

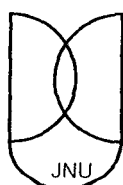
VIOLENCE AND COUNTER VIOLENCE IN RURAL BIHAR

(A Sociological Analysis)

**Dissertation Submitted to the
Jawaharlal Nehru University
In Partial fulfilment of the requirement for
the award of the Degree of**

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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CERTIFICATE

This Dissertation entitled "**Violence and Counter-Violence in Rural Bihar**" (A Sociological Analysis) submitted in partial fulfilment for the M.Phil degree of this university has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university is my original work.

CANDIDATE

We recommend that the dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


Supervisor
(Prof. K.L. Sharma)


Chairperson
(Prof. Nandu Ram)

*Dedicated to
Maa and Papa Jee*

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Chapter - I

VIOLENCE AND SOCIETY

This study is an exercise in exploring the different forms of violence in rural Bihar. Neither caste *senas* nor massacres are a new phenomenon in the state. The highest level of poverty, the second highest proportion of agricultural labourers, lowest literacy level, a slow rate of urbanisation, collapse of nearly all public services, an absence of infrastructure, thirdly unmanaged agricultural and industrial sectors, along with a near total breakdown of governance, all have contributed to a sense of widespread chaos and anarchy. Endemic inequalities, both economic and social, and few opportunities for employment, have forced a large number of people to live in a subhuman condition.

The objective of this study is to understand the patterns of relationships between different caste and various forms of violence. As caste and land both are closely related in rural Bihar, a large number of lower caste people have no land or a little land and this factor upto a great extent is responsible for mass violence.

The focus of this study is to show the social roots of rural violence in the state. It is evident that there exist a countless people who are both poor and powerless, suffering from a deep seated social malaise and a feeling of alienation from accepted norms and standards. Society is stratified and those at the bottom realize that they have only limited access to the success goals of dominant value system. To be poor, means inevitable conflict between the prevailing standards of

the community and the harsh realities of economic and social powerlessness. Political factors constitute no less an important source of violence.

The main emphasis will be given in this study to examine the violence of Bihar in general and rural violence in particular. One aspect of violence in Bihar is that a large number of people have come to occupy the position of eminence in the economic and political life of the state, whose upward mobility from the lower rung was facilitated by violence and crime. Violence in Bihar has been receiving a social acceptability as an inevitable concomitant of growth of political and economic power. The violent act is not only individual but it has social origin.

Bihar remains at the bottom of almost every index of social and economic development in India. Several programmes and policies have failed in the absence of participation and political will of the leaders. The man at the bottom remains unattended. Social structures are profoundly stressed. Polarization between different caste is very sharp.

Chapter-2 "Violence and Counter-Violence" throws light on the very concept of violence and counter violence in the context of Bihar state. It also reveals the fact that violence and counter-violence are closely related phenomena and it has taken a cyclic form in the state due to several factors.

Chapter-3 "Politics, Social structure and Violence in Rural Bihar" gives a detailed analysis of geographical setting of the State and the burning areas, It also deals with the social structure and Politics in general. As politics and social structure is closely intertwined, we can say that the social structure generally

produces the kind of politics and vice-versa. On the contrary it may be argued that the dominance of upper caste till recently shaped, the social structure of Bihar, which may be termed as semi-feudal. Bihar's politics is by and large dominated by castes, as it is always said that caste now is no more a matter of ritual distance, but a principal factor of political mobilisation.

The fourth chapter "Changing Contours of Violence" deals mainly with the rural violence and its different forms. It also search why violence erupted and under what conditions. In order to get its answer, this chapter explore the historical roots of socio-economic arrangements in Bihar, the roots of which go back to British colonial period.

The final chapter is in the form of summing up which ends with the remark that violence and counter violence both have taken the cyclic form in Bihar.

Meaning of Violence :

The term 'violence' is employed both in a descriptive and an emotive manner, whereas it is used to describe certain actions and events, it is also used to condemn the status quo and to condemn those, who, using the only means at their disposal attempt to overthrow the status quo. One can see a subtle blending of three different elements : ethical, juridical and political in the meaning of the term violence. It apparently designates something which can be seen and recognised as an event in spatio temporal realm.

In order to have an adequate understanding of the meaning of the term violence, it would be useful to refer to the Latin roots of the term.¹ According to oxford dictionary 'Violence' is derived from two terms in Latin: (i) *violentus*, and (ii) *violare* *violentus* is an adjectival term meaning forcible, vehement or impetuous and concerns itself with the state of the agent who is acting rather than the consequences of the action. In this sense the term 'violence is primarily descriptive- 'violare' is used as a verb means to injure, to dishonour to outrage and to violate and it looks to the consequence or the effects of an action on the other and is primarily a normative term expressing disapprobation. On the basis of these the same dictionary defines violence as

- (i) the exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury/harm upon a person/ property
- (ii) to inflict harm or injury upon a person,
- (iii) An act of infringement in the form of distortion repudiation or irreverence to a person or a thing.
- (iv) undue constraint applied to some natural process so as to prevent its free development or exercise².

The concept of violence is elusive complex and multidimensional: Violence is difficult to define as Megagree wrote "no definition of violence has ever provided completely successful. Although everyone knows what violence is , no one has ever been able to define it adequately so that every possible instance of

1. Satya P. Gautam: Some Observation on Nature of Violence, Ajanta Publication, 1983.

2. Ibid.

violent behaviour is included within the *definition* while all the excluded behaviour is clearly non violent. Ilfeld (1969) viewed violence as an act of intense willful physical harm committed by an individual or group against himself or another individual or group.³

The term violence designate different referents.⁴ It may indicate either individual or collective actions some of which may not even be deliberative—just compulsive or habitual.

Inter-linkages of Violence and Society

Violence and Society are closely related with each other. Any society is not exception to this phenomenon. History tells us that our existence till the modern world witnessed violence at each stage. Every society implies a minimal communication and later presupposes some areas of agreed adherence to rules of basic language without which no mobilisation of functional prerequisites of social order is conceivable. As such it is axiomatic that every society has some defining and constitutive norms which are adhered to by all its members even though some of which most members may not be able to either state explicitly or fail even to identify.⁵ Every society, in addition to these prerequisite of language and

3 Nagla B.K., "Violance in India : A Sociological Analysis" in Abha Avasthi (ed.) Dimension of Violence and Terrorism , Associated Publishing House, 1985.

4. Dharmendra Goel., "Some Remarks on Violence and Justice" in Bhuvan Chandel (ed.) "Nature of Violence"

5. Ibid

communication must have a substantial body of regulative means/norms of conduct or behaviour, which it has to enforce or it does no longer exist as a society and it is for this reason that every society designs social organisation, whose major part is employed to enforce surveillance of functioning of different elements according to role assignments, conditioned by the basis norms. All sub-systems as well as every individuals have got to fulfill their respective role expectations and deviations on the part of such constituents are routinely punished.⁶

Analysis of punishment, sanctions, laws are essential to structure of society's self identity, which suffers serious threats- from anomie, apathy and deviance. If violations against its own basic norms are not effectively curbed, and clear outlines of its normative personality are not perpetually asserted against disuse, indifference of explicit challenges, its loss of its identity is very likely.⁷

All normal societies are based on structural and organisationally authorised system of physical means of explicit monopoly employment of violence; crime, war, anomie- in its various form and subversion are held at bay and thus society assured to its very survival and any threats is thereby reduced to ordinary limits of society's own perceived and accepted limits of margin of tolerance.

As such, in order to uphold the sacredness of social compact and its historical credibility, the employment of force to put down any explicit violation of one or more items of implicit normative – consensus is a logical precondition of

6. Ibid

7. Ibid

every ongoing social system.⁸ In short, however different the structure of any society is or its specific perception of norms and their priorities, these are sought to ensure normal society as the base of collectivity and they sanction without exception suppression with legitimate use of violence any attempt at sabotage of this consensus. 'Establishment' and 'Dissent' are only two facets of this consensus, but any frontal confrontation in any normal society will be justly seen as meriting violent suppression. In fact anomie and to frequent infringements of the proclaimed popular expectations based on consensus lead to anarchy and barbarism, rather than society.

The greatest paradox is that violence has established itself as social value to a great extent in the present day society.⁹ A sociological analysis of problems of violence would reveal that violence is a predominant feature of societies with multiplicities of groups trying to fulfil their own differing and sectional interests. It may be argued that transformation of a society from a homogeneous to well integrated one to a heterogeneous type is accompanied by increased situation of social conflict and violence. Another proposition is that the tendency to violence is learned and finds expression in certain specific social context. It has to be promoted by a favourable combination of social factors, motivations, rationalisations, values and norms; second, the tendency for violence also varies

8. Ibid

9. Nagla B.K., "Violence in India : A Sociological Analysis" in Abha Avasthi (ed.) Dimension of Violence and Terrorism , Associated Publishing House, 1985.

according to position of the individuals and groups in the social order and how they condition themselves to respond to various social pressures.

According to Dr. Rajani Kothari the relationship between violence and revolutionary restructuring of society in India has been ambivalent, often painful and in the end confusing for political ranks and the public at large. Political, economic and social injuries, whether of imperial variety or of the local dominant class and caste variety, have remained so intractable for decades that resentment and protest against it have found spontaneous expression in violent outbursts.¹⁰ Where the “system” is so oppressive there often seems to be no alternatives but to hit back against it in bouts of personal and collective “power”, a strange admixture of powerlessness and assertion of dignity and righteousness.

It is not easy to dismiss violence in an unjust society where injustice becomes more and more institutionalised as irrational. Even the secular movements towards a non violent social order may involve violence. Non violence is not something which can be demanded in abstract. A social order based on exploitation and dominance is already a very violent one. Putting on end to these conditions involves a struggle for autonomy on the part of the dependent and exploited sections of the society. This struggle is crucial to the realisation of a non-violent society. In its essence, violence is a direct result of the violation of the dignity of people and of the collectivities with which they identify. Overcoming this violation involves forms of counteractions that are difficult to

classify along the dichotomy of violence and non-violence. Every society is handicapped by some degree of violence. Violence has remained a constant universal phenomenon in the socio-political processes, both modern and primitive. There is an element of violence in life itself. The sociological approach seeks clues to violence in the integral process of the society. As an instrument of political power violence may:

- a) Arises from spontaneous, chance oriented causes.
- b) Develop as a process of breakdown of law and order
- c) Be a deliberate result of organisation, either by government or by interest groups.

Sorel who is unanimously to be the first grand theorist of violence reflects on violence in a collection of essays first published in 1908. According to him Violence not only keep the revolutionary spirit alive, but also kindle the middle class.¹¹ Further in his own word: Proletarian acts of violence have no resemblance of these prescription; they are purely and simply acts of war; they have the value of military demonstrations and serve to mark the separation of classes.. The idea of class war tends to refine the concept of violence itself.¹²

10. Kothari Rajani, Preface, in Sajal Basu, "Politics of Violence", Minerva Publication , Calcutta, 1982.

11. Sorel, George, "Reflections on Violence", New York, Collier Books, 1972.

12 Ibid

13

Summing up Marx's arguments with respect to man's adaptation to the condition of capitalism, Sorel writes : ¹³

- a) On the lowest level, we find a scattered kind of violence which resembles the struggle for life, which acts through economic condition violence in this character works especially with the aid of the fiscal arrangements.
- b) Next comes the concentrated and organised force of the state, which acts directly on labour," to regulate wages",
- c) We have finally violence which occupy a great place in the history of primitive accumulation, and which constitute the principle subject of history.

In the middle of the 20th century Fanon too is an extremely passionate votary of violence who looks into it the promise of creating a new man, a whole man which the European civilisation has failed to create, and which is now responsibility of the third world. In the tradition of Lenin and Sorel, he too proclaim: ¹⁴

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

“Violence alone, violence committed by people, violence organised and educated by leaders make it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them. Without that struggle, without that knowledge and the practice of action, there is nothing but a fancy drall parade and the blare of trumpets.”

The creation of new man is not possible till we achieve decolonisation which is always a violent phenomenon. It never takes place unnoticed, for its influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. ¹⁵

Violence and society in general and violence and individuals in particular are closely interwoven. We can say that our independence was in general a by product of overt and covert form of violence; violence is also the by product of society due to the notion of domination and subjugation; violence also arise due to interaction process and interaction is a part and parcel of society. The naked truth of decolonisation evokes for us the searing bullets and blood stained knives which emanate from it.

Now the question arises why the native adopt violent means to achieve decolonisation. Fanon writes” The native takes the violence because it had earlier been leased on them by the colonisers and since then is perpetually forced to obey norms of decency and order worthy of a civilized society. ¹⁶

15. Fanon, Frantz, “Towards the African Revolution”, Penguin, 1970

16 Ibid.

On the benefits of violence, Fanon suggest that confrontation with the stronger enemy brings about integration and solidarity among the natives. The practice of violence bind them together as a whole, since each individual form a violent link in the greater chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upwards in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning.¹⁷

Social violence is largely the product of socio-economic and or a political system which is characterised by gross social injustice and exploitation.

Society like Bihar shows the violence either due to the deprived and depressed section trying to assert themselves and acquire their legitimate roles and entitlements and/or it can be due to vested interests trying to hold on to what control they had over the victim of violence for years and refusing to part with this control.¹⁸

To quote from John Gunn's violence in Human Society:

“Violence has biological and social functions important to our evolution. Its total elimination, therefore will have a hiatus, unless that can be filled by an equally powerful evolutionary force, it is possible that man will be worse, not better off”.¹⁹

17 Ibid.

18. Rajagopa, P.R., “Social Change and Violence”, Hyderabad

19. John Gunn, Violence in Human Society, London Croom Helm, 1983.

An unjust social order produces an environment which fosters and norishes various form of violence. If the state fails to redress such an unjust social order to that extent it forfeits its legitimacy in the eye of the people who are its victims.²⁰

Finally taking about violence Lystand (1975) grouped theories of violences into three categories:²¹

- 1) Those that involve psychological variables.
- 2) Those that involve social structural variables.
- 3) Those which seek the causes in contemporary society's cultural assumptions and values. All these three can be considered again under three levels.
 - a) Individual level.
 - b) Social level
 - c) International level.

The real life acts of violence have to be understood in their context of social structures, relationships and intersection. Violence could be both actual and symbolic and can only be understood in term of meanings it hold for the victim and the preprators.

20. P.R. Rajagopal: Social Change and Violence, Hyderabad.

21 Lystand, "Theories of Violence", Rutgers University Press, 1975

Now we can say that what is happening in Bihar is something unique in relation to the modernising process. Here the entire process of development and modernisation is simultaneously taking place. Economic development, political participation, mass uprising, urbanisation, literacy and education caste/class consciousness expansion of mass media, all are simultaneously developing society therefore is passing through a sort of traumatic experience, because new values, new norms and new mode of thinking are constantly passing in upon it.²²

The consequence of such development is not even throughout the state. Modernisation is affecting different social groups in society differently. Be it economic development, political development, education or expansion of mass media. There is a marked unevenness in the distribution of the cumulative gains among the different social segments of the society. The end result of this modernisation and mass awakening is conflict and violence.²³

22 Prasad, Negeshwar, "Rural Violence in India", Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1982..

23 Ibid.

Chapter - II

VIOLENCE AND COUNTER VIOLENCE

Bihar at present time is passing through a series of violence and counter-violence. It is the matter of concern for every body. Question arises whether this violence and counter-violence has certain specific motto or it is something more than this. Some scholars argue that Bihar's violence is not a general violence, but it is preparing space for a wider social revolution.

According to International Encyclopedia of social sciences, the term revolution, outside the natural sciences, connotes a sudden and far reaching change, a major break in the continuity of development. The idea of revolution and violence are closely connected.

The quality of change characterised as violent revolution cannot be grasped without consideration of the type of society in which it occurs¹. Bihar society may be described in highly simplified term as a society torn by an internal antagonism between a small upper caste which by virtue of its proprietary claims to land and other sources of income received a considerable portion of the social product and a large number of lower caste and class which perform all the manual, routine labour and subsists on relative poverty.

On the other hand a counter revolution and counter violence is an attempt to reverse the transformations effected in a revolution; its source signalises the triumph of the upper class/caste, which has been endangered and temporarily displaced by the revolution.²

One remarkable feature of counter violence/revolution is that it never proposes to reestablish the same old order. A counter revolutionary movement will look back with longing upon the old system, but the conception of the past from which it derives its goal for the future is a refined and idealised version of the Historical reality. Since it must operate in a revolutionary environment, it is compelled to accept many current ideas and methods³. So we can say that in words and in deeds counter violence is an ambiguous mixture of old and new.

The nature of conflict characterizing the different castes in Bihar villages have grown out of life style, woven around the scarce social values like power prestige, influence and other resources. The inter caste relationship which exists in the villages is due to the fact that different castes threat the prestige of others⁴. This threat is practiced enormously by higher castes over lower castes due to their inherent superiority since tradition.

¹ Laquer (W) "Revolution and Counter Revolution" in Encyclopedia of Social Sciences. (ed.) DL Sill., 1968.

² Ibid

³ Ibid.

Violence and counter violence is the most striking feature of contemporary Bihar. In recent years the social roots of violence have been nurtured by economic factors⁵. In other words, the resistance offered by the deprived sections of the community to the terror created by private armies of the big land holders leads to violence. The explicit and wider economic discrimination proves to be the primary source of exploitation in the socio-cultural domain as well. The privileged section unleashed violence in defense of the hitherto existing socio-economic order and status quo. Nevertheless the oppressed and less privileged section quite attempts often at resisting and retaliatory measures to facilitate changes in the socio-economic order. In Bihar rural-urban dichotomy is more vivid despite the fact that it is being one of the most ruralised state of India⁶.

There are two distinct stages in the development of counter violence and revolution. In the first the groups with counter violent tendencies originate the necessity of accepting the achievements of the revolution in order that it may be stopped before it undermine the old structure at the really decisive points. In the second stage the division between moderate and violent leads to armed encounter⁷.

⁴ Mishra, R.B., "Caste and Class Conflict in Rural Society", Commonwealth publisher, New Delhi, 1989.

⁵ Sachchidanand, "The changing village", Seminar, February 1997, p.33.

⁶ Bihar is one of those state where the percentage of rural population living below the poverty line is much higher than the national average. See the Dynamics of Employment and Poverty in Bihar (Working papers). A.N. Sinha Institute, 1989, Patna

The capacity of violence as a social and cultural resource drawn on four basis properties which has a cross cultural validity. These are :

- (i) The performance of violence is inherently liable to be contested on the question of legitimacy;
- (ii) The discrepancy in basic understandings amongst those implicated or in experiencing a violent image, is likely to be minimal,
- (iii) the practice of violence is highly visible to the senses and
- (iv) the performance of violence to a moderate degree of effectiveness requires relatively little by way of specialised equipment⁸.

Riches suggests that propensity for “violence to breed violence” i.e. counter violence stems not from something inherent in psychological constitution of the human individual, but rather from some basic and possibly universal logic of human and social interaction. It is the quality of social interaction which will determine the quality of manifest violence⁹.

⁷ Laquer (W) “Revolution and Counter Revolution” in Encyclopedia of Social Sciences. (ed.) DL Sill., 1968.

⁸ David Riches (ed), “Anthropology of Violence”, Basil Blackwell Oxford, 1986, p. 21.

⁹ Ibid; p.11.

Genesis of Violence and Counter Violence in Rural Bihar

Bihar's rural society is stratified on the basis of the caste and class. In the traditional societies both the structures are highly interrelated and corresponded to each other to a larger extent¹⁰. The recent land reform measures like abolition of zamindari, imposition of ceiling on land and tenancy laws and other political reform like democratization Panchayati Raj etc. resulted in crippling the domination of upper caste in the socio economic fields. This acted as a threat to the status quo of the upper castes and dominant castes and class.

Consequently on these changes in the social structure, the traditional feudal classes became weak and new classes were emerging. The contradictions arising out of those changes led to the old and new classes to fight against one another either to retain the lost status, or to compete for resources or to protect their interests¹¹.

The newly emerged class war between different categories have various dimensions. An important dimension of such conflict is between the landlords belonging to upper and *middle caste* and the landless agricultural labourers belonging to *SCs, STs and OBCs*. Now they decline to work in low wages and demand distributive justice and legitimate share in the production system. Their

¹⁰ Kumaran, K.P.(ed), "Rural Tension in India: Dimensions and Implications, Illustrated Book Publishers, Jaipur, 1997.

resistance often resulted in violence and killings of agricultural labourers by landlords¹².

During late 1967, the naxalite movement, which had emerged in West Bengal, entered in certain pocket of North Bihar. They said that the real path of liberation from exploitation and humiliation by the landlords is violence. The leaders who advocated these ideas were mainly from upper and upper middle castes. Some of the main districts where the naxalite violence spread were Saran, Champaran, Muzzafarpur, Darbhanga and Purnia in North Bihar and Patna, Sahabad, Bhagalpur and Monghyr and Hazaribagh district of south Bihar. Subsequently Naxalites formed guerilla squads. Later they formed "Red army" units. Initially most of the attacks were made on Bhumihars and Rajputs by Harijan, but later Kurmi and Yadavas landlords were also attacked.

Throughout the Naxalite prone districts of Bihar the landlords organised meetings to find out ways and means to deal with Naxalite violence. It was an open attack to their status quo. They started using personal army. They floated many organisations throughout the state like Krishak Sangh, Kisan Sangh, Lorik Sena, Bhumi Sena, Brahmashi Sena, Sanlight Sena, Ranvir Sena etc. to counter this Naxalite violence and to protect themselves. By 1985, the number of such

¹¹ Desai, A.R., 1986, "Changing Profile of Rural Society in India", in the Agrarian Struggle in India, After Independence, Delhi: Oxford University Press.

¹² Alexander, K.C., 1976, "Agrarian Tension in Tanjore", NIRD, Hyderabad.

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armies had increased on both sides. The result was open violence and counter violence¹³.

These form the essential ingredient of the organised violence syndrome. Violence in Bihar has become the generalised mode of social intercourse¹⁴. There after the society entered into the phase of violence and counter-violence in the plains of rural Bihar.

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¹³ Choudhary, S.N., "Power Dependence Relations", Struggle for Hegemony in Rural Bihar, Har-Anand Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1999.

¹⁴ Pradhan N. Prasad, "The Tragedy of Bihar", Meera Dutta., (ed)., Mark Publication Pvt. Ltd., 1996.

Chapter – III

POLITICS, SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND VIOLENCE IN RURAL BIHAR

Bihar, with its deep and inherent complexities in socio-economic and political realms, provide an adequate space for scholarly works.¹ With an area of 1,73,877 sq. kms., Bihar populates 86.34 million people. It has three distinct regions, North Bihar, Central Bihar and Chota Nagpur-Santhal paraganà, North Bihar is the poorest, least urbanised and among the most backward part of India, with a density of population second only to Kerala. Being North of the *Ganga*, or “*Ganga Paar*”, it is even now remain relatively isolated and lacking in connectivity and infrastructure.

The Chotanagpur plateau and the Santhal Parganas are drought prone and mineral rich and still have some dense forests. This is an area of mineral concentration. South Bihar, the Magadh of old lies partly in a rain shadow and is fringed by the Kaimur plateau, another area of neglect. It has fertile land and better regulated water supplies which has made land owners more

¹ Bihar's peculiar social, political and economic condition has attracted the attention of many scholars. See the work of Vineeta Damodaran, *Broken promises*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992; Pradhan H. Prasad and Meera Datta, *The tragedy of Bihar*, New Delhi, Manak Publication, 1996.

rapacious and oppressive of agricultural labour, But south Bihar is more exposed to outside influence which is perhaps why it has seen a some what greater degree of organisation of rural poor and more agrarian unrest than elsewhere.²

It is land of many paradoxes, extreme poverty side by side with plenty; literacy with widespread illiteracy and so on. The political renaissance, in recent year leading to profound alteration in its power structure. is reflection of a silent reaction by the masses to the maditional equilibrium of upper castes political exploitation.³

Politics

In Bihar, there is a broad correspondence between the hierarchies of caste, class and power as the caste, which is economically powerful exert considerable influence on politics. Francine Frankel has postulated that in Bihar, there was a strong correlation among the factors of high status, land ownership and political power.⁴

² B.G. Verghese, "Disgrace abounding, why should Bihar remain Backward?" in *Mainstream*, Annual 16 p.p.23-24.

³ A.K. Lal: "Bihar old and new". Seminar No.450, February 1997.

⁴ F.Rankel, "Caste, Land and Dominance in Bihar", in F.Frankel and M.S.A. Rao(eds.), *Dominance and State power in Modern India*, Vol. I, Delhi. Oxford University Press, 1989.

Till 1967 Congress was the dominant party in Bihar. During 1957-1967, Bihar came under the grip of political instability and in this period it endured thirteen changes in government and three period of President rule.⁵ Since then the politics here entered between forward vs Backward Castes. Since 1967 two new development, according to H.W. Blair, took place. The first one represented a coalescence of the slow unfolding agricultural transformation and second more rapidly governing movement of the backwards in a politically conscious force of Bihar.⁶ In Bihar caste and politics are not easily recognizable separately. Sometimes caste overpower politics and sometimes politics start dictating caste relationships, especially in the rural and poor agricultural heartland of Bihar. In order to understand Bihar's politics, one has to see social, economic and political factors and their combination and interaction.⁷

So caste and politics in Bihar is so close in fact to mention one has been almost automatically to speak of the other.⁸ Caste in no more prescribed as a

⁵ Frankel,op.cit, p.99

6. H.W. Blair." Structural Change, The Agriculturals sector and politics in Bihar, in John R. Wood(ed). The State Politics in Contemporary India: Continuity or Change. Boulder, West View Press, 1989, P. 66.

⁷ Ramashray Roy: Bihar Politics, Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol.55. no. 3, July-September 1994,p.222.

⁸ H.W. Blair, "Structural Change, The Agricultural sector and politics in Bihar," in John R. Wood (ed.) State Politics in India; continuity or change, Boulder; USA, Westview Press, 1984, p.62.

thing of ritual distance but it has gained importance in the matter of political mobilization as well as political empowerment. It has been the most important mobilizing factor in the politics⁹ upto 1967, Congress was ruling party and it hold over upper castes with support from middle castes and lower shudras continued in rural Bihar because of mild amount of land reform measures that were initiated by Congress ministers.¹⁰

Bihar politics is significantly determined by agrarian relationships. The agrarian contour that unfolded in Bihar was scripted by Lord Cornwallis through permanent settlement of intermediaries in 1793.

Even during the British period the hold of Raj in Bihar remained limited, same thing reflects in the present day administration¹¹ The Nehruvian model of civil society essentially succumbed the epic of western modernity.¹²

The democratization of polity resulted in a large scale entry of agrarian groups into state politics during the 1980s. In Bihar, uncivil entities like criminals along with primordial nationalist, ethnic or religious fundamentalist

9 R.C. Prasad, Political transition in Bihar, New Delhi (Magadh University; Survey Research University, P.107.

10 Casteism in India: A Study of Bihar, New Delhi, Pragati Publications, 1996, pp.279-280.

11 Anang A. Yang, The Limited Raj : Agrarian Relations in Colonial India. Saran District, 1793-1920. Oup, New Delhi, 1989.

12 Sunil Khillnani, "The Development of Civil Society: History and possibility, Cambridge University Press.

organization exercise greater sway than do modern entities such as trade unions, chambers of commerce and professional organization.¹³

Bihar is always on the fore-front of political movement-caste remains till today a dominant force of political mobilization of Bihar. The upper crust among the middle castes has moved centers stage. They have extended themselves in the power structure. This resulted into the sharp conflict and violence. Between backward and forward castes. Now it can be seen on a routine affair in the rural heartland of the State.

Rural Social Structure

It is Bihar where the social history of India began with the establishment of sodas *Janapadas*, the wondering of Buddha, and the simultaneous quest for a meaningful existence without resource to other wordily being. Bihar was also the site for the development of *prakrit* literature and some of India's greatest sculptor; where the first attempt to organize society along secular lines was made under *Chanakya* and *Chandragupta*.¹⁴

Present day Bihar has virtually become a byword for backwardness and stagnation. It has proved to be a graveyard for developmental projects and locale of scandalous feudal and caste barbarities and extreme peasant and rural

¹³ Gordon White, "Civil society, Democratisation and Development, Clearing the Analytical ground, Democratisation and Development, clearing the Analytical ground, democratisation1(3), Autumn 1994, P. 377.

violence.¹⁵ The population of Bihar continues to have a strong rural base, constituting 87.83 percent of total population. Sachchidananda observes” “that a study of rural families in west Bihar revealed the existence of 25 per cent nuclear families and 75 percent joint families. The largest number of nuclear families are found in high caste people. The highest percentage of joint families are found among the scheduled castes.

Bihar is characterised by structural rigidity and it seems a very compact society particularity in its rural base. The social order is based on severe inequality. The rural scene has been variously described as capitalist, colonial and semi-feudal.¹⁶

The identity that surfaces as Bihar is essentially a loose regional amalgum. That is why Bihar has developed a fragmented personality having a number of sub-territorial entities with separate dialects like Bhojpuri, Magahi and Maithili. Grierson, puts these dialectics into a common group Bihari language¹⁷. Bihar's rural life is complicated and very complex. It comprises diversified class and castes with conflicting respective interests. One important aspect of any rural community is the nature of new social conflict.

¹⁴ Ram Chandra Prasad, Bihar, Delhi National Book Trust, 1992, pp.40-74.

¹⁵ Sachchidandanda, Rural Social transformation in Bihar.

¹⁶ Ibid, op.cit.

¹⁷ Grierson, G.A., Ljinguist Survey of India, Vol.V, Part II, Govt. Of India. New Delhi, Reprinted, 1968.

The roots causes of these conflicts are not ill will of individuals or groups but it is located in the structural infrastructure of society and its impact on the various strata of society.¹⁸

The caste based movements of the pre-independence period got only modified in the post independence period. In fact the poison of casteism has entered into every walk of life and politics in particular its worst victim.

The agrarian structure has been characterised by Prasad as semi feudal.¹⁹ According to him vast majority of peasant households are deficit ones which forces them to take consumption loan. From the land owner class, which they are never able to return, even in the long run, due to their chronic deficit, this resulted in semi bondage and it allows them to become semi bondage and it allows them to become semi-serf.

This allows land owners who are mainly upper castes to become not only rich but also politically very powerful. The per capita income in the rural Bihar is lowest in the country mainly due to agricultural backwardness, consequently, the rural poverty prevails on mass scale in the state. This results into large-scale violence and tension particularly in central Bihar which is based on exploitative set up. The following table will show this reality.

¹⁸ Sachida Natha Mishra, "Political Socialisation in Rural India", Inter-India Publications, Delhi-110035, 1980.

Table-I
Caste, Class and Land Ownership in Plains of Rural Bihar

| | Caste | Percentage of persons to total in each of the caste group | | | | | | | | Per Capita Cultivated Land Owned in acre |
|---|------------------------|---|------|------|------|---------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--|
| | | Land owning category (acres) | | | | | Class | | | |
| | | 0 | 0-5 | 5-10 | 10+ | All | Landlord and Rich Peasant | Middle Peasant | Poor Peasant | |
| i | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | |
| 1 | Upper Castes | 5.7 | 62.1 | 17.9 | 14.3 | 100 (22.2) | 89.5 | 2.9 | 5.5 | 0.54 |
| 2 | Upper Middle castes | 25.9 | 66.4 | 5.5 | 2.2 | 100 (21.7) | 27.8 | 35.1 | 27.6 | 0.33 |
| 3 | Other middle castes | 60.9 | 37.6 | 0.0 | 1.5 | 100 (16.3) | 7.5 | 9.2 | 77.9 | 0.17 |
| 4 | Scheduled Castes | 69.5 | 30.4 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 100 (27.2) | 2.0 | 4.4 | 92.0 | 0.12 |
| 5 | Hindus | 40.9 | 48.7 | 5.9 | 4.5 | 100 (87.4) | 31.6 | 12.5 | 51.5 | 0.31 |
| 6 | Muslims | 58.6 | 35.4 | 4.4 | 1.6 | 100 (12.6) | 21.0 | 10.3 | 58.3 | 0.25 |
| 7 | All | 43.1 | 47.0 | 5.8 | 4.1 | 100 (100) | 30.3 | 12.2 | 52.3 | 0.30 |

Note: Figures in parenthesis refer to percentage distribution with reference to row total

Source of Data: (See next page)

¹⁹ Prasad, Pradhan et. Economic Benefits in the Kosi command area, A.N.S. Institute of social Sciences Studies, Patna, 1979.

An empirical research study by International Labour Office, Geneva and ANS Institute of Social Studies, Patna on "Dynamics of Employment and Poverty" in Bihar in 1981. See Prasad P.H. and Rodgers, G.B.(August 1983), *Class, Caste and Landholding in the analysis of the Rural Economy*. World Employment Programme Research, Population and Labour Policies Programme, Working paper No.140, ILO, Geneva.

Caste Composition

Caste in Bihar can be broadly categorized in six groups, five twice-born castes, constitute 13.6% (Brahmin-4.2 percent, Bhumihars- 2.9, Rajputs 4.2 percent, Kayasthas-1.2 percent and Banias-0.6 percent). Upper Shudras or OBCs – 18.7% (Yadavas-11 per cent, Kurmies-3.6 percent and Koeris – 4.1 per cent), lower Shudras or extremely backward castes 32 percent, Muslims 12.5 per cent, Scheduled Caste- 14 percent and Scheduled tribes 9.1 percent.²⁰

Amongst the upper castes, the Brahmins have the highest ritual and social status, while Bhumihars and Rajputs have been landlords and major landowning castes. Kayasthas have been educationally the most advanced community in the state. Most of the big landlords are member of twice born castes while most of the poor, landless laborers belong to scheduled castes and

other deprived castes. After talking about caste composition of rural society we have to see the nature of various land reform and their impact on the rural social fabric. The social structure of rural Bihar is mainly dictated and conditioned by land relationships.

After the independence, Bihar was the first to pass a Bill in 1948 for the abolition of the Zamindari System. Since the provision of the Bill was insufficient, the state government proposed to replace it by Land Reform Bill of 1950. Though it did not improved the condition of rural landless, the Bihar land reforms (fixation of ceiling area and acquisition of Surplus) act of 1961 came into existence.²¹ The important provision of the act was related to the surplus land acquired by the State. In the distribution of surplus land government gave preference to certain weaker section and landless of the rural society.

The agrarian relations are basically a peasant class relation, but in course of time they have also become a dimension of social stratification. The following table will show that the traditional agrarian relations were an essential part of the caste stratifications, with higher castes owning the land,

²⁰ Ramashroy Ray, "Bihar Politics", Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol.55, No.3, July-September, 1994, p.224.

²¹ Pradhan, Prasad H., "Land Reforms in Bihar", (A case study),(mimeo).A.N.S. Institute of Social Sciences, Patna, 1976.

with higher castes owning the land, the inter-mediate castes cultivating them, and lower castes operating on the land as laborers.

TABLE 2

| Class | Size of Land Holdings | Caste | Feature |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|
| Upper Class of Landlords | Very large landholdings (More than 30 acres) | Brahmin, Bhumihar and Rajputs | Not take cultivation rather intermediaries cultivate their land |
| Rich Farmers | Large land holdings (About 8-30 acres) | Bhumihars, Rajputs, Kayastha, Yadavas, Kurmies, Koeries | Cultivate themselves, Farming is based on exploitations. |
| Middle Farmers | Medium land holdings (About 5-8 acres) | Yadavas, Koeries, Kurmies | Partly themselves and partly employ cheap labourers. |
| Poor Farmers | Small land holdings (Less than 4 acre) | Mainly backward SCs etc. | Cultivation is done by themselves. |
| Agricultural Labourer | Either landless or own very small land. | Poor strata of BCs and SC. | Landless labourers/bounded labourers. |

Source: Field Survey of Bihar, conducted during November-December 1994.

The above table clearly shows, the connection between land holding and its relation with certain privileged caste and class. It is also clear from the

same table that land is concentrated in a few higher castes hand and it is also their status symbols. The gap between the highest and lowest is maximum in Bihar than in any other state in India. The Bhumihar and Rajputs holds approximately 73 percent of the total land area in Bihar.²²

With little other enterprise, land ownership in State shows the dominance and power structure. Even the landowning classes represents the Bihar legislatures, bureaucrats and other professional groups. The state account for 3 percent of agricultural growth without any effective public sector investment.²³

The most striking feature of contemporary Bihar in large scale rural violence and its principal cause seems to be the unequal distribution of land. So far government only distributed, the land on paper and very little section of deprived class are able to cultivate the land which has been re-distributed to them. mainly due to large scale violence and terror created by landowning castes and class. In recent years the social roots of violence have been nurtured by the notion of maintenance of status quo, by the upper caste and the

²² Hiranmay Dhar, Shaibal Gupta, Nandulal Roy, Nirmal Sen Gupta, "Caste and Polity in Bihar", in Gail Omvedt(ed), Land Caste and Politics in Indian States ,Guild Publications, 1982.

²³ Arvind N.Das,"Still paying old Debts" The Telegraph, Calcutta, 6 June, 1997.

violent assertion by the deprived castes, backed by MCC and other Marxist militant outfits.²⁴

The contemporary violence is nurtured by economic factors.²⁵ In other words violence and counter-violence are routine feature of society. In Bihar, the rural-urban dichotomy is more vivid despite the fact that it is most ruralist State of India.²⁶

According to the 1931 census for Bihar and Orissa, the following was the caste-wise educational standard.

| | | |
|----|-----------|-----------------------|
| 1. | Kayastha | 372 Literate per 1000 |
| 2. | Brahmins | 195 literate per 1000 |
| 3. | Bhumihars | 135 literate per 1000 |
| 4. | Rajputs | 120 literate per 1000 |
| 5. | Yadava | 50 literate per 1000 |
| 6. | Kurmies | 40 literate per 1000 |

²⁴ M.C.C.(Maoist Communist Centre), It is most deadly millitant left outfit, fighting in rural Bihar for (mainly South and Central Bihar) so called under priviledged and poors.

²⁵ Sachidanand "The changing village", Seminar, Feb. 1997, p.33

²⁶ Bihar in one of those state where the percentage of rural population living below the poverty line is much higher than the national average. See the Dynamics of Employment and Poverty in Bihar (Working paper), A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Sciences, 1989, Patna.

However Sachidananda observes that the traditional feature of the caste system do not obtain at present in their age-old complexion. The higher caste enjoy only ritually better position but most of them neither adhere to their caste occupation nor observe traditionally prescribed behaviour patterns.

The bulk of the Scheduled Castes have now moved away from their traditional caste occupation and now work as agricultural labourers. The structural distances between scheduled castes and others is being community narrowed.

One of the main reason of rural violence is socio-economic disparities between different section of rural society. Since both section (privileged and deprived) do not get adequate political attention and adequate protections they have organised themselves in the form of different organisations and *senas* and fight with each other, resulting in mass violence and severe conflict.

Chapter – IV

CHANGING CONTOURS OF VIOLENCE

Violence in the sense of illegal use of force against person and property by one group against another, besides institutional violence like the police and paramilitary forces to suppress genuine demands of the people or groups of people is a common feature of the Bihar state. Caste has been used by vested interests for playing one group of society against another, in turn, opening the pool of caste violence or caste war in Bihar. The state seems to have surrendered its autonomy to the organised force of violence and withdrawn from its responsibility.

The History of Caste violence in Bihar can be traced back to the days of its separation from Bengal in 1912. The face of politics in Bihar did not change even after the attainment of independence. The year 1963-67 saw a slow and gradual decline in the dominance of the upper castes in the predominant congress party as well as their strength in the Assembly. This period also saw the polarization and formation of caste alliances of backward

castes and Harijans and it thus break down the monopoly of dominance of upper castes. This was the time when politics of Bihar came to be shaped in terms of Forwards Vs Backwards.

This resulted in gradual shift of land control from upper castes to intermediary castes in the rural areas. The lower and suppressed castes are now able to resist the suppression and oppression of the upper castes and intermediary castes. A growing subculture of violence is discernible among the lower middle castes and the scheduled castes which have been most disadvantaged groups and whose resources and behaviour options are sharply circumscribed by poverty and exclusion from organised and legitimate activity. The growing expectations of this group has led to a revolt especially in the rural areas where social violence and contradictions are more visible. Thus we find a conflict between upper castes , lower middle and lower castes on one hand and lower castes and scheduled castes on the other.

The growth of left militancy in the formative years of the early 1970s indicates a process of consolidation in areas where challenges by antagonistic classes were most pronounced. In areas where such a confrontational matrix remained dormant or absent ,

their ideology and movement, moreover has made little headway in establishing even an effective token presence.¹

It seems that a lasting peace had the potential to destroy the left as well as their most bitter opponents the extreme right Kisan formation.

The early history of the emergence of the militant left in Bhojpur³ and Jehanabad⁴ was certainly conditioned by some conscious policy planning that revolved around the application of the historical demands of the left against any feudal order of socio-economic and political organisation. Here, local leaders were slow to emerge and consequently a constant struggle to up the ante against entrenched 'landlordism' became the key element in identifying leadership, and this cumulative raising to the stakes in the conflict became key to the situation.⁵ The discriminatory

¹ The caste arraigned against the left are led by the Bhumihars, the Rajputs, the Brahmins, Yadavas and the Kurmies.

³ It was at Ekwari village in Bhojpur that the liberation movement was born.

⁴ Jehanabad: In central Bihar, witness to the maximum number of massacres since the late 1970s.

⁵ The MCC document Lal Chingari (Red Spark) mention its inability to find people to serve as political commissiors; Sep. 1995. The CPI-ML, Liberation group after coming overground in December , 1994 has been consciously wooing middle class since it believe that leadership potential is limited among dispossessed group.

treatment of labourers acted as a spur to the peasants who initiated more concerted programmes to make the preferential wage as the universal norms. This prepared the stage for greater confrontation. It all started with selective retaliation by the landlords, and gradually escalated to more unified, purposeful and violent intervention targeting the castes that were prone to support the left, or who were already viewed as supporters. As the confrontations grew larger and more frequent, direct state intervention was a foregone conclusion.⁶

The operative area chosen by these extremist organisation are the traditional bastions of the old feudalism and agrarian bowl in central and south central Bihar. Fourteen districts are badly affected by extremists. The highly affected districts in Central Bihar comprising parts of Nalanda, Jehanabad, Gaya, Patna, Aurgangabad, Bhojpur, Rohtas, Siwan and Haziaribagh.

The most popular Naxalite group active in these regions are the Indian Peoples Front(IPF), the CPI-ML-Liberation and its front

⁶ The Bihar Government had launched operation Rakshak even as it categorised caste militias as self defence groups, paramilitary forces were inducted for operations. Meanwhile operation Sidhartha, a socio economic developmental project was launched in three village cluster in Jehanabad under the 20 -point programme to emphasise developmental activities in order to wear away the Red cadres. Both failed in their purposes.

organisations. The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS), CPI-ML Party Unity and its Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti (MKSS). The MCC is the group besides other smaller factions. Their operational areas also differs according to their strength. Drawn by the Naxal philosophy of Charu Mazumdar and Mao these outfits believe that it is easier to seize power in the countryside where the government is the weakest. Hence after gaining a little clout these organisation took upon themselves the right to implement land reforms, redistribute land, impose minimum wages for farm labourers and dispense justice through people's courts, shortening the landlords and their henchmen by six inches (sentence to death) and organising protests against state excesses and oppressive laws. Rajni Kothari remarks " Local caste based conflicts between the haves and havenots have gradually aggregated into a broader front that encompasses small marxist-leninist campus." The basic demands of the left had meanwhile revolved around the urge for equity. respect for their women, payment of minimum wages.⁸and

⁷ Class struggle in Bihar, in Hindustan Times, June 21, 1987.

⁸ The issue of rape and denial of minimum wages were basic issues to the left in its formative years. The fight now is for self respect, which in the eye of higher caste tramiate into a misdemeanor by the lower castes.

end to the *begari system*.⁹ It was however, not Jehanabad, but actually Purnia where the mainline Communist Party of India (CPI) had made early forays after Independence. And it was Purnia that saw the first caste massacre, when peasants were gunned down by farm managers of the then Bihar Assembly speaker, L.N. Sudhanshu, in 1969.¹⁰ Till the later half of the 1970s, confrontation in the Jehanabad region were few and far between, but then came pipra and Parasbigha¹¹, Nonhi and Nagwan, Berchi and Arwal¹² a sequence of murders that embroiled the entire South Central and West Central Bihar in a sustained conflict that culminated in Bathe in 1997.

⁹ A term used for work taken from the labourers or his family members beyond normal hours of work with payment to one only. Basically means work without commensurate payment.

¹⁰ Purnia in North Bihar, the first killings were recorded at Rupeswar Chandua Village where the son of the then Bihar Assembly Speaker, Lakshmi, Narain Sudhansu led the assault.

¹¹ Nine Yadavas were killed at Parasbigha in Jehanabad in 1979 while 22 Dalits were burnt alive at Belchi in Nalanda district in 1978.

¹² Made infamous by Police firing on April 13, 1983. Justice P.S. Poti had termed it the "Jalliwala Bagh of free India."

By the 1980s, as the animosities between the Red (left) groups and the elite grew a deep polarisation in caste and community consciousness occurred. On the one hand, the entire phalanx of Scheduled Castes were deemed Naxalites; on the other, the upper castes progressively banded together, closing ranks, not only among the richer landowners, but along caste lines that embraced every rung of the political ladder, down to the poorest of their caste-men. Thus a Bhumihar or Kurmi landowner was in a position to call upon all caste resources, men and material, not only from among the locally empowered families but also from their poorer landless brethren. Between the year 1987 to 1997, the following major bloody strikes took place by different outfits and *sena*.

KILLINGS (YEARWISE) BY DIFFERENT GROUPS

| Year | Place | Toll | Group |
|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| 1987 | Dalelchak-Baghoura | 54 | MCC |
| 1991 | Tishkora (Patna) | 15 | K.S.(Kisan Sabha) |
| 1991 | Deo Satiara (Bhojpur) | 15 | CPI-ML |
| 1992 | Bara (Gaya) | 34 | MCC |
| 1996 | Bathanitota (Bhojpur) | 22 | Ranvir Sena |
| 1997 | Haibaspur | 10 | Ranvir Sena |
| 1997 | Jaipura(Patna) | 11 | Party Unity |
| 1997 | Koderma | 13 | MCC |
| 1997 | Laxmanpur Bathe | 59 | Ranvir Sena |
| 1998* | Aiyara(Jehanabad) | 3 | Ranvir Sena |
| 1999* | Shankarbigha (Jehanabad) | 23 | Ranvir Sena |
| 2000* | Miapur (Aurangabad) | 35 | Ranvir Sena |

Source : India Today

*1998, 1999, 2000 taken from Economic and Political Weekly, June 24,2000, P. 2209.

Since 1997 a bloody fighting is going on in the rural pockets of Bihar. The viciousness of the conflicts was highlighted by the MCC- sponsored Baghaura- Delelchak massacre , in which 54 Rajputs were killed in the Madanpur region of Aurangabad. This massacre was in retaliation to a series of smaller massacres of Dalits by the Rajputs.

These confrontations with the Naxalities gave birth to the Sunlight Sena – a joint effort of Rajputs and Pathans who saw themselves as natural allies, since both are landowners. The Kurmi caste set-up Bhommi Sena, led by the Congress MLA from the Masaurhi area, and later led by his wife Poonam Devi, also an MLA; CPI Leader and MP Ramashraya Singh Yadav had in the meantime, set-up the Lorik Sena, exploiting the linkages between the Yadav landowners and contractor- caste criminal combine, to take the left squads. At the same time, the Rajputs of Bhojpur set up the Kunwar Sena and Brahmin set up Ganga Sena.

The proliferation of Senas, however, failed to contain the Naxalities. Most of the caste Senas were consequently, decimated in this contest. By the 1990s, most of the Senas has been buried

under the Red assault. In another attempt of revival in 1991, the Kulaks formed the Kisan Sangh at Paliganj, 40 km southeast of Patna, and set up its armed wing Kisan Security Tiger (KST). The KST went into action at once, gunning down, 5 at Tiskhora in the Masaurhi region, and then carrying out three other strikes in quick succession. But the leader of the KST squad were arrested and that was the end of the Tigers.

Ranvir Sena was born in 1994¹³ with the support of all upper caste landowners in Bhojpur. The Ranvir Sena notched up a record of several massacres, injecting a heavy loss of life on Dalit women and children – actions that appealed greatly to the remnants of the other caste armies of central Bihar. This Ranvir Sena consequently gained acceptance in Jehanabad and Gaya district as well. The turning points of this bush war were the actions at Ekwari, Nannaur, Bathe, Narainpur and Shankarbigha and these massacres were retaliated by left armies at Bhima and Senari. The use of caste feelings for serving class interests is apparent in the composition of Ranvir Sena. The forerunners of Ranvir Sena

¹³ The Ranvir Sena, the most dreaded caste militia to date is seen as an effective reply by the landlords to the Reds. It commands, 16000 licenced and unlicenced arms including AK-47 rifles and grenade launchers. Barmeshwar Singh, the headman of Khopira village in Bhojpur is the leader of the armed underground group. It was banned in 1994 but never disarmed. This group was responsible for several massacres and has killed over 600 people since 1995 including 62 at Bathe in Jehanabad on December 1, 1997.

were Brahmarshi and Kunwar Senas which could not sustained for long time. Then the local ruling classes were divided along caste lines. Ranveer Sena is not in actual sense a caste *sena* as happened to be the case with other private senas. The Class aspects is fairly pronounced in Ranveer Sena's support base and functioning. Bhumihar and Rajput castes people have never seen eye to eye and have a history of being mutual foes throughout Bihar. They have now joined hand to form Ranveer Sena. Further it is class interest which goaded to ruling stratum of the middle castes to extend support to the *sena*.

Presently a war of supremacy among various naxalite groups in Central and South Bihar took another heavy toll. In the year 1997 ten people of Kiriya Village in Chatra district of south Bihar were murdered in cold blood. Prabhat Kumar, the office Secretary of CPI (ML) Liberation in Patna, claimed that 40 cadres died in MCC attack and at least 100 people were injured. In this war each group is projecting itself as the most popular and radical. The MCC criticises the liberation group for its 'revisionism'. Since the latter took to parliamentary politics in the early 1990s. The MCC characterises it as a representative of class enemies – big landlords and bourgeoisie. The liberation group describes the MCC as an

'anarchist' organisation with no clear cut strategy. The MCC, an offshoot of Dakshin Desh, was started by Kanhai Chatterjee in the early 1960. It presently adheres to the Lin Piao line and is purely anarchist organisation and thus fight with other left organisations.

Some Case Studies on Recent Massacres

In order to understand the changing contours of violence in rural Bihar, it is necessary to mention some of the recent massacres. Let us see the two major massacres happened recently. One is Jehanabad carnage occurred on 1st December, 1997 and second in the year 2000 killings led by Ranveer Sena at Miapur.

Jehanabad Carnage:

On the night of December 1, 1997, 63 people of Lakshmanpur Bathe village in Jehanabad district were murdered in cold blood. The victims, landless agricultural workers and their families were supporters of the communist party of India, party unity and killers were members of Ranveer Sena, a private army of local landlords. Among those killed were 27 women and 16 children. The victims were from the backward communities of Paswan, Chamar, Mahto, Mallah, Rajwar and Barbar. Two families were wiped out in this attack: Moti Choudhary and six members of

his family and Sheojatan Chamar, his wife and two sons and two daughters. Seven year old Bimlesh is the only survivor in the family of Sohar Rajwar, his wife, two sons and two daughter is law were killed. Savitri Devi lost her daughter, son in law and four other members of her family. The killers did not spare even an infant, Sumitra and 50 year old Rajmati Devi. The dispute between local landlords and landless peasants over 60 acres of land is said to be the cause of the carnage. Bhumihars reportedly captured 50 acres of village land embarked for distribution among the landless peasants in the village. They also grabbed 10 acres of *garmazarua* (Government) land that was distributed among the landless peasants with *purchas* (land ownership document). A section of peasants affiliated to naxalite groups was up in the arms against upper caste landlords of Bhumihar community.

Miapur Carnage:

The massacre of 34 people in Aurangabad district by Ranveer Sena on 18 June 2000 marked a new twist of killings in the violence prone central Bihar. But the Mainpur carnage was not an isolated phenomenon. Ranvir Sena claimed that it avenged the killings of 35 Bhumihars of Senari Village in Jehanabad district in

March 1999, but the instant instigation for the blood bath in Mainpur was the murder of 13 Bhumihars in Nawada districts a week ago. The Asaf Carnage was the culmination of the battle among three gangs which had support of the Bhumihars, Yadavas and Kurmies respectively.

The most significant aspect of the mainpur carnage is that it had targeted the intermediary backward castes of Yadavas, besides the Dusadhs (a unit of the Scheduled caste) and mistries (Carpenters).

From both the case studies it is clear that the manner in which human lives are being allowed to be snatched away in Bihar, need to deal with the critical issues that have been thrown up in society ever since the feudal and socio-political order, dominated for long by section belonging to the landowning upper castes, was challenged in the past one decade. The violence and counter violence goes on in a cyclic manner and it is a chain reaction. One carnage breeds another carnage and so on.

The semi-feudal society like Bihar gives rise to ruthless oppression, violent revolt and resistant. The landed gentry are making and all-out attempt to ensure its hegemony and monopoly

and labouring masses are ready to sacrifice everything to overthrow this oppressive structure. In the bargain, caste class contradictions continued to sharpen the consciousness of the contending social forces, leading to massacres.

The handling of caste violence requires a skillful mix of political acumen, sociological assessment and administrative competence.

The another grim situation is that the political parties are also involved for worsening conditions. The Peoples War Group (PWG) and the MCC have supported the ruling party RJD several times. Raghvendra Singh minister from the Bhojpur area, and Dilip Singh, the minister for relief and Rehabilitation from the Mokamah are close to the Ranveer Sena, while former central ministers Chandradeo Prasad Verma and Mrs. Kanti Singh have directly benefited from its support. Verma had opposed the ban on the sena. Presently a large area of land is under economic blockade in Bhojpur. In Jehanabad 40,000 acres are still blockaded by the PWG and Liberation Groups.

Chapter - V

SUMMING UP

If Bihar presents an extreme degeneration of the present socio-political set up, the regeneration expressed through various social movements in conscious organized revolt of the downtrodden against the existing system, and this is another face of the Bihari social psyche. It can be said that land ownership and landholdings are proportional to the prestige and status of the owner and to the network of relationships which confers a position of dominance or oppression. The main reason for violence and tension in rural Bihar may thus be found in the scarcity of agricultural land and the value attached to its ownership. The second reason as a corollary is the nexus between land ownership with caste hierarchy. The ownership of land and social prestige and social control being coterminous, they are directly linked to caste hierarchy.

In a recent study of rural Bihar it was found that most of the people at bottom of social stratification do not generally approach the courts of law. They cannot afford the cost as well as the time that law courts take in settling the disputes. The situation turns worse for the downtrodden when they are dragged to law courts by the dominant sections of society. Under these circumstances, the poor are left with no alternative but take recourse to some extra legal means (generally violence) for the redressal of their grievances. Violence thus spurts in the course of clash of interest between the upper and the lower sections of people in rural Bihar.

Talking about the formation of caste associations, the kayasthas were the first to have their caste association in 1887 (Jha.1977:14). A little later, in 1889, the Bhumihar Brahmans also established their pradhan Bhumihar Brahmans Sabha in Patna with its several branches all over the State. This was followed by the formation of Surjupari Brahman Sabha in 1906. The Marwari

Young men's Association was founded in 1907 and the Kurmi Sabha was formed in 1912. Initially, this caste association began functioning with a mission and zeal to introduce certain reforms in their respective castes. The leaders took up the cause of their castes and communities but subsequently leaders began to articulate interest of their respective castes. Their interests are generally for gaining or retaining or promoting their political and economic dominance. Cast conflicts are as such an extension of the conflict of interest between the caste leaders reflected through the district and state level political rivalries. Such conflicts promote what Rajni Kothari calls, 'Negative Communalism'¹

As such caste violence is growing both in frequency and severity. One very crucial issue in the unfolding of violent clashes

¹ Rajni Kothari writes "The negative sense of communalism is based on an exclusive identity that denies respect for other communities and thinks of unity as something to be achieved not organically but by subjugating others". See Kothari, "Beyond Alternatives, Development, Rethinking Development: In Search of Human Alternative", Ajanta Publications, Delhi 1998, p. 197

in Bihar is the behavior of the upper and the upwardly mobile middle castes, wherever they are dominant (in the sense of landownership). Secondly, social factors like caste based segregation, social alienation and backwardness come in the way of the lower castes, hence they continue to be agricultural workers and marginal cultivators. Social distance brought about inter-caste prejudices and inferiority-superiority complex. The political dimension of violence in the rural areas is of utmost importance. In a way, as a certain stage in tensions out of such a socially structured situation leads to a breaking point, and the same gets reflected in the political overtones and action/non action by the states.

It is obvious that the clash everywhere was triggered off as a result of tension building up for sometimes between two dominant individuals or groups of people headed by such swollen headed person. A situation of class war, most of the times in the name of

caste based tensions and rivalries could be witnessed. One of the warring persons belonged to the economically and socially lower stratum, naturally the other belonged to upper caste/class. Secondly notwithstanding the tension, in all the cases, the clash involved not only the victims and the aggressors in the same village but sucked within the fold of aggressors, exogenous groups mobilized on the basis of appeal to assertive and particularistic loyalties. And, lastly, the law and order machinery of the state consciously or unconsciously seems to have sided with the aggressors in so far as it did not show the kind of alertness and promptness to deal with such grave situations.

The collapse of the State and its administrative machinery has resulted in a dual or parallel system in different spheres of social life in Bihar. The collapse of the state-run educational system has led thousands of private educational institutions to spring out throughout Bihar. The same is the fate of state-run

health-care system. The prime source of income for thousands of the state-employed doctors is their practice in private clinics and nursing homes. The state-run hospitals have become death traps. Power supply in the state is equally erratic and inadequate. The state-run water supply system is so contaminated, especially during the monsoons that it perceptually becomes a source of water-borne diseases. Even the big police force proves to be totally incapable of providing the minimum safety and security to the people. The muteness of its people, extreme apathy and alienation of a large section of the society, and vulgar politisation have rendered the state a spineless entity. Is there a state in Bihar?

In fact, such a paradox explains the seeds of violence, which have been sown and nurtured over the years. Now violence has assumed threatening proportions and a parental feature of Bihar's social formation. Being caste based, society, its politics has become fragmented and gritty, and its economy is marked by stagnation and

decay. The state is incapable to satisfy the rising expectations of the people and to fulfil their aspirations for social mobility.

At present the State has broken down. No more conventional political mechanisms, namely the state, the traditional political parties and the ideal of democracy itself to protect the people. The extremism and mass killings in Bihar have put a big question mark on the relevance of the political parties in the state.

In nutshell the changes taking place today should be viewed in terms of in equal distribution of resources. The poor are still deprived of the fruits of freedom. Their share is negligible in the resources made available to people. The poor have suffered also by way of rape of their womenfolk. Any resistance by the poor has invited enhanced torture and killings.

The phenomenon of casteism has more pronounced in Bihar than other states of India. Caste has overshadowed social fabric of

Indian Society. The gap between the rich and the poor, between the lower and the upper castes is one of the important causes of growing violence and counter-violence. Law enforcing agencies have become weak to the extent that they are reduced to mere mute spectators in situations of massacres. In fact the state present a variegated picture of caste conflicts based on numerical strength of different castes As a result the nature of the caste conflict differs even within a district. Thus caste violence is the highest form of conflict reflecting distinctions based on status and power..

There is a kind of rural renaissance going on Bihar as the deprived groups have been showing restlessness for social change and development. There is almost a total breakdown of the authority of the State on exhibited by a popular hostility to its established institutions. Lately, the left-wing revolutionaries have managed to get most of the attention, as demonstrated by the activities of the MCC. The upper-caste associations like the

Ranveer sena shows another form of extremism by using repressive techniques against the awakened poor. The State apparatus is still not geared to the call of the poor. Though the hold of the traditionally entrenched groups on the state has become somewhat loose, yet it has strong enough strings to pull the poor to the dark edges of the society.

With the growing criminalisation of politics and politisation of crime, violence in the State becomes an unending reality. It seems that political system itself 'Permits the legitimization of violence and criminalisation, and the violence and counter-violence in fast gaining social acceptance for upward social mobility. It can therefore be safely remarked that in the sense violence and counter violence control the political system.

The problem of violence and counter violence has many socio-economic implications. The abject poverty, unemployment, corruption at all levels, and failure to implement land reforms are

mainly responsible for the spate of violence. Unless Bihar takes the path of economic development, percolating all sections of society, caste violence will not stop in near future. It may be possible that the oppressor and the oppressed change, but the violence will continue.

The swift pace of change and complexity of interacting forces in Bihar have rendered its society essentially unmanageable. The rebels think that they are attacking the real oppressor at the top of the social structure but without attacking the institutions in structures, which contribute to the perpetuation of violence.

Violence evokes, even seeks, a violent answer. Coercion invites counter-coercion, and in turn results into a chain-reaction pushing the society further in the dark ages.

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