in June 1987.

28. Kalyan Mukherjee and Manju Kala, "Bhojpur : The Long Struggle" in Arvind N. Das (ed.), Agrarian Relations in India, Manohar, 1979.

On the other hand, the governments Home Department is of the opinion that the left extremists committed 160 murders in four years ending 1985. According to the Intelligence Bureau officials in Patna, the MCC alone has killed our 250 'class enemies' in the last eight years.²⁹ The main cause of revolutionary violence and counter revolutionary violence in these areas is the unequal distribution of economic resources, as mentioned above. B.K. Singh, the Home Commissioner, has frankly accepted that the extremism in this pocket is deeply rooted in the poor implementation of land reform laws.³⁰ Ashok Kumar Singh, the Collector of Gaya District admits, "If the administration does not solve people's problems, they are bound to go to the extremist to get justic. And this is what has been happening in this belt."³¹

It is true that in comparison to the Central South the north and tribal Bihar is more peaceful. North Bihar consists of 17 districts situated at the north of the Ganga river and the tribal belt of Chotanagpur Plateau

29. "Bihar : Area of Darkness", India Today, December 31, 1986, pp.82-85.

30. Ibid., p.84.

31. Ibid., p.85.

consists of 12 districts. Statistics shows that over last years there are numerous cases of killings in the central districts of South Bihar. Through various documents it has been revealed that near about 1000 people have been killed in the Central districts in the last six years in class-cum-caste conflicts, while a few cases of killings have been discerned in the other zones. Further, mention has already been made that the Central South Bihar has a long historical tradition of the peasant movements. However, the poor peasants and landless labourers of Central-South districts have been far more organized, conscious and militant than their unorganized docile and apathetic counterparts in the other parts of Bihar.

A minute study of agrarian unrest and violence may inform us that the root cause of violence in these areas is linked with land. In comparison to north and tribal Bihar, the pressure on land is heavier here. The areas are lacking industrial infrastructure. More than 90 per cent population lives in villages. All these factors in combined way are fuelling agrarian unrest and rural violence. Apart from land distribution system, irrigation facilities, consciousness and intense pressure on land, there exist some fundamental differences between north and South Bihar. For instance, in North Bihar the landowning classes consist of by and large of the traditional twice

born castes like Rajputs, Bhumihars, Brahmins, etc. The other backward castes like Koeris, Kurmis and Yadavas along with Harijans constitute the havenots. Contrarily, in Central Bihar a large section of rich peasants is constituted of the backward castes like Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris. This situation has emerged after the green revolution. In their attitude towards landless labourers (Harijans) they are even more inhuman, oppressive and aggressive than the traditional landowning classes. It is this group of the new oppressors who have inflicted atrocities on horijans in Belchi, Pipra and Kaila³² (emphasis mine).

To sum up this chapter, one may say that Bihar has seen many forms of peasants movements. In course of time, the movements have undergone some basic changes in terms of the nature of leadership and pattern of mobilization. Specially in Bhojpur, the leadership of peasant movements has passed, over a century, from Zamindars to Junkers and Kulacks and finally to the poor peasants.³³ In fact, the Champaran Satyagraha was the milestone in the history of peasant movements in Bihar, as mentioned earlier. First of all, it was this movement which paved

32. Ibid.

33. Arvind N. Das, "Agrarian Changes from above and below" in Ranjit Guha (ed.), op.cit., p.221.

the way for a close interaction between the unorganized politics of peasants world and the organized politics of modern world. Such type of interaction of the consciousness from below with consciousness from above was an unprecedented event in the history of Bihar. Even after the Champaran Satyagrah the consciousness from below has not been overshadowed by consciousness from above. Both exist side of side. As far as the nature of violence and unrest is concerned, it is multi-faceted. Therefore, we cannot explain it within a single existing theoretical paradigm. Here, situation is so complex that it needs a comprehensive-situational analytical perspective to understand the violence in its totality.

The main cause of violence and unrest is the exploitative agrarian system. But agrarian system should not be visualized in isolation; rather, the socio-political system is equally responsible for violence and unrest. The political elites in Bihar, like in many other states, wish to maintain a class rule which seems to be an island of privilege in the ocean of deprivation. In this situation of vast gap between a few privileged and countless deprived, a violence oriented political culture has emerged in Bihar which is largely shared by the people from below. Regarding violence, a question is generally raised whether it is class violence or caste violence. Although in most of the

cases it has been class violence, the role of caste also cannot be overlooked in this regard. As far as the fundamental causes of violence are concerned, these are mostly economic, though the pattern of mobilization has been based on caste and other primordialities. Therefore, both the deep rooted causes and pattern of mobilization are to be taken into consideration for a proper analysis of nature and pattern of violence in rural Bihar.

CHAPTER - 6CONCLUSION

In the foregoing chapters an attempt has been made to present a systematic analysis of agrarian unrest and violence in Rural Bihar. In order to understand the said problem the whole socio-economic matrix of the society in Bihar has been taken into explanatory conceptualization. The different views regarding the question of agrarian relations, prevailing mode of production, epistemological -philosophical perception and consciousness of peasantry and its internal differentiation etc. have been discussed and their theoretico-practical limitations have also been pointed out on the basis of textual and contextual knowledge.

The agrarian relation in India has kept on changing through out the history. Sometimes changes came from the structure itself and other times some kinds of changes were imposed on it. In brief , one can say that agrarian structure in India has been shaped and directed in accordance with the socio-political conditions of the society. It is because of this that the system has undergone various noteworthy changes

during the medieval, British and in the post independent eras. Upto the Mughal period, undoubtedly, some changes were brought about in the agrarian relations but no systematic attempt was made to restructure and remodel the land-tenure system at the macro level.

It was the Britishers who introduced some unprecedented radical transformation in the Indian agrarian system. During the said regime the private rights in land were brought about. Land became a private alienable and saleable commodity. This objective was achieved by introducing three basic systems of land revenue, namely, the Zamindari, Ryotwari and Mahalbari. Consequently, an oppressive class of intermediary came into existence in India. The emergence of this class had destroyed the century-old system of the ownership control and use of land. A new system of sub-infeudation appeared in the agro-social fabric of the country.

The land tenure system introduced by the British government had three major constituents: (i) owner-cultivators, consisting of large absentee landlords and small proprietors residing in the village; (ii) owners with inferior proprietary rights with varying degree of

security, the difference from the first group being mainly reflected through the amount of land held; (iii) holders of tenancy right in the soil and agricultural labourers. In reality, the lower ranks of share-croppers and tenants at-will, were almost indistinguishable from the farm servants.

The system was too oppressive. The rights of Zamindars were unquestionable. The peasants and landless labourers were subject to the multiple forms of exploitation like physical, social and economic. At various points of time, the peasant tried to protest against their inhuman exploitation but due to certain situational constraints, they did not break the deep rooted chains of exploitation. During the freedom movement, the peasants problem was raised and it became the part and parcel of the overall struggle. But ultimately the cause of peasantry became subordinate and secondary to the larger objective of achieving national freedom.

After independence attempts have been made to bring about egalitarian land relations by introducing certain land reform legislations. But the implementational

dimensions of the legislations remained very weak and incomplete. Still our agrarian relations characterized by unequal distribution of land. No remarkable change has discerned in the nature of the concentration of land into a few hands. On the basis of the experiences of land reforms, it can be stated that in a sharply divided society, the government formulates beautiful laws but does not implement them.

Like other states, Bihar was also under the permanent settlement. The permanent settlement gave birth to a parasitic class of zamindars in Bihar. This class used to inflict various kinds of atrocities upon the peasantry and the landless people. In order to remove the exploitative land relations, the government has taken various steps since the dawn of independence. The most important step in this regard was the Land Reforms Act of 1950. Besides, the major Land Reforms Act passed during 1950-1961 were (i) The Land Reforms Act of 1950, (ii) The Tenancy Act of 1885 (Second Amendment 1955), (iii) The fixation of land ceiling and Acquisition of Surplus Land Act 1961. Besides these laws, there were two separate tenancy Acts known as Chotanag Pur Tenancy Act and Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act. These

laws were only applicable to the tribal population of Chotanag Pur and Santhal Paraganas districts. It goes without saying that land reforms in Bihar have not achieved their fundamental objectives. Still the land distribution system is highly unequal. Bihar can be cited as the best example of cumulative inequality in terms of its land relations.

Traditionally, in Bihar there was a congruence between the agrarian and social hierarchy. Even today, this summation has not broken in any substantial degree except some remarkable positional changes in the middle hierarchy of the socio-economy system.

On the one hand, inequality in its extreme form is prevailing in Bihar and on the other hand the realization of inequality is increasing day by day. The inseparable coincidences of these factors have given birth to the multiple forms of unrest, conflict and violence. The causes and genesis of unrest and violence can be explained on the basis of the following five factors -

- i. Existence of inequality
- ii. Realization of inequality

- (iii) Breakdown of coincidence between existential Order and Normative Order of Society ,
- (iv) Poor implementation of land reforms laws, and
- (v) The emergence of a new political culture and consciousness.

On the basis of these factors, we can only explain the causes of the unrest and violence coming from below. But the causes of ruling class-perpetrated violence is quite different from it. The ruling class inflict violence to maintain its domination. Its main objective has been to maintain status quo. For analytical clarity, we have tried to classify the phenomenon of violence on the basis of the objective, participants and the enemy against whom violence is directed.

(In order to point out the phenomenon of unrest and violence, attempts have been made to trace out its) *let us see* historical genesis. (In this regard, we have taken 1917 as the milestone.) Before 1917, there was no penetration of the modern political culture *at* on the grass root level. Violence was manifested through the consciousness from below. There was absence of organized violence in

modern political sense. There was no convergence among interest, consciousness and organization. Both the participants and leadership belonged to the same micro-group. There was no question of the imposition of ideology from above. After 1917, the unorganized domain of the peasants politics came close to the organized politics of modern age. (But it does not lead us to the conclusion that the unorganized domain of the peasants world politics was overshadowed by the organized politics. Both of the domains of politics has been existing side by side even at present.)

(Although we have concentrated mainly on the question of agrarian unrest and violence in Bihar, some chapters have also been devoted to explain the problem at the macro-level. In this connection, the debate over the recent mode of production and the problem of the conceptualization of the peasantry and peasants' movement have been discussed elaborately. This will help us to draw a clear-cut-comprehensive conclusion about the nature of conflict and violence.)

What type agrarian relations is prevailing in India is a highly-debateable issue. Due to the long colonial subjugation and the impact of neo-colonialism

who have been subjugated through violent means can set themselves free only through violence. The slogan of non-violence does not bring about any substantial improvement in the conditions of the oppressed. It is a rootless slogan. Satre has rightly remarked that "if violence began this very evening and if exploitation and oppression had never existed on the earth, perhaps the slogan of non-violence might end the quarrel . But if the whole regime, even your non-violent ideas are conditioned by a thousand year old oppression, your passivity serves only to place you in the ranks of oppression".

The above mentioned views of Satre can be confirmed empirically in the Indian context. Historically, it has been proved that most of the peasant movements in India have been violent. Peasants on the basis of their day to day experiences have come to realize that their masters have enslaved them by the physical coercion and they can break this chain of slavery by using the same means.

In the Marxist writings , it is considered that those movements which are based on the mobilization through religious symbols represent the false consciousness of the people. Our submission is that religious consciousness

is not always false and deceptive. Sometimes, it corresponds to the true and real consciousness of the people. In absence of a codified ideology, religion plays very important role in the mobilization of the people.

Some recent trends of historiography have also enriched our understanding of peasant movements, violence and unrest. These trends of history consider the all existing trends of historiography as elitist. They emphasize much upon the people's consciousness. These trends are known as the subaltern studies. Although the subaltern approach has got certain theoretico-empirical limitations, in Indian context one can agree with it at least in the study of the peasant movements which took place during the colonial era.

In the case of Bihar generally it is asked whether 'ongoing violence' has been caste-oriented or class oriented. Mentions have already been made that caste and class exist side by side in Bihar. Even today, agrarian hierarchy corresponds to the social hierarchy except some noteworthy changes in the middle of the hierarchy.

No substantial changes have been witnessed at the bottom of the socio economic hierarchy. In this situation of complex congruence of caste and class, it becomes too difficult a task to draw any analytical -perceptual line between the caste and class violence. On this issue, what can be suggested is that to understand the phenomenon of caste and class violence, one will have to keep in mind both the basic causes and pattern of mobilization.

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