

# **EXPLORING GENDER INTERSECTIONS IN NAXALITE MOVEMENT IN BIHAR**

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation, “**EXPLORING GENDER INTERSECTIONS IN NAXALITE MOVEMENT IN BIHAR,**” submitted in the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** of this University is an original work to the best of our knowledge and has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other institution.

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और

उनकी जैसी औरतों के लिए

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# **INTRODUCTION**

## Introduction

In recent times, the grand narratives are being shifted to the periphery and the micro level narratives are struggling to the center stage. The latter include among others, narratives from the subaltern land that were hitherto untouched and devalued. These narratives often speak of the 'lived experiences' of the individuals. Such 'lived experiences' seldom are notions of joy and pleasure rather these are made of struggles and bruised knees. These narratives represent the various sites of struggle and modes of resistance. They also speak of the issues and concerns giving rise to such struggles.

Historically (more so in the case of 'male' history) speaking women have been in the periphery. In the case of India, it becomes all the more problematic, as this history does not exclude women only; rather the caste dimension is also of great concern. Thus the 'male' history becomes 'Brahmanical' that includes upper caste women only. Thus, we witness a fragmentation within the hitherto homogenous category of women. Such a fragmentation in the recent times has become too visible to be ignored by the women's movements in India. It has resulted in some way or other the dominance of certain 'voices' thereby excluding most of the others. There is an ongoing struggle by those at the periphery to be included in the core of the movement rather than to be left at the periphery. The Dalit women in the naxalite movement in Bihar represent the same cause and concern. At this point the various understandings of social movement becomes important. Subsequently, the women's movements have been situated in the broad rubric of new social movements.

Broadly speaking, social movement is a collective effort by those who attempt to bring about institutional change. Some of the major definitions of social movement can be briefly discussed. Blumer (1939:199) argues that "Social movements can be viewed as collective enterprises to establish a new order of life. They have their inception in the condition of unrest, and derive their motive power on one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a new scheme or system of living." Manuel Castells (1997:3) defines social movements as "purposive



collective actions whose outcome, in victory or in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of society.”

In an important analysis, Dubet and Thaler (2004:557-573) have contextualised social movements in the rubric of Sociology of collective action. According to them, there are three broad areas exploring social movements; i.e., strategic, political and social structure. The strategic purview “seeks to explain conditions of mobilization” (2004:559). The political purview focuses on “institutionalization of social struggles and their capacity to influence and/or enter the political system” (2004:559). The purview of social structure explores social movements through “structural processes, mechanisms of domination and the shifting identity horizons of culture” (2004:560).

In the same line of argument Gerlach and Hine (1970:xvi-xvii) pointed out five key factors responsible for the emergence of social movement. These five key factors are:

- i) A segmented, usually polycephalous, cellular organization composed of units reticulated by various personal, structural, and ideological ties.
- ii) Face-to-face recruitment by committed individuals using their own pre-existing, significant social relationships.
- iii) Personal commitment generated by an actor or an experience which separates a convert in some significant way from the established order (or his/her previous place in it), identifies him/her with a new set of values, and commits him/her to changed patterns of behavior.
- iv) An ideology codifying values and goals provides a conceptual framework by which all experiences or events relative to these goals may be interpreted. It motivates and provides rationale for envisioned changes along with defining the opposition. It forms the basis for conceptual unification of a segmented network of groups.
- v) Real or perceived opposition from a society at large or from that segment of the established order within which the movement has arisen.

An important paradigm explaining the nature and emergence of social movements is the resource mobilization theory. Its basic lies in the organizational setup and mode of

communication among its elements. Cohen (1985:675) notes the following assumptions of resource mobilization theory:

- i) Social movements must be understood in terms of a conflict model of collective action.
- ii) There is no fundamental difference between institutional and non-institutional collective action.
- iii) Both entail conflicts of interest built into institutionalized power relations.
- iv) Collective action involves the rational pursuit of interests of groups.
- v) Goals and grievances are permanent products of power relations and cannot account for the formation of movements.
- vi) This depends instead on changes in resources, organization and opportunities for collective action.
- vii) Success is evidenced by the recognition of the group as a political actor or by increased material benefits.
- viii) Mobilization involves large-scale, special-purpose, bureaucratic, formal organizations.

### **Social Movement and New Social Movements**

With the end of II World War and a more intense degree of industrialization, a new line of thought emerged. “The world revolution of 1968 shared two fundamental arguments almost everywhere; first, they opposed both the hegemony of the United States and the collusion in this hegemony by the Soviet Union. Secondly, they condemned the Old Left as being ‘not part of the solution but part of the problem’ as there was a massive disillusionment over their actual performance in power” (Wallerstein, 2002:33). It was ‘New’ social movement that manifested itself into women’s movements, student movements; movements centered on ecological concerns, peace initiatives protesting the nuclear armament and other forms of resistance. It was characterized by the participation cutting across class lines and including a significant section of the educated white-collar middle class.

Thus, the 'Old' was seen as class-based, such as trade unions, communist parties, and socialist movements. "Dominant issues of new social movements consist in the concern with a (physical) territory, space of action, or 'life world,' such as the body, health and sexual identity; the neighbourhood, city, and the physical environment; the cultural, ethnic, national, and linguistic heritage and identity; the physical conditions of life, and survival for humankind in general" (Offe, 1985: 828-829). More importantly, the 'New' movements were not directly political rather social, as they had no aim to capture or overthrow the State. "Their common features lay, firstly, in their vigorous rejection of the Old Left's two-step strategy, its internal hierarchies and its priorities – the idea that the needs of women, 'minorities' and the environment were secondary and should be addressed 'after the revolution'. And secondly, they were deeply suspicious of the State and of State-oriented action" (Wallerstein, 2002:35).

It is in this context, arguing that "the idea of a social movement is less a truly analytic category than a category of a historical nature and globalization has shifted the sites of and issues in conflicts considerably", Touraine (2004:717-725) proposed a new definition i.e. "a social movement is the combination of a conflict between organized social adversaries and a common reference by both adversaries to a cultural 'stake' without which they would not confront each other. For if they could situate themselves in completely separate battlefields or areas of discussion, this would, by definition, do away with the conflict and confrontation, as well as with compromise or conflict resolution." More significantly, social movements are central to the sociological analysis (Touraine, 1985:749-816).

Scott (1990:30) has summarized the characteristics of new social movement organization as follows:

- i) locally based, or centered on small groups;
- ii) organized around specific, often local issues;
- iii) characterized by a cycle of social movement activity and mobilization, i.e. vacillation between periods of high and low activity (the latter often taking a form of a disbandment, temporarily or permanently, of the organization);

- iv) where the movement constructs the organizations which bridge periods of high activity they tend to feature fluid hierarchies and loose systems of authority; and
- v) shifting membership and fluctuating numbers.

The new areas of concern and debates of the 'New' social movements are pointed out by Beuchelr (1995:447). These are:

- i) The first concerns the meaning and validity of designating certain movements as new and others (by implication) as old.
- ii) The second debate involves whether new social movements are primarily or exclusively a defensive, reactive response to larger social forces or whether they can exhibit a proactive and progressive nature as well.
- iii) The third debate concerns the distinction between political and cultural movements and whether the more culturally oriented new social movements are inherently apolitical.
- iv) The fourth involves the social base of the new social movements and whether this base can be defined in terms of social class.

Table A at next page reflects the comparative perspective on the nature and genesis of resource mobilization and new social movement theories.

Table A: Resource Mobilization and New Social Movement Theories:

Major Theoretical Points and Concepts

Issues	Resource Mobilization	New Social Movement
Why do social movement emerge?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Resources become available – political opportunities are a resource</li> <li>ii) Grievances are pre-existing</li> <li>iii) Organizations can be co-opted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Cultural changes lead to dissatisfaction with lifestyle.</li> <li>ii) Experienced predominantly in a leisure class.</li> </ul>
Foundation (building blocks) of the movement	Organizations – pre-existing and emerging	Communities and networks where activist identities develop
Why do people participate in movements?	People are rational actors and become involved because they have something to gain – that is, adherents or beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) People seek to change quality of life</li> <li>ii) Activism becomes a part of identity and everyday life – that is, friendships</li> </ul>
Core concepts of the movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Pre-existing organizations (such as communication networks)</li> <li>ii) Organizations</li> <li>iii) Resources</li> <li>iv) Political opportunities</li> <li>v) Rational actors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Politicization of everyday life</li> <li>ii) Activist or collectivist identities</li> <li>iii) Social movement communities</li> </ul>

Source: Reger and Dugan, (2001:337).

**New Social Movements and Women's Movements**

The women's movements across world were situated in the broad framework of 'New' movement briefly discussed above. The issues of participation are elaborated by West and Blumberg (1990:13) such as i) those directly linked to economic survival; ii) those related to nationalist and racial/ethnic struggles; iii) those addressing broad humanistic/nurturing problems; and iv) those identified in different eras as 'women's

rights' issues." Additively Chafetz and Dworkin (1986:48) argue that women's movements are characterized by the "conscious and collective revolt on behalf of women, defined as a general category with a set of problems and needs specific to themselves, which in turn are created by a socio-cultural system that categorically disadvantages them relative to men."

According to Omvedt (1978:372), "Women's movements are those which arise as conscious, organized efforts of women (often supported by men) to change this system of economic, political and cultural inequality. While women individually struggle against their subordinate position under many conditions, such organized movements have only arisen with the development of capitalism and imperialism, as part of efforts to carry through the democratic revolution. Women's equality movements aim at attaining an equally place for women in social structure whereas women's liberation movements challenge the sexual division of labour itself."

There are at least two complementary perspectives in which the basic tenets of the above definitions can be discussed. The first one is the labeling approach thereby exploring the notions of liberal and radical feminisms among other labels of feminist movement. The other approach is to trace the history in often manifested in 'waves' of feminism. There are various strands of theories related to feminism. Significant among these are feminist liberalism, feminist essentialism, feminist Marxism, feminist socialism and feminist postmodernism. A very brief description of each follows.

The feminist liberalism is the most basic and classical theory of not only Western feminism but also of non-western feminism. Its basic tenet rests on the ability of State to formulate such laws which aims at women's liberation. Thus, the struggle against gender discrimination is through legislative measures - equality through law. This was the case with the social reformers in the colonial period as well as post independence period in India. In contrast, the radical feminism sees the exploitation of women in the existence of patriarchy. Broadly understood, patriarchy is the system operating through women-oppressive social, economic and political institutions. Radical feminism aims at liberating

women through radical steps like complete denial of existence and viability of male even in the sexual domain. It focuses on the issues of violence affecting women.

The feminist essentialism on the other hand accepts the basic duality between male and female and exhorts the latter to maintain the same. It is like celebration of the feminine. The biological capacity of 'reproduction' is attached to the 'reproduction in nature' and thus the nature and the feminine become synonymous to each other. The struggle for land, water and eco feminist movements roughly correspond to such theoretical framework.

The socialist and Marxist feminism both see the subjugation of women as the result of non-ownership of mode of production. Here the categories of both class (economic) and gender (social) intermesh with each other. It is more pronounced in the class-based capitalistic system. Thus, it is only through addressing the economic concerns of the women and reevaluating the women's unpaid work in the family setting, the liberation of women can take place. However, there is a basic difference between Marxist and Socialist feminism. Whereas the former sees the liberation of women only after the revolution the latter focuses on the women's liberation as the part and parcel of the revolution.

Last but not the least, feminist postmodernism accepts the multiplicity of feminine identities based on the specific socio-historical circumstance. It accepts that the issues faced by the women world over are not common, rather social/primordial identities of race and caste along with other factors like region and class also affect these experiences. The result is the proliferation of feminine voices across globe and mutual understanding among them. In other words, it is also manifested as multicultural or global feminism.

A brief historical overview of 'waves' of feminism or feminist movements is now discussed. It was in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States and Europe that the First-wave feminism arose. It was the period of industrial society and liberal Politics. The earliest manifestation of the first-wave feminism was the socialist feminism. It focused on equal opportunities as well as equal access to it for the women. The second-

wave feminism was more a fallout of various events unfolding in the 1960s to 1970s in postwar Western welfare societies. It was the time when the New Left was emerging as a strong force thereby redefining the boundaries. In the due process many other groups like Blacks and homosexuals also raised their concerns. It was concerned with radical voices of women's empowerment and differential rights.

The most visible and audible voice was that of Black feminism. Helen and Hamer (2001:2) delineated the core RBF (revolutionary/radical Black feminism) tenets noting that "We understand RBF as a set of systematically related principles designed to explain the lived experiences of Black women. The perspective is revolutionary in its underlying assumption that the dominant societal structures and ideologies must be transformed to eradicate oppression. The core RBF tenets are: i) Revolutionary vision is dynamic; ii) racial, gender, and sexual oppression are reconfigured within periods of capitalist restructuring; iii) Black women's oppression consists of two recursive components: structure and ideology; and iv) there is a dialectical link between theory and practice."

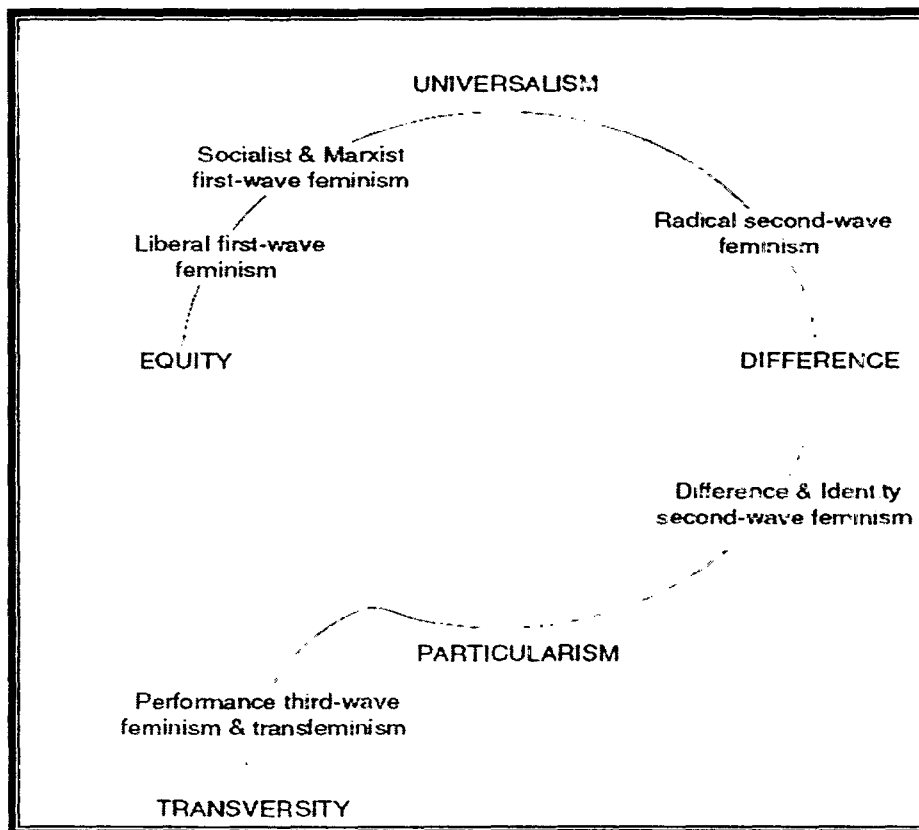
The third-wave feminism was the product of fissures within the second-wave from the mid 1990s. These were primarily by the feminists from the postcolonial countries. Although it became visible in the era of globalisation and the hegemony of capitalism, yet the roots can be traced from the 1970s itself. It has been noted that "In the 1970s, clashes occurred among nationally or regionally framed feminisms, mainly due to disagreements between Western feminists, who tended to emphasize women's need for legal equality and sexual autonomy, and Third World feminists, who tended to emphasize imperialism and underdevelopment as obstacles to women's advancement. These arguments were especially noticeable at the first UN Conference on Women, which took place in Mexico City in 1975, and especially at the second conference, which took place in Copenhagen in 1980" (Moghadam, 2000:61).

In the third-wave feminism, the universal sisterhood was effectively challenged by the resultant poverty and unemployment of women in the third world countries. More importantly, theoretically the multiplicity and the diversity of the women's movement was rallying cry of the current form of feminist movement. The Figure 1 at next page



presents the historicity as well as the issues addressed by the various ‘waves’ of feminism across world.

Figure 1: Feminist Positions: From Equity to Transversity



Source: Three Waves of Feminism [Online]  
 Available at: [www.sagepub.com/upm-data/6236\\_Chapter\\_1\\_Krolokke\\_2nd\\_Rev\\_Final\\_Pdf.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/6236_Chapter_1_Krolokke_2nd_Rev_Final_Pdf.pdf)

### Social Movements in India

In the context of India, the ‘old’ movements are peasant movements and agrarian struggles; post-history and peasant consciousness, subaltern studies; tribal movements; and workers’ movements. The ‘New’ social movements include the ecology movement; women’s movements; Dalit movement; and the farmer’s movement. The exclusionist movements are the subnationalist and autonomy movements (Singh, 2001:227-263). According to Rao (1978:2) “Social movement is an organized attempt on the part of a section of society to bring about either partial or total change in society through collective

mobilization based on ideology.” Four aspects of social movements have been generally stressed:

- i) Organizational structure, i.e. recruitment, commitment and leadership;
- ii) Orientation of change, i.e. movement as an instrument of change;
- iii) Collective mobilization and means employed; and
- iv) Ideology or normative aspect which binds its members together;

The first three aspects distinguish social movements from other related phenomena. Additively, “While locus provides the substantive aspect, the criteria of ideology and consequences provide the analytical foci of a movement” (Rao, 1978:3). Three structural changes can take place due to social movement which are i) Reform; ii) Transformative; and iii) Revolution (Rao, 1978:12). Ghanshyam Shah (1977:63-64) classified movements as in the context of changes in political system:

- i) Revolt: It challenges the political authority and subsequently struggles to overthrow it;
- ii) Rebellion: It is also an attack on the political authority yet it does aim to capture State power;
- iii) Reform: It aims at reordering the elements of society within the framework of existing structure; and
- iv) Revolution: It is an organized attempt by the section of society to replace the existing authority by an alternative social order.

For Mukherji (1977:38) the study of social movements and social change are premised on the following:

- i) Social movements are essentially related to social change and therefore to the social structure. This does not mean that a social movement is a necessary condition of social change, on the contrary, social change can take place independently of social movements through the operation of impersonal forces and factors. Nor does it mean that it is invariably change-promoting, it can be, equally, change resisting.
- ii) Social movements are a product of the social structure and hence emerges out of certain conditions in the social structure.

- iii) Social movements have consequences for the social structure of which they are the products.
- iv) Social movements themselves have a recognizable structure in terms of which they are rendered functional relative to their goals.

Further, the changes in the context of society are categorized as following (Mukherji, (1977:43):

- i) Accumulative: changes occurring within the system;
- ii) Alterative: changes of the system; and
- iii) Transformative: creation of additional structures or displacement of existing ones without any replacement.

In an attempt to interlink (rather to oppose) the notions of mobilization and institutionalization in social movement, Oommen (1990:145-156) observes that “movements are deliberately initiated and guided collective mobilizations to bring about relatively rapid social transformation. Often the organizational core of the movement provides the nucleus of the institution. In the process of the institutionalization of a movement, the characteristic activity of the movement, namely mobilization, gets relegated to the background and becomes less salient. But the process of institutionalization carries with it the seeds of movement.” The Table B at next page reflects the above stated proposition.

Table B: Characteristics of Different Aspects of Movements at the Two Phases

<b>Aspects of Movement</b>	<b>Mobilisational Phase</b>	<b>Institutionalization Phase</b>
Ideology	Very important, emphasis on mass appeal, centers on issues of deprivation, stress on collective participation.	Not so significant, emphasis on translating movement ideology into specific programmes, stress on implementation.
Organisation	Embryonic and rudimentary, leader-follower relationship emphatic. Stress on functioning as a propaganda vehicle, emphasis on martyrdom.	Crystallised and complex, leader-follower relationship replaced by 'professional-client' relations, operate as interest groups, stress on administration of justice.
Strategy and tactics	Stress on collective actions, (agitations, strikes, <i>gheraos</i> , <i>satyagrahas</i> , demonstrations, etc.); emphasis on propaganda and communication of ideology to sensitise participants to their rights.	Interest articulation (bargaining, submission of memoranda, petition, lobbying for legislation) emphasis on the 'here and now' goal, namely, welfare of participants.
Leadership	Professional revolutionary (typical roles: prophet, charismatic hero, demagogue).	Institutional entrepreneur (typical roles: manager, bureaucrat, bargainer, legalist).
Membership	Inclusive, expansive, undefined.	Exclusive and defined, clearer boundary demarcation.

Source: Oommen, (1990:154).

At other place while commenting on the relation between violence and social movements Oommen (2005:284-285) analyses social movements as "those purposive collective mobilizations, which are informed by an ideology to promote change in any direction,

using any means – violent or non-violent – and which function within at least an elementary organizational framework. A social movement is purposive in that it is different from elementary collective behaviour such as panic response or crowd behaviour which does not have an ideology. While violence is not desirable because its social cost is very high, many social movements invoke violence to achieve their goals.”

Singh (2001:36) distinguishes between riot, rebellion and revolution on one hand and social movements on the other. The former group involves violence whereas it may not be the case with latter. Further he says “Social movements are characterized by the presence of an ideology shared by the participants, a strategy employed to achieve the objectives, an organizational structure with a clear system of leadership and communication, an adversary, mobilization against the adversary and finally, the impact they have on the society” (2001:37).

### **Women’s Movements in India: ‘Inclusion’ and ‘Exclusion’ of ‘Woman’**

The women’s movements in India are the product of the specific socio-cultural structures of Indian society. As argued by Shahani and Ghosh (2000), “The women’s movement of the 70s was possible because it had not segregated itself from other struggles. It was not a coincidence that trade unionism, working class struggles, teachers’ and students’ protests, organisations for the protection of democratic rights, as well as women’s activism gathered momentum during this period. Like its western counterpart, the women’s movement in India was an integral part and an inevitable product of a world and a time when, at various individual and organisational levels, the status quo was being challenged. It was the backlash to various repressions, notably the emergency, that led to political and cultural activism, and that made possible a spirit of collectivity wherein class struggle and gender issues could find common cause. It was mainly the affected yet affecting middle class that was seen to activate unions and organizations.”

A brief analysis of the opening sentence of above paragraph reveals not less than four critical issues pertinent not only to the present study rather these transcends the boundaries of this study and can be generalized as issues being faced by the women’s movements in India at the macro level. These issues are notion of ‘woman’; peripheral

protests struggling for space in the presence (or dominance) of 'single' form of movement (singularity of movement rather than multiplicity of women's movements); specific socio-cultural structures and lastly is the slippery notion of Indian society.

We can begin our discussion with what constitutes a woman. Can one arrive at an universal definition of woman based on the certain attributes? What and how these attributes will be judged and decided to be a part of woman as such? Such questions are important as it were such attributes that were questioned by the women's movements in India and else where in world. It has been observed that "In India a woman's innate power lies in her ability to enrich and sustain the family; thus while she is the protective mother figure, the submissive and fertile wife and the obedient daughter, she is also the one who mediates, negotiates and often arbitrates with in the kin group. In the caste-based Hindu system where endogamy and exogamy determine marriage and commensal relations, the entire kin group has a stake in feminine chastity" (Karlekar, 1995:49).

Kumkum Roy (1996:160-161) while 'Unraveling the Kamasutra' points out the multiple facets of Hindu wife's subordination. The Hindu wife "was expected to treat her husband as a god, look after the household, maintain a garden, serve her husband by dressing for him, cooking according to his tastes, sleeping only after he had slept, waking before him, performing rituals for his welfare, seeking his permission before going out, avoiding the company of 'disrespectable' (and possibly threatening) women including mendicants, renouncers of the world, witches, fortunetellers, and unchaste women. The dependence of wife was fore-grounded particularly in the context of polygeny."

Such notions of woman as 'docile, passive, domestic and repository of sexual and social reproduction' was questioned not only by the contemporary women's movements rather the process began a long time back under the rubric of reform movement in the colonial India (Chatterjee, 1980:241-254; Crawford, 1980:73-92; Sarkar, 1995:1). "In fifty years of the demand for social reform, one could identify two different phases. In the first phase, social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy identified the gross social evils that thwarted women's freedom and made a strong plea for legal reform. In the second phase, great stress was laid education of women" (Desai, 1986:290). In due process the

reformers were “to some extent, influenced by Christian missionaries, European travelers and British administrators who were all critical the position and treatment of women in Indian society” (Basu, 1995:2).

However, a poignant critique against them is the omission (consciously?) by them to make the woman fully independent of the traditional clutches. It has been pointed out that “In their own limited way these efforts at reform succeeded in bringing about some legal and social changes that made inroads into improving the position of women in Indian society. However, the broadly accepted critique of these efforts by feminist scholars is that they continued to construct women as primarily wives and mothers and also failed to include their voices, their subjectivities and agencies” (Phadke, 2000). Additively, social reform movement had “narrow social base, constituting primarily the upper classes and the burgeoning, western-educated Indian middle classes who grew under the aegis of British colonial rule and who were in important ways beneficiaries of British rule” (Raman, 2006:6).

The notion of ‘passive’ and ‘domesticity of women’ was further unsettled by the Gandhian initiatives. It was primarily through women’s participation in freedom struggle (Chattopadhyaya, (1939); Basu, 1995:2; Sahgal, 1995:873-874; Jones, 1996:145-154). Gandhi effectively exhorted the feminine principles of Indian woman and thus added vigour to the women’s liberation process. Basu (1995:2) argues that “While on the one hand women were fighting for their rights and trying to improve their status through education and social reform, the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi in India changed the political scenario. He claimed that women were better than men in waging non-violent passive resistance because they had a greater capacity for self-sacrifice and endurance; were less self-seeking and had more moral courage.”

With India achieving freedom and adopting the socialist modal of economy and most importantly declaring her as a secular entity, things were thought to take a radical shift. In the context of women, adult franchise along with citizenship was characterized by shift from ‘subject’ to ‘citizen’. It was the emergence of ‘new’ woman ‘modern’ and ‘secular’. However the ‘Sita’ syndrome was very much visible as Roy (2001) has argued that “The

Indian nationalists thus conceived an 'Indian' past 'a body of tradition' within which the 'new' 'Indian' 'woman' was inscribed as the bearer of a pristine and unsullied national past. This woman was 'new' because she was emancipated. Her emancipation emanated from her reinscribed femininity, her markers of 'tradition', and her capacity to purge while she herself remained untainted. While conquerors mauled the body politic, she, in her sacrosanct femininity, remained untarnished and sovereign in spirit, and in her, survived the nation."

The notion of woman responsible for 'reproduction' has again led to thematic similarity of 'reproducing' not only primordial identities reflected in caste and communities but also nationhood more specifically Hindu nationhood. Broadly speaking nation is a cultural entity and State is a political unit. Problem arises when the dominant force tries to merge these into one entity called nationhood as can be seen by the right wing in the Indian context. Oommen (2005:130-134) has extensively commented on the conceptualization of Hindu identity. According to him, there are three different yet interlinked premises on which Hindu identity is built. "The first conceptualization is a very generic one which is that Hindus are the original and obvious inhabitants of Hindustan, that is, India. The second is the restrictive and exclusionist one wherein Hindus consist only of upper castes – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas – of Arya Bhumi, that is, north India. According to the third conceptualization Hindus are those who follow the religions of Indic origin including Adivasis, Dalits, Dravidians, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs." Any 'reproduction' of Hindu nationhood by the women ('upper caste Hindu') has to be seen in this context.

The assertion of Hindu nationhood goes back to the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century during freedom struggle. The struggle for freedom also gave birth to the religious nationalism whereby Hindu community was anchored in India and non-Hindus (primarily Muslim) were to be settled in Pakistan. Within the nationalist struggle, there was differentiation between the two communities. The underlying principle was the formation of both Hindu and Muslim nationhood. In this context Raman (2006:8-9) argues that "...gender became an important tool in both sharpening Hindu identity and simultaneously sharpening the divisions among and between Hindus and Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs. Thus integral



to this new Hindu identity was an othering of both Muslims and Islam. The construction of the new Hindu man and woman was extremely important in the task of consolidating Hindu identity and in militant nationalist struggle.”

As a consequence of such ‘feminine principles of nationhood’, the ‘woman’ is further fragmented into upper/lower caste woman and ‘our’ and ‘their’ woman representing different (most often conflictual) and religious identities. The former was visible during the anti-Mandal agitations characterized by upper caste women taking the streets opposing it (Parthasarathy, 2006). The latter engulfed the riots in post 1990s like Hindu-Muslim riots after Babri Masjid demolition (Sarkar, 1991; Sethi, 2002; Sarkar, 2001:268-290), Mumbai riots in 1992-93 (Banerjee, 1995:216-32; Banerjee, 1996:1213-1225) and Gujarat riots in February 2002 (Pati, 2003:6-8; Ahmad, 2004).

The radical and violent process of ‘othering’ of women by Hindu ‘women’ during Ram Janmabhoomi movement of the RSS-VHP-BJP in the late 1990s “had the effect of breaching the association of women with pacifism and jolting the political activists as well as the academicians alike from an easy complacency about the democratic and feminist potential of women” (Sethi, 2002). Thus the sites of struggle shift from the issues affecting the women as a category to the importance of issue for the nation. This shift has immense implications (mostly negative) for the women’s movements (Butalia, 2001b:99-114). The legacy of women’s movements and the struggles of many activists are labeled as ‘inspired by the West’ in one stroke. Subsequently, ‘universal sisterhood’ becomes ‘threat to national identity’ and becomes a potent tool for revivalism.

Some other forms of fragmentation are class, region (urban and rural), language, and level of education among others. Thus, the notion of woman is important for our discussion. We have already witnessed the academic debates centered on India/*Bharat* dichotomy reflecting fractured notion of nation. Additively, the issues are further fragmented into urban and rural issues, economic and social issues, issue of political participation (macro) vs./and participation in the decision making process at the household level (micro) and similar other heuristic categories. Though they overlap with each other, yet the demarcation becomes very much clear as evident in the proliferation

of groups that are working in women's movements. Such groups can be autonomous women's groups in the 1970s-1980s (Patel, 1988:250) and the NGOisation of these in post 1990s (Krishnaraj, 2003:4536). The situation becomes all the more fluid as we seldom come across organizational uniformity among the various groups addressing women's issues. The leadership as well as the support structure also varies. Not only the issues are different but also the "kind of power and resources that the Indian women's movement has utilized in the struggle to bring attention to women's subordination" reflects multiple strategies (Kazenstein, 1989:53-71).

Related to the multiplicity of the issues and their respective importance to the population concerned is another issue of uniqueness of the situations in which the issues of violence are experienced. It again brings us back to the 'woman' and historical settings of 'woman'. The experiences of 'purity and pollution' along with violence are mediated through cultural norms and the immediate settings (Mehrotra, 2002:64). The latter may include primordial identities and the support structure to which one has access. Women experience the overarching issue of violence differently. All the more there are various understandings of violence itself (Patel, 1998:198-207). It is beyond debate that if the educated urban middle class women faced violence mediated through dowry (Ghadially and Kumar, 1988:167-177; Kumar, 1989:22; Kishwar, 2001) and domestic violence (Agnes, 1988:151) on one hand, then their 'universal sisters' having lower caste rural preliterate background were facing sexploitation and discrimination based on caste discrimination (Malik, 1999:323).

Here sociological analysis of inter-linkages between caste and gender along with patriarchy mediated through respective caste and religious community are of prime importance (Rege, 1998:47-52; Rege, 2000; Thorat, 2001; Chakravarti, 2003:142-143). Thus the unit of analysis is the way patriarchy operates within the caste domain. Interlinked with it is the 'voices' of Dalit women who are 'Dalits among the Dalits' (Guru, 2003:80-85). At this place the notion of 'Brahmanic patriarchy' can be explored. It is a concept that has been used for the first time in Indian scholarly literature by the historian Uma Chakravarty. A crucial aspect of brahmanic patriarchy was linkage to caste

hierarchy and differential impacts on women at different levels in the caste hierarchy (Omvedt, 2000).

Additively, Rege (2000) has attempted to merge the issues of sexuality and violence within the framework of Dalit women discourse. According to her, “DFS (Dalit Feminist Stand) argues that a thorough going analysis of the material basis of patriarchy, requires that the differential access to and control over labour, sexuality, and reproduction by castes, classes and communities be brought to centre. That, in the absence of such a critiques of brahmanical, class-based hetro-patriarchies, the political edge of sexual politics is lost. No politics committed to redistribution in a caste-based society can overlook sexual politics. It is therefore important to revision it rather than give it up or pose the upper caste women alone as the only needy constituents of such a politics” (Rege, 2000). Thus, the issues of violence are mediated through the cultural categories rather than as a universal form of gender discrimination. Not only the issues are important rather there mediation through categories like what constitutes a woman, presence of multiple ‘voices’ and the access to the resources deeply influence the nature and viability of women’s movements in India.

The sexuality of woman becomes the struggle site for biomedical intervention sometimes for population control but most of the time for experimentation of new drugs. Broadly understood, “Sexuality is a shorthand tem for all those issues that specifically and almost exclusively affect women; practices which deprive women of control of their bodies and put them in the service of men, either particular men or men in general. Sexuality issues conclude rape and other forms of sexual violence, incest, pornography and other sado-masochistic representations of the female body in full gamut of the media, compulsory heterosexuality, gynaecological practices and so on” (Bulbeck, 1990:7).

In such complex and plural realities, the backlashes against Indian women’s movements were also of varied colours. The protests against domestic violence are labeled as ‘those breaking the families’; support for succession rights to women become ‘questioning the marriage and family obligations’; those at the periphery fighting for share in resources is labeled ‘disturbing the equilibrium of social order’; and most importantly incidents of

communal violence targeting women of particular community (read minority) is supported and never condemned in the name of 'preserving nationhood and displaying patriotism'. It also reflects that the relevance of issue depends on the concrete socio-historical situation of the individual and collectivity.

Another issue of prime concern is the realization (brushed away rather than to be understood as manifestation of 'multiple identities') of nature and singularity of women's movements. Do we have a singular women's movement addressing the prime concerns of all the women across region, caste, class and other parameters or local specificities give birth to their own form of resistance? How we are going to address this situation where we have not only multiple issues but also the importance of respective issue varies depending on the very parameters that fragment the notion of 'woman.'

Such issues were raised more than a decade back as pointed out by Illina Sen that "Given the diversity of cultures and the complexities of caste and class among women in India, can we actually speak of an overarching women's movement in the country? Or is it that there are a number of fragmented campaigns which do not add up to a movement? How many of these campaigns are urban, middle class and how many rural? Equally how do we define a 'women's' movement: is it one in which only women participate? Or one which raise only women specific issues? How then do we look at women's participation in 'broader mass movements?'" (Sen, 1990:3).

Thus what emerges is not a unified single cosmology of women's movement as such but a collection of issue-based protests along with the 'dominant' voice in the center. Moreover, neither can exist on its own rather they are complementary in nature. However, such a fragmentation does not points to the weakness of the feminist movement rather it has been a hallmark of the movement across globe. The changing times and he emergence of third 'wave' of feminism has made us realize that "The strength of feminism lies in its ability not to ape the unitary categories and Archimedean points of male theory, philosophy and politics; not to search for the one position from which the 'truth' of all women can be seen, nor the one lever that will transform the whole female

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world, but to abandon the privileges of hierarchies for the multiple connections of the web and the quilt” (Bulbeck, 1990:154).

### **Gendering Naxalite Movement in Bihar**

The naxalite movement can be broadly understood in the Marxist framework of movement and mobilization. According to the Marxists perspective, social movements are the product of different (most often contradictory) class interests in society. It leads to the contradiction in the mode of production. This process is characterized by violence and is aimed at new social order based on the equal access to the resources important for survival. The following Table C interlinks the naxalite movement within the broad paradigm of social movement.

Table C: Locating Naxalite Movement in the Social Movement Paradigm

	Goals of Mobilizations for Collective Action Directed Towards:	
	Intra Systematic Change	System Change
	Change Promoting/Change Resisting	Change Promoting/Change Resisting
	A	B'
Institutional Means	Quasi movements (collective protests, strikes)	Quasi movement to social movement (transitional) (union claims for managerial powers)
	B*	C
Institutional and non- Institutional Means	Quasi movements (tebhaga movement)	Social movements and revolutionary movements (Sarvodaya and Naxalbari movements, (Russian, Chinese revolutions)

Source: Mukherji, (1977:51).

It will be an important exercise at this stage to briefly discuss the various agrarian classes in the Indian context. It is argued here that such a classification is equally applicable to the agrarian scenario in Bihar. Desai (1986:22) classified the Indian agrarian scene into the following:

- i) Rich farmers and landlords comprising 7 percent of the population possess 50 percent of total land, owning 15 acres and more;
- ii) Middle farmers possess 30 percent of total land, constitute 19 percent of the population, owning between 5 to 15 acres;
- iii) Poor farmers owning between 1 to 5 acres constitute 30 percent of the population, possess 17 percent of the total land; and
- iv) Agricultural labourers owning less than one acre possesses 2 percent of the total land, constitute 44 percent of the rural population.

From the above classification, it becomes clear that the landless agricultural labourer class is mainly constituted by the Dalit castes. Further expanding on elements of Dalit castes, Oommen (2005:220) comments that “the traditionally unprivileged social categories in India are i) the Scheduled Castes (16%), the ‘untouchables’ who were assigned the lowest status in the Hindu caste hierarchy; ii) the Scheduled Tribes (8%), strictly speaking not part of the Hindu caste hierarchy but being early settlers in the hilly and forest tracts were socio-economically backward; and iii) the Other Backward Classes (50%), the peasantry and the artisan groups, falling between the Scheduled Castes and the upper caste Hindus. In social discourses in contemporary India these three social blocks are together labeled *dalit bahujans* (oppressed masses).

Additively, a significant point is that those who participate in the naxalite movement are from the same Dalit castes group. Thus, the inter-linkages between struggling for land rights and participating in the naxalite activities become clear. It has been documented that economic issues manifested in land and wages have been the springboard of naxalite movement. The mobilization of landless agricultural labourers along with other lower classes in the broad framework of naxalite movement is reflected in the Table D at next page.

Table D: Identities of Agrarian Categories and the Types of Mobilizations

Category	Status Identity	Class Identity	Ideological Identity	Size of Actual or potential Participants	Issues	Type of Mobilization
1.	Low caste	Proletariat	Leftist	Substantial	Land to tiller, better working conditions	Radical
2.	Low caste	Middle peasants	Leftist/Centrist	A few	Better subsidies, better prices	Reformist
3.	Middle caste	Proletariat	Leftist	Substantial	Land to tiller, better working conditions	Radical
4.	Middle caste	Middle peasant	Leftist/Centrist	Substantial	Better subsidies, better prices	Radical
5.	Middle caste	Landlord/rich farmer	Rightist/Centrist	A few, but likely to be supported by middle peasantry	Better subsidies, better prices, low wages for labour	Reformist for self; conservative for workers
6.	High caste	Proletariat	Leftist	A handful	Land to tiller, better working conditions	Radical
7.	High caste	Middle peasant	Leftist/Centrist	Substantial	Better subsidies, better prices	Reformist
8.	High caste	Landlord/rich farmer		Substantial	Better subsidies, better prices, low wages for labour	Reformist for self; conservative for workers

Source: Oommen, (1995:139).

Regarding the nature of agrarian structure in Bihar, Prasad (1974:1305) comments, “The bulk of the rural poor happen to be the semi-proletariat of the agricultural sector. The characteristic feature of this setup which we may call semi-feudal is that an indissoluble bond between the semi-proletariat and his overlord is maintained by resort to usury.” In

all matters, the upper caste zamindar is also regarded as *Malik* by its *Praja* i.e. lower castes working as tenants or landless agricultural labourers working in the formers' land (Roy, 1970:231). The upper castes i.e. Brahman, Bhumi-har and Rajput own more than two third of the total land and as the consequence the lower castes have been reduced to the category of tenants, agricultural labourer and in most cases bonded labourer (Das, 1979:3-29; Bharti, 1990:2124-2125; Brass, 1999:110-130; Chakravarti, 2001:282-286).

To make the scenario more exploitative, the newly emerged kulak class of backward castes like Yadav, Kurmi and Koeri are equally ruthless while dealing with Dalit agricultural labourers (Battacharya, 1986:47-55; Desai, 1986:23-28; Singh, 1986:55; Kohli, 1990:208-209; Patnaik, 1990; Prasad, 1979:481; Prasad, 1980:215; Prasad, 1991:1923; Louis, 2003:51). The failures of *Bhoodan - Gramdan* movement (Jannuzi, 1974:100; Rasul, 1974:62-63; Oommen, 1984:308; Battacharya, 1986:26) along with State enacted land reform measures (Jannuzi, 1974:85; Prasad, 2001:81; Singh, 2005:27-28; Kumar, 2003:4978) have been held responsible for such a dismal situation.

Along with the land owning disparity the other characteristic of agrarian structure in Bihar important for our study is the issue of Dalit women's dignity or '*izzat*' and incidents of violence on her. The former is manifested in the sexploitation of the Dalit women agricultural labourers. The traditional 'ritually' sanctioned form includes *Dola Pratha* (Maheshwar, 1992:8-10; 1997:35-39) and sexual advances by the landed gentry during Holi festival. Then there are various incidents of rape and molestation (Mukherjee and Yadav, 1982:122). The emergence of naxalite movement struggling for Dalit's rights (Sinha, 1978:90; Das, 1979:154-163; Yadav and Mukherjee, 1980; Bhatia, 2005:1536; Mohanty, 2006:3163) has been retaliated by massacres committed by landed gentry (Bhatia, 1997:3242; Chaudhuri, 1997; Banerji, 1998; Chaudhuri, 1999; Sinha and Sinha, 2001:4096; Louis, 2002:234; Chaudhary, 2005:139). In such incidents also, Dalit women are worst sufferers (Bihar PUCL, 2001; Sinha and Sinha, 2001:4096; Chaudhary, 2005:133-144; Sahar, 2006:43-47).



## **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

From the above brief description there are broad two issues that affect Dalit women in particular. The first one is land and the second one that is all the more important is violence and violated dignity. It is not that these issues do not concern the Dalit men yet it can be argued that "Grievances are gendered to the extent that women and men share some common concerns but women bring to the table an additional set of concerns. These demands are interwoven with demands for credits and assets to improve their productive capacities as economic actors. As women become more active, often as a requisite to their participation, gender relations within communities are also challenged in this wide gamut of issues" (Purushothaman, 1999:132-133).

In participating in the naxalite movement, women resist the sexploitation and patriarchy that is limiting their optimum functionalities. In this context, Rajan (2000:154) argues that "Resistance is a term that has a range of meanings, from describing an intransigent attitude or behaviour; a deliberate course of oppositional action; a 'natural' counter-force to an organized collective movement for change ('activism') by individuals and people subjected to various kinds of domination. It is metonymous with terms like subversion, transgression, refusal, disobedience, insurgency. Increasingly (any) 'agency' is treated as synonymous with resistant agency. It is not (yet) a revolutionary term since, as we notice, it is a praxis that is reactive to domination rather than one that initiates a transformation."

It has been discussed in the foregone pages that people's (in this context, women) experiences are mediated through their respective primordial identities as well as their access to resources to power. At the same time it has been outlined that throughout the women's movements in India, its respective units have maintained their autonomy along with sharing the broad tenets of the women's liberation and empowerment. We have also discussed that to achieve it, these have utilized different strategies and resources at their disposal.

In this context, the present study thus analyses the participation of women in the naxalite movement in Bihar as a strategy of their empowerment and liberation from gender

exploitation along with the patriarchy operating within the family and community. It forms the basic tenet of what the study means by gendering the naxalite movement. Such mode of resistance encounters different set of oppression and sites yet share the platform of women's movements. The basic issues of participation are that of equal land rights and recourse to retaliation in cases of violation of dignity and violence. The various slippery categories of caste along with class are of prime importance in our study.

Similarly, the 'othering' of Dalit women anchored in the caste system based social order is also witnessed in the Belchhi massacre in 1977. The Belchhi massacre where the backward caste burnt 11 lower caste persons alive in a way started a chain of massacres in Bihar. It is important to note here that "When Sindhwa (Harijan leader) was taken out to be killed and burnt, it was the kurmi (backward caste kulak) women and children who had arranged the pyre. Normally, would women come out of their houses in a place where bullets have been flying continuously for six hours? The energetic promptness of the women and the children in arranging the pyre only shows their casteist frenzy" (Ranjan, 1978:34). Other instances of the 'othering' of Dalit women are ritually sanctioned sexual exploitation in *Dola Pratha* and regular incidents of molestation. Then there are killings in massacres and 'stray' incidents.

Thus, the aim of the study is to locate women in the naxalite movement in Bihar. It is situated in the broad framework of women's movements in India that aims at emancipation of women from all forms of inequality primarily manifested in gender discrimination. The broad objectives of the study are to explore the trajectory of women's social movements in India; delineate the issues of mobilization in the due process; locate the sites of struggle giving rise to naxalite movement in Bihar; analyze various reasons of gendering naxalite movement in Bihar; and nature and viability of gendering naxalite movement in Bihar.

There are various questions to be addressed at this place. Some of these are how the study locates women in the naxalite movement in Bihar? How the study analyses the impacts of naxalite movement on women in Bihar? How the study explores life histories of those who participate in naxalite movement in Bihar? Most importantly, how to interlink

women's social movements in India at macro level and women who are participating in naxalite movement in Bihar at micro level?

At this place it can be argued that "Gender ideologies may shape social movements in profound ways, deeply affecting the discourses, objectives, tactics and outcomes of social movements. Within the same movement, women may be organized and mobilized differently from men. Recruitment methods, leadership roles and management styles may exhibit gender patterning. Gender roles, relations and ideologies may shape political opportunities; opportunities may exist for men but not for women, who may be less mobile or less able to respond to opportunities due to their greater involvement in family roles" (Moghadam, 2000:60).

Briefly responding to the above questions, the present study locates women in the naxalite movement in Bihar through their effective participation in the same. The manifestations of such participation are the militant struggle waged against the feudal elements. The issue of dignity of Dalit women is at the core of assessing the impacts of naxalite movement. There are hundreds of lives lost and many more wounded in the struggle, a brief sketch of some of these throw light on the process of participation in the naxalite movement. Most importantly, the macro level women's movements are addressing the issues at stake in a given socio-structural dimension, in the same way Dalit women in Bihar are responding and effectively countering the threats to dignified life and survival in their own context. The feudal violence is countered not only through violence rather it also take a democratic discourse manifested in CPI(ML) Liberation's frontal organization All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA).

Coming to the methodological issues, the study is based primarily on secondary data. It is supplemented by the primary data collected by the researcher while collecting local literature. It was during the month of September 2006 that the researcher was in the 'field' i.e. Bihar the loci of the study. The primary data is based on various interviews given by those who directly or indirectly shared the basic tenets of the study. This group included activists of the movement, social scientists sharing the themes of study,

journalists, and a member of bureaucracy along with academicians. All together twelve interviews were taken.

The responses during the interview were written down by the researcher with the permission of the respondents. Time frame of the interviews depended on the time availability with the respondents. Each interview and or informal discussion lasted for an average two to three hours. The medium of interviews was primarily Hindi though few respondents responded in English as well. The interviews were taken mostly at the residences of the respondents. The interviews with the activists were taken at their regional offices in Patna. The discussions were centered on various issues like emergence and nature of women's movements in India; naxalite movement as site of struggle in Bihar; trajectory of AIPWA; nature of women's participation in naxalite movement in Bihar; issues of women's participation; impacts of naxalite movement on Dalit women in Bihar; AIPWA and women's participation; and naxalite movement as a social movement.

### **Outline of the Study**

The first chapter begins with a brief discussion on women's movement in India. It traces its emergence from various social reforms during the colonial period. The emergence of Gandhi in 1920s and women activists' participation in freedom struggle is discussed. In late 1970s, 'second wave' of Indian feminism emerged focusing on violence in all the forms against women. These included primarily incidents of dowry deaths and custodial rape. Domestic violence was another concern. In the globalized and liberalized economy of 1990s, the emergence of rightwing political parties and increased Dalit feminist assertion was a significant period for Indian women's movements. On the political front, the women's movement struggled for reservation for women (WRB) in State legislatures and the Parliament.

The focus of chapter 2 is the State of Bihar in its multiple dimensions. The semi-feudal agrarian structure characterized by numerically small landowning castes like Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumihars, and the Kayasthas and huge mass of Dalit landless agricultural labourers is discussed. The miniscule success of land reform measures along with green revolution further sharpened the disparities. The resultant violent exploitation by the

landed gentry led to the emergence of naxalite movement. Subsequently, the private caste army or *Sera* founded by the respective upper caste landed gentry emerged to counter it.

Chapter 3 is an attempt to explore 'gendering' of naxalite movement in Bihar. It begins with an analysis of Bodhgaya land struggle as a case of non-violent participation by the women. Subsequently the issues of wage and land rights coupled with violated dignity became the prime concern of Dalit women. The study is focused on organized and sustained mode of resistance by women as manifested in All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) as a frontal organization of CPI(ML) Liberation. The various sites of struggles undertaken by AIPWA are then discussed briefly. In the process some of the case studies of activists are documented. Subsequently, Chapter 4 is in lieu of conclusion.

# **CHAPTER**

**I**

“Historically, women’s movement in India can be classified into two phases: First, as a part of nationalist struggle – a period of reformist movements, when, first men and later women took up women’s issues. Many women’s organizations also emerged, spearheading the struggle against social evils, and advancing the cause of female education and female franchise. After a long gap, a second and more militant phase of women’s organizations emerged in the 1970s, which directly challenged the patriarchal social order while rallying around issues of violence against violence against women, like dowry deaths and rape cases” (Mehrotra, 2002:63).

Broadly understood, social movements are “struggles or sustained actions taken by groups of people coming together around an identity, issues or strategies formulated by a partial or developing ideology. These are named after the groups they have been able to mobilize and so we have the women’s movement, the gay rights, the displaced, workers, or people for peace, etc. Movements represent their voices, issues and demands as well as formulate their own methodology and organizations” (Gandhi and Shah, 2006:72-76). To trace and to provide a brief history of women’s movement in India is very difficult task. Not only India has diverse nature of women population on the basis of caste, class, religion, educational levels, etc. but also the issues of women’s movement have different degree of importance for each segment of women population. However, an attempt here has been made to explore and analyse women’s movements in India keeping in mind the questions raised by Ilina Sen (1990:3) more than a decade ago.

#### 1.1 Questioning ‘*Smritis*’ (1800-1920)

The arrival of colonial powers in India is a watershed as it strongly influenced the status of women in the post-colonial India. Many superstitions, dogmas and rituals, exploited women of all castes and were ‘sanctioned’ by the religious scriptures and texts (Wadley, 1988:23-43). The customs of *Sati* and *Purdah Pratha* reflected lack of women rights in the various domains of life. Other forms of inequality were female infanticide due to son preference, child marriage, prohibition on education of women and dowry system. Along with the colonial power, social reformers initiated changes in women’s status focusing on

three social customs in particular i.e. *sati*, the prohibition of widow remarriage and prevalence of child marriage.

Many distinguished personalities like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Jyotiba Phule, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and others took such initiatives. Raja Rammohan Roy (1774-1833) is regarded as the pioneer of 'Indian Renaissance' in the 19th century (Crawford, 1980:73-92). Through his organization *Brahmo Samaj*, he was among the first who fought to eliminate the practice/ritual of *Sati*. The British government banned the ritual of *sati* in 1829. Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) founded the *Arya Samaj* on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1875 in Bombay to fight against the social evils of untouchability and *Sati*. He vehemently protested against the custom of child marriages and advocated the ideal age for a girl to be between 16 and 24, and for men between 25-40.

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (11<sup>th</sup> April 1827-28<sup>th</sup> November 1890) focused on the upliftment of widows by educating them and the lower caste. He opened girl's school in August 1848 that became fully functional on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1851. He initiated widow-remarriage and started a home for upper caste widows in 1854. On 24<sup>th</sup> September 1873 formed the '*Satya Shodhak Samaj*' (Society of Seekers of Truth). In 1882, he submitted a representation to Sir William Hunter, Chairman of the Education Commission arguing that primary education for women needs to be encouraged. Similarly he started the infanticide prevention centre (*Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha*) for helping the widows from higher castes to deliver safely and thus prevent infanticides. At that time, the ritual of '*keshavapan*' - tonsuring the heads of widows was very much prevalent. He initiated the strike of barbers against this act.

In all his campaigns aiming at the emancipation of women, his wife Savitribai Phule (3<sup>rd</sup> January 1831 to 10<sup>th</sup> March 1897) was more than equal activist. It was with her help that Infanticide prohibition home was started on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1853. Later on an orphanage was also started in 1863. Her struggle resulted in country's first school for girls in Pune on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1848.



The Sanskrit texts regard widow as unfortunate and inauspicious woman. In 1850s, societies like Bethune society, Tattwawobodhini Sabha and Derozians argued for widow remarriage. In 1855, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar reinterpreted '*Parsar Samhita*' and argued for the same. After many debates, the Widow Remarriage Act XV was passed in 1856. Others those who supported the cause were Brahma Samaj in Bengal, Arya Samaj and Prathna Samaj. In 1896, Maharshi Karve founded Ananth Balikashram for education of widows. For the same cause, Pandita Ramabai opened Sharda Sadan in Bombay (1889) and Poona in 1892.

The practice of child marriage was another social evil addressed by the social reformers as M.G. Ranade, B. Malabari, Tej Bahadur Sapru and others. It was in 1860 that the Criminal Law Amendment Act revised section 375 of the Penal Code to raise the age of consent to 10 years (Age of Consent Bill, 1860). In 1884, Malabari published '*Notes on Infant Marriage and Enforced Widowhood*' resulting in proposal for legislation. It was supported by the All India Social Reform conference by M.G. Ranade. In 1891, through an amendment the age of consent was increased to 12 for married and 14 for unmarried girls. To raise the minimum age of marriage to 12, Hari Bilas Sarada introduced a Bill in 1929. Subsequently, Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 stating 14 as the minimum age of marriage for a girl was passed. At present, the minimum age of marriage for girls is 18 years.

In the wide spectrum of initiatives and subsequent protests one thing stands out that "The Indian Social reformers and the British relied heavily on legislation to eradicate social evils which had an adverse effect on the status of women" (Sarkar, 1995:1). On the whole, "the women's and social reform movements of the late-19th and early-20th century were all development-focused --- they dealt with women's health and education, eradication of purdah, dowry and sati, working conditions, and by the early-20th century also included political rights (to franchise and representation)" (Kumar, 2005; Chatterjee, 1980:241-254).

## 1.2 Resisting Colonialism (1930-1947)

The struggle for freedom from British rule provided further impetus to the women's emancipation in pre-independence period. Mass mobilization and participation of women in the public arena gave birth to a vibrant chain of women activists who soon crossed the boundary of nationalism and seriously focused on women issues (Jones, 1996:145-154). A significant event was formation of Indian National Congress in 1885 and participation of women in its meetings. The earliest record mentions delegates like Swaran Kumari Ghoshal and Kadambari Ganguly attending the Indian National Congress meeting. Women along with men protested against the partition of Bengal in 1905. The All India Women's Education Conference held in Pune in 1927 was a significant step towards the educational rights of the girl child. It was in 1931 that the Indian National Congress adopted 'gender equality' as a guiding principle in the Fundamental Rights Resolution.

The emergence of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in 1920s provided further impetus to the women's participation in his non-violent methods. The *Satyagraha* Movement thrived on the persistent participation of the women activists in all fronts including his wife Kasturba Gandhi. *Swadeshi* movement saw the participation of women activists like Dr. Sarojini Naidu, Smt. Basanti Devi, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Susheela Nair, Sucheta Kripalani, Aruna Asaf Ali, Kamla Nehru, and Mrs. Vijayalaxmi Pandit among others. Many unknown women figures like Dashriben Chaudhary, Gowramma and Lakshmi Devi Naidu among others contributed significantly.<sup>1</sup>

Sarojini Naidu led an all-India delegation of prominent women to discuss the political rights of women with Edwin Montagu (Secretary of State) and Lord Chelmsford (Viceroy) on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1917. Later on, she argued the same case at the special session of Congress held in Bombay in August 1918. Although, women played significant role in Constructive Programme and Civil Disobedience movement, yet Women's Indian Association pointed out the sexual division of work in Satyagraha movement initiated in 1919.

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<sup>1</sup> Photography Project: Freedom Fighters [Online]  
Web Source [http://www.sparrowonline.org/photoproj\\_freedom.htm](http://www.sparrowonline.org/photoproj_freedom.htm)

Gandhi made *khadi* integral to freedom struggle in A.I.C.C. session (1921). Women intensively participated in it. Saraladevi Chaudharani in Punjab, Manibehn Patel in Gujarat, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur in Punjab through her Spinner Association, Basanti Devi and Urmilla Das in Calcutta were significant in propagating this idea. Gandhi's decision to exclude women from Salt Satyagraha was questioned by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Durgabai Deshmukh and others. At the time of breaking salt laws on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1930, two women (Sarojini Naidu and Mithubehn) were with Gandhi. Gandhian initiative of women in picketing foreign goods also mobilized women. Mithubehn Petite and Kasturba Gandhi in Gujarat, *Rashtriya Stree Sabha* (established in 1921) in Bombay, *Desh Sevika Sangh* among others were prominent here.

Consequently, A.I.C.C. passed a special resolution marking women's contribution in 1930 Satyagraha. Although the British Government turned down the demand for women's franchise in 1931, the Karachi session of Indian National Congress resolved in favor of women's franchise and representation. The following observation by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya (1939) reflects the transition in the context of women:

“Long oppressed, the word freedom worked like magic on them. Almost overnight they emerged out of their rocklike reserve into the glare of the battlefield, the turmoil, into the strange new world of publicity. Hundreds faced dangers, lathi blows and even gunfire. With pride they entered prisons, leaving behind the traditional sanctity of the homes which had sheltered them so long. Walls of tradition cracked and rays of new hope came creeping in” (Chattopadhyaya, 1939:13).

On the other hand, there was emergence of various women's organizations. D. Jinarajadasa along with Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins established the Women's Indian Association in 1917. Later on the National Council of Women came into existence in 1925. The All India Women's Conference in 1927 focused on women's education and recognized child marriage as the root cause of women's status in India. It was the most visible organization among these. “During the first two decades of its existence, the organisation spearheaded some path-breaking causes such as, demand for codification of Hindu law and actively supporting the Rao committee, calling for equality in electoral rights and opposing any form of reservation, making vehement plea for protection of women workers particularly in mines, participating actively in the national planning sub-

committee of women's role in planned economy and promoting educational institutions and schemes to provide various services to women" (Desai, 2003). Additively, it demanded for a Hindu code aiming at women's right to inherit ancestral property in 1934. The nationalist leaders cutting across party lines very vehemently protested it. This incident alerted the women's movement from the patriarchal inclined functioning of state. In the coming years it became a stark reality.

Apart from such participation, women also participated in violent movements as many secret societies had come into existence in Bengal during 1905<sup>2</sup> and later on. They played a major role in the Lahore Students Union of Bhagat Singh and the Kakori case<sup>3</sup>. Apart from the numerous women activists, names that stand out are Bina/Veena Das (aged 21) who shot at the Governor of Bengal Sir Stanley Jackson<sup>4</sup>; Kamladas Gupta attempted to assassinate Police Commissioner of Calcutta Sir Charles Teggart and Sir Stanley Jackson. Kalyani Das (elder sister of Bina/Veena Das) was active within the revolutionary groups. The bombing of Pahartali European Club was led by Preetilata Waddadar aged 21. Kalpna Dutt was of 18 years when she led the Chittagong Armoury Raid. The Quit India movement (1942) provided another platform for women in active militant politics. Thousands of women actively participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942 (Basu, 1995:2). Women like Sucheta Kriplani, Aruna Asaf Ali, Mridula Sarabhai among others actively participated in it. Significantly, Dr. Lakshmi Swaminathan (later Captain Lakshmi Sahgal) headed Rani of Jhansi Regiment by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

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<sup>2</sup> Although there existed such notions, yet the sudden withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation movement by Gandhi in February 1922 disillusioned a lot of patriotic youth with the politics of the Congress Party resulting their inclination towards revolutionary activity.

<sup>3</sup> "A lesser-known fact associated with the Kakori robbery is the role of Raj Kumari Gupta of Kanpur. She was in charge of supplying the revolvers to the men during this operation. As she put it, 'I hid the revolvers in my underwear and wore khadi clothes on top. My three-year-old son accompanied me.' She and her husband Madan Mohan Gupta were members of the Congress Working Committee and also worked very closely with Chandra Shekhar Azad, a well-known revolutionary and leader of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association."

*Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42.* Suruchi Thapar-Björkert. New Delhi, London: Sage (2006).

Comments on: [http://www.hindustantimes.com/news/181\\_1625539,00110004.htm](http://www.hindustantimes.com/news/181_1625539,00110004.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Bina Das earned the epithet of *Agni Kanya* (daughter of fire) as she was 'as firm as the Northern Star' after she fired at the Governor Sir Stanley Jackson, at the Convocation Hall in Kolkata University. Her elder sister, Kalyani also was a revolutionary and an important organizer of *Chhatri-Sangh*.

Available at: <http://www.bhavans.info/heritage/agniknya.asp>

### 1.3 Euphoria and Subsequent Introspection (1947 Onwards)

With the independence in August 1947 came a new sense of achievement and security women's right to equality and non-discrimination were defined as justifiable fundamental rights in the Constitution. It had various provisions aiming at empowering women. Some of these are equality before the law (Article 14); no discrimination by the State on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of these (Article 15 (1)); special provisions to be made by the State in favor of women and children (Article 15(3)); equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state (Article 16); State policy to be directed to securing for men and women equally, the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39 (d)); provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42) and (Article 51 (A)(e)) to promote harmony and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

However, such a plethora of laws and regulation could not salvage the status of women from obscurity. Reasons vary from 'lethargic attitude towards the formulation and execution of the empowerment policies' to 'traditional patriarchal structure' from time immemorial. The euphoria of independence very soon gave way to the hard realization that even the independence had felt short to fulfill the aspirations of large mass. The battle-lines had to be redrawn and new definitions of 'enemy' had to be evolved as there was "a concern 'with violence against women, although not with the earlier issues of *Sati* and ill-treatment of widows but with rape and wife battering; with marriage, not widow or child marriages but divorce, maintenance and child custody; with legislative reform, not the enactment of more laws but with bringing in amendments that facilitate implementation of existing ones; with education, not only spreading educational facilities but attacking sexist and stereotyped textbooks; with equality, not only equal rights, but equal opportunities to work and with equal pay" (Jandhyala, 2001:31).

Various women' groups with a political base were formed. They worked as extension of the parent political parties. Various issues like anti-price rise movements and the anti-

liquor campaigns provided a strong platform for the women organizations and activists to come together. Along with violence, economic issues (land rights and minimum and equal wages) were also important as “given their vulnerable situation in the labour market, women workers are subject to sexual harassment by employers and labour contractors” (ASMITA, 1999).

In 1967 the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. In 1971, the then Indira Gandhi government appointed the Commission on Status of Women in India (SWI) headed by Manibenkara and Dr. Vina Mazumdar by the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare. This move was a response to United Nation’s initiative regarding status of women report for International Women’s Year in 1975.<sup>5</sup> The committee had to examine “the constitutional, legal and administrative provisions that have a bearing on the social status of women, their education and employment,” and to “assess the impact of these provisions”<sup>6</sup>. The Committee gave its report in 1974 which was published as “*Toward Equality: The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India*” in 1975.<sup>7</sup>

The Report “drew attention to some of the alarming facts with regard to employment, political participation, and health status of Indian women. The International Women’s Year and the Decade provided opportunities for analyzing Indian women’s real status and the causes for the same” (Desai, 1986a:295). Additive’y, “the report dramatically called attention to existing gender inequality with its documentation of a declining sex ratio (read as an indicator of differential female mortality) and its presentation of evidence of

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<sup>5</sup> The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established in 1947 at the recommendation of the UN. It prepares reports and recommendations on women’s rights and status and serves as the preparatory body for the UN conferences on women. In 1972, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 1975 International Women’s Year--IWY. The proclamation called for action to promote equality, the involvement of women in development efforts, and the recognition of the woman’s role in strengthening peace and promoting friendly relations among nations. The World Conference of the International Women’s Year was held in Mexico City in 1975. *Focus on UN Fourth World Conference on Women*. 7<sup>th</sup> December 1995.

Web Address: [http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/erc/intlorg/conference\\_women/950712.html](http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/erc/intlorg/conference_women/950712.html)

<sup>6</sup> Status of Women in India: A Synopsis of the Report of the National Committee (1974-74). *Studies in Family Planning*, December 1976. 7(12):358.

<sup>7</sup> *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India*. Department of Social Welfare, Government of India: New Delhi (1975).

inequalities in education, income, access to health care and political representation” (Kazenstein, 1989:61).

Additively, it was the mid 1980s that was seen as the turning point for the feminist movements in India. Philipose (2001) notes that “There were two broad developments that went towards creating what feminist academics have variously termed ‘the third phase of the women’s movement’, ‘the contemporary women’s movement’ or the ‘new women’s movement’. The first was the formal process, set in motion in 1967, when the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. This led in turn to 1975 being named the International Women’s Year, and the years between 1975 and 1985 being declared the Women’s Decade.”

The internal emergency between 26<sup>th</sup> June 1975 to 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1977 deeply influenced the women’s movement as “in the period following national emergency, the women’s movement in India assumed a role and form different from the one which it had in the social reform phase as well as during the struggle for independence” (Phadke, 2003:4567). The only solace was Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 “to provide for the payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers and for the prevention of discrimination, on the ground of sex, against women in the matter of employment and for matters connected therewith”. It was later amended in 1987 prohibiting discrimination in promotions, training and transfers (Sarma, 1988:421).

Another significant feature of the women’s movement at this time was the emergence of women’s studies across the country. According to Agnihotri (2001) “The movement built on this in the years to come through the discipline of Women’s Studies. While those in metropolitan campuses became familiar with the feminist writing emerging from the West, activists also drew on a vast storehouse of popular writing emerging from a mix of left-socialist ideological streams, local traditions and folklore of resistance. It is not surprising that these years saw a literary outburst as well as challenges to entrenched strangleholds in the language press.”

## 1.4 Violence and 'Second Wave'

In late 1970s, 'second wave' of Indian feminism emerged focusing on violence in all the forms against women. These included primarily incidents of dowry deaths and rape. According to Patel (1998:198-207) following understandings of gender violence emerged subsequently:

- For the liberal activists in the civil liberties groups, sanctity of the individual was an issue of prime concern. Hence any citizen who was violated had to take recourse to Constitutional means of redressal for justice, by approaching the existing judicial system.
- The democratic rights organizations represented the views of the far-left groups and gave a call for direct actions which confronted the state.
- The religious and puritanical groups were perturbed by the violation of 'chastity' and the 'purity' of women.
- The feminists saw violence against women as an outcome of the subordination of women - a weapon to terrorize, intimidate and humiliate women.

During 1980s, the media reported numerous cases of 'burning brides' where newly wed girls either 'committed suicide' or were 'burnt alive' by her husband and in-laws over dowry disputes. Although protests marking "the feminist assertion of the personal as political through an activist agenda" (Phadke, 2003:4568) were launched by Progressive Organisation of Women in Hyderabad in 1975, subsequently these protests later on shifted to Delhi due to its highest incidents of dowry deaths sensitized the people about the issue. Intense mass mobilization along with an attempt to analyze the incidents of dowry deaths resulted in shift in the understanding from media labeled 'bride-burning' to feminists coining 'dowry murder.'

Dowry (Hindi term is *dahej*) broadly understood is a form of wedding gift also sometimes called price-of the-groom has been also seen in the context of *Stridhan* (Kishwar, 2006). As per the Dowry Prohibition Act [The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (Act No.28 of 1961) [20<sup>th</sup> May, 1961]] (originally passed in 1961 and amended in the



1984 and 1986), dowry is defined as ‘any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly by one party to a marriage to the other party to the marriage or by the parents of either party to a marriage or by any other person, to either party to the marriage or to any other person at or before [or any other time after the marriage] in connection with the marriage of the said parties’.

Ghadially and Kumar (1988:167-177) in their study pointed out that “the most important item of dowry demand was hard cash (58 percent) followed by household furniture (28 percent) and jewelry was the third (25 percent) demand. In the situation when the demands are not met domestic violence was in 78 percent of the case. The milder violence was 31 percent and severe violence meted out to bride was 47 percent. Most importantly 67 percent of parents of daughter were aware of the violence. Of the thirty six cases, thirty resulted in death”.

It was this situation which was being fought against by the women’s groups and organizations. The personal/private sphere was brought into public sphere of dialogue and protest as the early feminist activism protested the deaths of many young women by holding *dharnas* in front of police stations and the houses where the women were burned to death (Kumar, 1989:22). More significantly, absence of any kind of constitutional remedy was also critiqued. The then situation is aptly observed as “...everyone wanted justice. However, approaching the police and law courts turned out to be a great disappointment” (Kishwar, 2001).

This struggle resulted in some changes oriented towards women like the construction of special Crimes Against Women Cells in select police stations to handle women’s complaints and Family Courts. Crimes against women within the institution of marriage were recognized by the law. The Indian Penal Code (Section 498A and 304B) was amended twice during the 1980s, first in 1983 and again in 1986. In 1983, under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code ‘cruelty by husband or relatives of husband’ was defined as cognizable offence.

During the same period, two other amendments to the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, enacted in 1984 and 1986, made dowry giving and receiving a cognizable offense. A new category of crime named 'dowry murder' or 'dowry death' was covered by Section 304B. Under section 304B, in the case of a 'dowry death', the accused are frequently denied anticipatory, or even regular bail. Later on, the Dowry Prohibition (Maintenance of Lists of Presents to the Bride and Bridegroom) Rules, 1985 [dated 19<sup>th</sup> August 1985] provided that the lists of presents which are given at the time of the marriage to the bride shall be maintained by the bride.

Another aspect of violence against women was 'domestic violence' an issue "camouflaged under the term 'dowry deaths'" (Agnes, 1988:151). A booklet titled 'Family Violence' by ASMITA (1999) elaborates on the forms of domestic violence. These include wife battering, marital rape, female foeticide, female infanticide, dowry harassment and murder, forced abortions, and unpaid household labour. Till date we do not have an effective mechanism in legal terms to curb such incidents. 'Family-marriage' and 'husband-wife' are taken as entities existing in the private domain of society and individual. It further complicates the problem, as concerned authorities do not address incidents on the ground of '*yeh unka personal mamla hai.*' A survey conducted by Agnes (1988:150-166) exploded various myths surrounding domestic violence. Some of these are briefed below:

"...middle class women do not get beaten; victim of violence is a small, fragile, helpless woman belonging to the working class; man beating his wife is from the lower strata of society, a man who is frustrated in his job, an alcoholic, or a paranoid person; men are provoked by women to beat them; long standing battering relationships can change for the better; loving husband does not indulge in wife beating; loving husband does not indulge in wife beating; and since the women don't leave their husbands they do not mind the beatings or that they actually like it" (Agnes, 1988:154-156).

Another issue of equal importance was incidents of rape (custodial rape) and subsequent acquittal of accused due to lack of concrete constitutional remedies. In India such issues as rape or sexual molestation are invariably linked to State repression, class oppression and caste and communal prejudices (Patel, 1985:78). The patriarchal mindset of law and State machinery (Sarkar, 1994:69) put the onus of proving the act of rape on the victim herself. Some of the cases of protest are briefly discussed. In March 1978, several

policemen gang-raped Rameeza Bee, a woman of minority community. The one-man Mukhtad Commission of enquiry established the policemen's guilt. Yet, the charged men were acquitted. Several women's organizations filed a public interest review petition in the High Court against the acquittal. As a first major case of custodial violence, it was significant in many senses: First of all, it was seen as a communal incident involving woman not as victim rather as the representative of minority community (Ifthekhar, 2003). Second, it gave fodder for identity politics both for the majoritarian as well as minority community (Kannabiran, 1996:32-41) as a Muslim fundamentalist organization *Majlis Ittehadul Mussalmeen* got involved in the issue.

In another incident, Mathura (a 14 year old *dalit* girl) was raped by two police constables at the police station in 1980. Even though the Nagpur Sessions court acquitted the policemen yet the High Court rejected the Lower Court's holding and convicted the policemen on the ground that 'acquired acquiescence is not consent'. However, the Supreme Court reversed the High Court's verdict arguing that there were no injuries on her body. On the state of women's movement at that time, Agnes (2005) commented that "...this is the situation we started with in 1980, with how the Supreme Court reasoned, how the Supreme Court thinks of bodily autonomy, the bodily integrity of women. That when there are no injuries, there is no rape." An open letter to the Supreme Court by four lawyers pointed out many shortcomings in the judgement<sup>8</sup>. In a response to unjust judgment on rape cases, activists of women's movement formed Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW) which was started as Forum Against Rape in 1979.

Another incident to stir the conscience of nation was custodial rape of Maya Tyagi on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1980 at Baghpat, Haryana. It was only after much protests; the Uttar Pradesh government set up one-man commission headed by P.N. Roy. Its report was tabled in the state assembly on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1981. The Commission's approach was purely technical and moral issues were deliberately suppressed (PUCL Bulletin, May 1981) and no policy measures were recommended to prevent such incidents' (PUCL Bulletin, June 1981) while acquitting those accused.

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<sup>8</sup> This Open Letter to the Chief Justice was written jointly by Lotika Sarkar, Upendra Baxi, Raghunath Kelkar and Vasudha Dhagamwar that critiqued the Supreme Court's decision.

Due to intense mass uproar against such decisions, the government was forced to amend the Indian Evidence Act 1872, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Penal Code and introduced the category of 'custodial rape'. The Law Commission of India in its report on 'Rape and Allied Offences - Some Questions of Substantive Law, Procedure and Evidence' recommended an amendment to Section 155(4) of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 which allows questions on the past sexual history of the victim only vis-a-vis the accused. Under Section 376(1) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), a minimum term of seven years imprisonment may be imposed for rape. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 1983 for the first time provided for the offense of custodial rape. Commissioned officers of the paramilitary and military forces are included under Section 376(2)(b) of the IPC and are thus also subject to this mandatory sentence. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (1983) also shifted the burden of proof regarding consent to the accused.

Despite such corrective measures Section 155 clause 4 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 remained in effect. The notorious abuse/misuse of Section 155 clause 4 of the Indian Evidence Act is reflected in the following observation:

"This law was used to humiliate women and girls who are ready to file a complaint and whose case goes up for trial: who's your boyfriend? What kind of mother? Is she divorced? There were a whole lot of things you could humiliate the girl with on the basis of her sexual behaviour, not only with the man in question, but with anybody. That became a defense for the accused, but still we didn't get it. What we did get was an increase in punishment. Is that enough?" (Agnes, 2005)

There were various attempts on part of government to amend it. Subsequently, the Indian Evidence (Amendment) Bill 2002 was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2002. It intended to remove Section 155(4) of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872. Finally, after more intense mobilization and subsequent recommendations of Law Commission of India and the National Commission for Women, it was only on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2003 that it was modified. The Indian Evidence (Amendment) Act, 2003, provided deletion of clause 4 of Section 155 by specifically providing in Section 146.

Recently, the Indian Evidence (Amendment) Act, 2006 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on the 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2006 to further to amend the Indian Evidence Act, 1872. It stated

that “In the Evidence Act, 1872, after section 114A, the following section shall be inserted, namely 114B: In a prosecution for culpable homicide or murder, as the case may be, of a person by a police officer the court may presume that the death was caused when that person was in the custody of the police, by the police officer having custody of that person during that period after taking into account all the relevant circumstances and facts unless otherwise proved by that police officer.”

Violence against women during 1980s also manifested itself in “the sharp increase in use of sex determination and sex selection tests with the use of new reproductive technology, which were followed by abortion of female foetuses. By the early 1980s new reproductive technologies like amniocentesis had appeared on the scene” (Mazumdar, 2000). The declining sex ratio coupled with the advent of new technology was a concern for the women’s movement. It was found that the states of ‘Hindi-belt’/‘Cow-belt’ laid more premium on the son compared to daughter due to patriarchal social structure. Along with it was the increased prosperity resulting in dowry giving capacity. Thus, daughters became a ‘burden’ on the family leading to increased incidents of female infanticide. “What shocked everyone from academics to activists was that between 1978 and 1983 around 78,000 female foetuses were aborted after sex determination tests in India” (Das and Sinha, 2002:566-579).

Various techniques used for such purpose were chorionic villi biopsy, amniocentesis and ultrasonography (Balasubrahmanyam, 1986:1492; Patel, 1997:19-20). The sex determination (SD) followed by use of sex-selection abortion (SSA) is “An area where the violence on women is not so direct but the effect is as adverse” (Sarkar, 1995:24) reflected in the declining all-India female/male child ratio in 0-6 age-group (juvenile sex ratio). It was 976/1000 in 1961, 964/1000 in 1971, 962/1000 in 1981, 945/1000 in 1991 and 927/1000 in 2001.

Bombay (Mumbai) was the core of the anti- female infanticide campaign led by women movement activists during 1980-1981, which soon spread to other areas. In 1986, the Forum Against Sex Determination and Sex Pre-Selection was formed in Mumbai to campaign against sex-selective abortions. Another such forum was Doctors against Sex-

Determination and Sex-Preselection Techniques (DASDSP). Under severe pressure, Maharashtra Regulation and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act was passed in May 1988. It was for the first time in the country that such a law was formulated. Subsequently, the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act was passed by the Centre in 1994 aiming at registering the users of technologies and to keep a check on doctors violating such act.

The effective implementation of the Act was questioned as the Census data 2001 again showed the decline of female sex ratio. It was then during giving decision on the public interest litigation (PIL) that the Supreme Court strictly directed that states to register all ultrasound centers and to put up notices in ultrasound clinics that sex determination tests were illegal. Later on, the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act was amended in 14<sup>th</sup> February 2003. The Act became Pre-Conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act.

The eighties were also period of several new women's organizations and autonomous groups focusing on the needs and concerns of women. These collectivities cut across caste and class lines. All the more, its base was broader as people from diverse background like trade unionists; academicians, political affiliates, students, etc. became active participants in such organizations. According to Patel (1988:250) significant features of autonomous women's movement are:

- i) Women organize and lead the movement.
- ii) Fight against oppression, exploitation, injustice and discrimination against women is the first and foremost priority of the movement, any other considerations cannot subordinate women's rights.
- iii) It cannot be subordinated to the decisions and necessities of any political or social group/organization.

According to Jaising<sup>9</sup> by the mid eighties, Indian feminism had taken three different schools:

1. The liberal stream: focus on demanding reforms in those aspects of the polity which specifically affected women
2. The leftists: situates oppression of women within a holistic analysis of the general structures of oppression and called for a coming together of specific movements for social change in order to effect the revolutionary transformation of society
3. The radical feminists: concentrate on defining the development of femininity and masculinity in society as fundamental polarities, and experimented with reclaiming traditional sources of women's strength, creativity, etc.

In 1985 various recommendations of Commission on Status of Women in India (SWI) like Panchayats, provision of New Education Policy for gender empowerment and women to be an integral part of policies of Planning Commission were given attention. Subsequently, Department of Women and Child Development emerged. Department of Rural Development introduced 30% quota for women in all anti-poverty programs.

It was also during later years of 1980s that issues of rights of women and emergence of identity politics became enmeshed. The women's movement for Uniform Civil Code aiming at equal rights for all the citizens regardless of gender, class, caste and religion was at the heart of debate. In a strange unfolding of events, lives of two women from different 'antagonistic' communities redefined the 'universal sisterhood' of feminism and women's movement. The first was the case of Mohammad Ahmed Khan vs. Shah Bano Begum (known as the Shah Bano case) in 1985 and the second was Roop Kunwar *Sati* case in September 1987.

The case of Mohammad Ahmed Khan vs. Shah Bano Begum (known as the Shah Bano case) in 1985 infused multiple identities of religion (Hindu and Muslim), of gender (patriarchal Hindu and patriarchal Muslim), of 'our women' and 'their women' (Hindu women and Muslim women) (Pathak and Rajan, 1989:558-583). Shah Bano Begum, after

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<sup>9</sup> *The Indian Women's Movement*. Indira Jaising. [No publication date given.]  
Web Address: [http://www.lawyerscollective.org/lc\\_wri/publication/miscellaneous/indian\\_womens\\_movment.htm](http://www.lawyerscollective.org/lc_wri/publication/miscellaneous/indian_womens_movment.htm)

being given triple talaq from her husband claimed for maintenance from her husband under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC). The decision in favour to Shah Bano Begum by Supreme Court was seen by the minority community as a threat on themselves under the grab of secular credentials of constitution since, according to Muslim personal law, a divorced woman is only entitled to maintenance during the period of *iddat* (three months following the divorce). Thus, “the Shahbano case became a campaign in which women were pitted against both the State and fundamentalist forces within communities. It was also this case that made women activists realize, for the first time, that women too could be divided by the politics of their identity” (Butalia, 2001a:37-38).

The then Rajiv Gandhi led Government overturned the Shah Bano case decision by introducing Muslim Women (Right to Protection on Divorce) Act, 1986. The Act excluded divorced Muslim from the purview of Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Although the passage of Act was interpreted by the Muslim community as ‘victory’ and was thus ‘relieved’ from the onslaught of right wing groups yet, the issue of payment of maintenance to divorced Muslim women received a serious setback. However, all was not lost as

“The feminist collectivity, by embracing the individual woman’s cause, converted her resistance into a significant operation within a (collective) feminist politics. Women’s groups have been able to reconcile two contradictory aims: to attend to the specificity of the problem of Shahbano as a woman living in poverty, in order to focus on concrete, pragmatic, end-directed actions; and also to subsume the specific issue in the larger context of Indian women’s secondary social and legal status, in order to avoid the danger of isolating women of the community by targeting their religious identity as regressive, speaking therefore on their behalf, even usurping their victim status, and ending by offering ‘protection’” (Pathak and Rajan, 1989:580).

Another incident, which split the ‘universal sisterhood’, was *Sati* case in Deorala village of Sikar district in Rajasthan on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1987. In the middle of raging debate was a 17-year-old young Rajput widow Roop Kanwar who became/committed Sati. There were many women chanting prayers at the funeral site. Although the High Court had banned the proposed *chunri* ceremony on 15<sup>th</sup> September yet, it was held the next day with full fan fare. It was the question of Rajput identity rather than a woman’s issue which was at stake. Another community, *Marwari* constructed one of the richest temples as paying ode



to the custom. It spurred to a large debate both for and against sati in which Indian feminists were often branded as 'westernized', 'colonialist' and 'cultural imperialists' (Kumar, 1993:174). As various women's organizations along with other civil rights organizations peaked up protest, the State government, the State government promulgated the Rajasthan Sati (Prevention) Ordinance, 1987 on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1987.

The *Dharma Raksha Samiti* organized a rally in support of Sati practice on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1987. Most of the participants were carrying naked swords. Alwar and Sikar witnessed the same scene. Subsequently the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Bill, 1987 came into effect on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1988. It recognized making attempt to commit, abetment and glorification of sati punishable. On 11<sup>th</sup> October 1996, all 32 accused were acquitted by the additional district and sessions judge at Neem-ka-Thana in Rajasthan citing lack of eyewitnesses to the immolation.

The Supreme Court took up these cases once again January 2003. Cases were directed to the Special Sati Court in Jaipur for trial which began in June 2003. On 31<sup>st</sup> January 2004, the Special Court Justice Shiv Singh Chauhan acquitted the accused including former minister and vice president of the state BJP, Rajendra Singh Rathore, former Bharatiya Yuva Morcha president and the nephew of vice president Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, Pratap Singh Khachariawas, president of the Rajput Maha Sabha, Narendra Singh Rajawat, former IAS officer Omkar Singh and advocate Ram Singh Manohar were acquitted of the charges of sati glorification.

Various women's organizations came under a unified front *Mahila Atyachar Virodhi Jan Andolan* and protest demonstration was taken out in Jaipur on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2004 led by Brinda Karat of All India Democratic Women's Association and Saheba Farooqui of National Federation of Indian Women. The following observation reflects the caste and gender dimension:

"While Kalyan Singh Kalvi of the 'social justice' Janata Dal defended Sati. The union minister of State for commerce of Congress (I) Priya Ranjan Das Munshi threatened to burn a copy of the anti-sati law and to lead a *padayatra* to Deorala for 'protecting Hinduism'. While the then-prime minister, V.P. Singh maintained his mystic silence on the issue, his successor Chandra Sekhar elevated Kalvi to Union Cabinet Minister's post with the statement, "he may have glorified sati, but so do lakhs of people." Vijayraje Scindia, widow herself and vice-president of the

BJP, which sponsored the formation of the Dharam Raksha Samiti to defend sati, went on record to say that "sati formed a part of Hindu faith and no woman wishing to be sati could be deprived." Most political bigwigs of the day attended the *Chauri Mahotsav* to commemorate Roop's death (Abraham, 1997:4-12).

Thus, the years of 1970s and 1980s were characterized by a plethora of activities aiming at violence manifested in incidents of dowry death and rape (custodial as well as of other nature). The women's movement at this stage was also instrumental in bringing significant changes in the policy plans and papers of the country. For the first time in country's planning, the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) had a chapter on women and development. A separate Department of Women and Child Development was set up in 1985 under the newly created Ministry of Human Resource Development. Although protests against the issues of dowry deaths and custodial rapes stand out in the history of the women's movement in India (Chaci, 1981) yet the present scenario starkly reveals that both the issues are far away from being solved (Agnes, 1992:19-33).

However, to summarise the 1970s-1980s activities restricted only to issues of rape and dowry will be mistake as "the post-1970s women's movement did not focus on rape and dowry alone -- the urban women's groups were actively unionising women, both in established unions like CITU and in new unions such as SEWA for unorganised women's labour. And the rural women's groups actively mobilised rural women, especially landless labour (later some of these groups were to help elect the first women's panchayats in India). Also the mainstream women's groups, those affiliated to the Congress, Left and socialist parties, were very active against rising prices, and on issues like housing and water" (Kumar, 2005).

### **1.5 Liberalized, Privatized and Globalized 'Golden Chains'**

With the coming of 1990s, the issues became more complex and women became more vulnerable as "this has been the decade of the liberalization of the economy, the anti-Mandal agitation against the extension of reservation to the Other Backward Classes, and the emergence of lower caste parties such as the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party. This was also the decade of the demolition of the Babri Masjid and ensuing riots, and rise to dominance of a Bhartiya Janata Party-led coalition" (John, 2000:WS-

22:3828). The severe backlash from the mainstream patriarchal State machinery resulted from the twin sources of communalism and backward caste/class assertion. It was observed that

“...the centrality of gender in the political discourse has assumed greater importance in recent years given the increasing hold of fundamentalism in this region. It can also be established that the ‘woman question’ offers an ideal entry point for exploring the links between retrogressive ideologies and neo-liberal political strategies, a combination which presents the biggest challenge to the strengthening of democracy in India as well as the South Asian region” (Agnihotri, 2001).

The economic reforms were based on macro-economic stabilization of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and structural adjustment programme of World Bank. It is in this context that the women’s movement discussed the ‘rolling back of Welfare State’ that was resulting in drastic reduction in social sectors investment and plan outlays in terms of money. Significantly, there was emergence of various new non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on the women’s issues. Money/grants from the foreign donor agencies (sometimes governmental sources) became a visible feature of women’s activism.

Prior to the trilogy of liberalization, privatization and globalization factors in Indian economy, there were some important legislation which protected the interests of women labour force. These were Minimum Wages Act (1948), the Maternity Benefits Act (1961) and the Equal Remuneration Act (1976) among others. At present, the most important tool of legislation for securing women workers is the National Empowerment of Women Policy (2001). Various multinational corporations involve works having irregular and low pay many a times they do not implement Minimum Wages Act (1948). Majority of the jobs are in the informal sector marked by casual to temporary jobs. Consequently, it generated low income for the women labour force. Again, the Maternity Benefits Act (1961) involves the permanent status of female worker so as to have benefit from it; however, the casual women workers (in BPO Centres) are unable to get it as they work as piece rate workers.

Two major areas of development i.e. education and health depend on government spending. The withdrawal of funds and subsidies from these areas negatively affected the

primary education of the girl child in particular. Moreover, the numbers of Primary Health Centres have decreased drastically. Another area where the subsidies have been reduced is that of Public Distribution Program which used to provide basic necessities at subsidized prices. As a consequence, it has been difficult for the low-income groups, women in particular to purchase food as the prices have increased. At the same time, fewer sources are producing grain for domestic consumption due to increase in cash crops production. It further aggravates the situation. For example, expenditure on education fell from 3.4 percent of GDP in 1989-90 to 2.8 percent in 1995-96.

More serious is the emerging scenario where women are being pushed out/marginalized of the organized sector to the unorganized sector. The working conditions, nature of work, wage security apart from absence of any legal and safety concerns of unorganized sector is well known. Even the basic amenities regarding hygiene and crèches for married women are not taken care of. Acting on the policy of 'down sizing' the public sector, many employees have been retrenched in the organized sector. In this process, if the employee is the male earning member, then the family has to accommodate with the unorganized sector. If woman employee is retrenched, it further makes her vulnerable to economic crisis and makes her more dependent on her family and relative. In both the cases, it is the woman who suffers the most.

Women have also bore the burnt of shifting alliance of planning policies and funds from agriculture to service sector (Reddy and Reddy, 2001:378-392). The majority of the women work force is in agricultural activities that are now ailing from lack of social security. At the same time, emergence and gradual acute marketisation and globalization of agricultural products have led the shift from subsistence crops to cash crops. The further privatization of agricultural lands has left them landless labourers. According to ASMITA (1999), these economic reforms are intricately linked to violence against women in the following ways:

- SAP requires cuts in social sector subsidies. This means institutions such as Public Distribution System (PDS) and government health services will be dismantled. Since the provisioning of food, health care etc. to family members is

primarily women's responsibility, women will face increasing pressure when subsidies and services are cut. Ultimately this will increase domestic violence.

- With the withdrawal of state control, SAP allows market forces free play. This in turn will lead to the closure of inefficient industrial units and removal of protective labour legislation. Since women often work in non-unionized jobs, they will be the first workers to lose their jobs and the minimal legal protection they now have.
- In just one year, 12,000 private sector units and 200 public sector units have been declared unviable. Closure of these operations may result in starvation since alternative jobs are impossible to find.
- As casual labour, a woman is paid less than half of a man's daily wage, although women work for longer hours. This occurs because in a male dominated society, the man is considered the breadwinner of the family and the woman as only a supplementary earner.

In the same context Patil (2002) argues, "with such an economy, can a woman avail herself of and afford education with the tremendous cost that goes along with it?" Further it states that the new policies will further marginalize the majority of women through reduction in their employment; reduction in their family resources; withdrawal of subsidized food; abandonment of preferential and affirmative policies like lower interest rates for the unorganized sectors and poor women; privatization of educational and health institutions, the high cost would deprive a large number of women and poor of education and health facilities; and female labour would be exploited by the free market economy in areas where women are at a disadvantageous position.

A significant aspect of women's movement in post 1990s is its NGOisation. Innumerable NGOs have come up to work in the arena of women development. It can be partly explained as effect of 'roll back of Welfare State' and reduction in government's spending on voluntary organizations. At the same time, the increased internationalism stemmed from LPG forces is also responsible. These NGOs work in various fields related to women such as education, health issues i.e. nutrition, safe motherhood and HIV/AIDS, water sanitation, income generation or economic incentives, women with disability,

building up advocacy or campaigning on issues or causes, training in the form of 'Capacity Building', dowry, divorce and violence against women have become more visible. United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 discussed the role of NGOs and funding/donor agencies in the overall development of women. Subsequently, National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO) was formed.

Another feature of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is funding by the foreign agencies. Broadly, most funds/grants are issue-specific. Such instances of funding have led to a debate in the multi-layered feminist discourse. Layers of universal sisterhood; fragmented gender identities based on caste, class, religion; and sometimes nationalist agenda have become intertwined with each other. At the same time, the issue of independent thinking/critical inquiry/autonomous functioning is also at stake. On one hand some of the women groups have rejected the modes of funding whereas others have accepted it on the account of boosting its activities. Regarding the nature and viability of such NGOs, it has been observed that

"The extensive NGO-isation supported by international agencies has pushed in a niche concentration, replacing visible broad assertive struggles where women's groups formed federations and were once very active. Most NGOs have become conduits for delivery of government programmes without independent, autonomous mobilization of people. For many of them setting up documentation centres, publishing newsletters or journals and some gender-training sum up the list of activities that replace real grass roots mobilization which had been more prominent in the 1980s" (Krishnaraj, 2003:4536).

### **1.6 'Politics' of Representation and 'Representation' in Politics**

The *National Perspective Plan for Women* (1988-2000) strongly recommended a 30 per cent reservation in the local government. In 1984, Rajiv Gandhi introduced the 64th constitutional Amendment in Parliament for Reservation in all Panchayats. A united opposition defeated the Bill. Later on, in 1992-93, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments aiming at grassroots democracy were enacted. Thus, reservation of one third of seats for women at level of local governance in rural and urban areas made constitutional. Consequently, there are about 1 million elected women representatives in

Panchayats and Municipal Bodies in India. Their participation has further sensitized them regarding their empowerment. However, according to 'India Report', there are various constraints that prevent women from effective participation at local level<sup>10</sup>. Most serious one is "deeply entrenched patriarchal political structures" (UNDP)<sup>11</sup>.

Subsequently, the women's movement struggled for reservation for women in State legislatures and the Parliament. The National Commission for Women (NCW) along with several other women's organizations began a more systematic struggle for introduction and passing of WRB in 1995 itself. The 81<sup>st</sup> Constitutional Amendment Bill, popularly known as the Women's Reservation Bill (hereafter WRB), was introduced in the Parliament on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1996 to insert 330A (1), which had provision of 1/3 Seat to be reserved for women in the House of the people. It gave rise to a aggressive debate. Those who argued in favour of WRB focused on feminization of Parliament and those opposing it pointed out the preferential treatment factor and issue of 'elite' women hijacking the whole cause.

However, various constitutional provisions indicate the relevance and significance of WRB. Article 15 guarantees women that the State will not discriminate against them on the basis of gender. Furthermore, Article 15(3) gives the state the right to use affirmative action or benign discrimination to further its equality goals. It states, "nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children." Article 16 states that, "There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State." Section 16(2) further states "No citizen shall on the grounds only of . . .sex. . . be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the State." Thus, the issue of enhancing women's representation in the legislatures is very much in the line of constitutional provisions.

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<sup>10</sup> State of Women in Urban Local Government: India [Online].

Available at: <http://www.unescap.org/huset/women/reports/india.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> UNDP: Democratic Governance: Decentralisation and Participatory Planning [Online].

Available at: <http://www.undp.org.in/dpp.htm>

A national debate on WRB was initiated by the then prime minister in May 1997. Several organizations like National Alliance of Women's Organizations, All India Democratic Women's Association, National Federation of Indian Women, Joint Women's Program and other joined together and began the struggle for equal political participation. The new BJP-led governing coalition introduced the 84<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill in July 1998. However due to protests from political parties like *Rashtriya Janata Dal* (RJD) and *Samajwadi Party* (SP), the Bill was not even introduced. They raised the issue of OBC women and demanded quota for them.

Such caste-based arguments "take positions for and against reservations explicitly or implicitly in terms of caste. We must see it also as expressing a legitimate fear that reservations for women would radically alter the composition of Parliament in favour of upper classes and upper castes. This kind of the opposition to the bill (WRB) in its present form has to be recognized as arising from the politics of caste-identity" (Menon, 2000:WS-37:3837) as political parties like *Rashtriya Janata Dal* (RJD) and *Samajwadi Party* (SP) "feared that reservation for women would give many of their seats to women from Brahman and other high caste groups. The fact that a large section of existing women parliamentarians were high caste and from elite families only deepened this fear"(Omvedt, publication year not given).

Significantly on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1999, several women's organizations demonstrated for immediate passage of WRB. *Mahila Maha Adhiveshan* organized by All India Democratic Women's Association in New Delhi in 1999 demanded fair political representation. "No alternative to women's quota Bill" became the rallying point of women's groups in 2000. A new front 'Joint Action Front for Woman' emerged out of union of forty women's organizations to further struggle for WRB.

Recently, under the broad rubric of civil and political rights, there has emerged another solution to WRB.<sup>12</sup> Pointing out to the limitations of WRB in its current context, it argues that "the role of independents in our elections at national and state levels is both marginal

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<sup>12</sup> This argument is proposed by the Forum for Democratic Reforms (a loose alliance formed by *Lok Satta*, *Lokayan*, *CSDS* and *Manushi*).



and declining” and “the success rate of women in elections is consistently and significantly higher than that of men”. Thus, the way out is “to make it mandatory for every recognized political party to nominate women candidates in one third of the constituencies” (Narayan et al. 2000). The suggestion of amending Representation of the People Act (RPA) and making mandatory for political parties to give a fixed percentage of seats for women candidates was refused by several women’s organizations as women candidates might be fielded from ‘defeat-prone’ and ‘violence-marred’ constituencies.

Another alternative proposed in July 2003 intended to create dual-member constituencies in one-third of all electoral districts. In this process will increase the total number of seats in parliament by 181. This will result in election of one man and one woman from these particular constituencies. The All-India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA) opposed it in February 2005 as due to the 84<sup>th</sup> Constitutional amendment the number of Parliamentary seats has been frozen until 2026. The Common Minimum Programme (CMP) issued by Congress-led United Progressive includes one-third reservation for women in state assemblies and the national parliament.

### **1.7 ‘Our Women’ and/vs. ‘Their Women’**

“Some of the most powerful images and sounds that live on, since the storm over the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya has abated, are those of Sadhvi Rithambara and Uma Bharati. Their shrill voices filtered through cassette tape recordings goaded Hindu men into violence against Muslims in the course of many riots between 1990 and 1993. On 6<sup>th</sup> December 1992 these women openly celebrated the destruction of the Babri Masjid. Women’s activism has not only found expression among the movement’s orators and spokespersons but has also taken hold at the grassroots level. In the early 1990s, thousands of women became skilled in organizing demonstrations, campaigning for elections, and using arms and ammunition” (Basu, 1998:167).

Far more important issue having serious implications for the women’s movement is the rise and further consolidation of identity politics based on caste, class and religion. Broadly understood, identity politics are political movements based upon group identities; e.g. caste, class, gender, race, region, etc. and is more than interest group politics. Another viewpoint views it as a new form of tribalism reflecting a ‘primitive’ stage of politics. Such politics is based on the primordial identities. Seriously questioning

the basic premises of women's movement (Berenstein, 2005:47-74), the implications of identity politics on feminism/feminist struggle is reflected in the following observation:

“Within feminism, identity politics has taken two often-related forms i.e. difference or essentialist feminism, and victim feminism. The former emphasizes the unique identity of women as a group, stressing and usually celebrating essential female characteristics which it believes make women different from - indeed even opposite to - men. Victim feminism also assumes that women have a unique identity, but the focus of that identity is women's victimization on the basis of sex, typically at the hands of men. In addition to dividing potential allies from one another, identity politics' dominance of feminism creates other obstacles to effective struggles for social change” (Mandle, (publication year not given)).

In the years of 1990s, the rise of right-wing Hindu political parties like *Bhartiya Janata Party* and *Shiv Sena* have become a concern for women's movement. Moreover, the demolition of *Babari Masjid* on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1992 and violence against the Muslim community in Gujarat in 2002 have emerged as a major challenge to the women's movement. In this hostile situation it has been observed that “In the recent past there have been several incidents where women from the majority community have actively participated in escalating violence against the women of the minority community” (Patel, 1998:198-207).

Some significant manifestations of women as agents of violence are their mass participation in ‘*Ram Janambhoomi Movement*’ in the early 1990s (Sarkar, 1991; Sethi, 2002; Sarkar, 2001:268-290), communal violence targeting minority women in Mumbai riots in 1992-93 as *Shiv Sena Mahila Agahdi* (Banerjee, 1995:216-32; Banerjee, 1996:1213-1225) and recent Gujarat riots in early 2002 through *Rashtra Sevika Samiti* and *Durga Vahini* (Pati, 2003:6-8). The Report on the Commission on the Status of Women (2004) while doing a “feminist analysis of the targeted sexual violence against women in Gujrat” argued “sexual violence is part of the patriarchal culture based on ruthless competition to gain control” (Ahmad, 2004). *Matrishakti*, (literally, the power of motherhood) one of the women's organizations affiliated to the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP) has also been in the forefront of such militant activities aimed towards ‘other’ women. However, such participation had nothing to do with the female empowerment (Banerjee, 1996:1215; Butalia, 1997). It has been emphasized that

“The Hindutva movement negotiates the new situation with a three-fold strategy. It does not deny the privileges of consumerist individualism to its women. It incorporates women as leaders of the anti-Muslim violence and allows them a new role in activism that was earlier withheld. And it simultaneously constructs a revitalized moral vision of domestic and sexual norms that promises to restore the comforts of old sociabilities and familial solidarities without tampering either with women’s public role or with consumerist individualism” (Sarkar, 1998:104).

Such acts of ‘betrayal’ have taken caste in to consideration also as evident in anti-Mandal agitations in 1990s. In such conditions, the upper and middle castes’ women vented their anger (violent expressions) against the women of lower castes. It has been observed that “the combined effect of a) family and group legitimacy that enable attacks on members of other communities; and b) the failure to label domestic violence as criminal and illegitimate, have created a situation where women often find it much easier to collaborate with their own oppressors in inflicting violence upon others than to combat oppression within the family” (Parthasarathy, 2006).

The notion of universal sisterhood is seriously being questioned and reevaluated by the supporters of women’s movement (Butalia, 2001b:99-114) due to such incidents of violence. The consequences are too sharp to be ignored as “traditional forms and methods of campaigning” (Patel, 1998:198-207) are being questioned. The emerging complexities based on slippery identities have “forced them to confront the fact that they cannot assume a solidarity as women that cuts across class, religion, caste, ethnic difference. And yet, they must hold fast to such an assumption if they are to work with women: for how, as an activist, do you deal with a woman who takes part in a violent right wing demonstration one day, and comes to you for help as a victim of domestic violence the next?” (Butalia, 1997).

## 1.8 Dalit Feminism: 'Bottom' is an Uphill Task

*"Their inhuman atrocities have carved caves  
in the rock of my heart  
I have been silent all these years  
listening to the voice of right and wrong  
But now I will fan the flames  
of human rights"*

--'Caves' by Jyoti Lanjewar (Dalit woman poet)

*"We go to work for we are poor  
But the same silken beds mock us  
While we are ravished in broad daylight.  
Ill-starred our horoscopes are.  
Even our tottering husbands  
Lying in the cots in a corner  
Hiss and shout for revenge  
If we cannot stand their touch."*

--Teresamma (a Dalit poet)

A more sharp categorization into 'our women' and 'their women' is on caste lines (along with existing boundaries of religion) led to birth of a more radical and more intense introspection activities often manifested as *Dalit* feminism which emerged within the rubric of *dalit* assertion and movement in the post 1990s. *Dalit* movement was the product of increasing assertion on the parts of marginal section of caste system and the subsequent backlash from the upper and middle castes. Commenting on its nature Omvedt says

"The Dalit and the non-Brahman anti-caste movements can be classified as 'anti-systematic movements' in the framework of such Marxist theorists as Immanuel Wallerstein, or, in the functionalist sociological theory, as 'value oriented movements' as opposed to 'norm-oriented movements'. That is, they challenged and sought to transform the basic structure of the Indian Social system, replacing caste and the accompanying social oppression, economic exploitation and political domination by an equalitarian society" (Omvedt, 1994:10).

There are two different perspectives on *dalit* movement in the context of gender issues. On one hand it has been argued that "*dalit* identity politics articulates caste identity sharply but resists, deliberately, understanding and articulating the gender dimensions of caste itself (that sees all women not just *Dalit* women) in a certain light. Worse, it completely shuts out patriarchal attitudes of *Dalit* men vis-à-vis their women. This patriarchal attitude sideline women from forums and especially from decision-making bodies" (Thorat, 2001). On the other hand it has been pointed out that "it is the *dalit* movement which has established the rape of a *dalit* woman as rape. The sexual access to

women from the dominated castes, which was earlier regarded as the right of the dominant castes, has been radically configured by *dalit* politics and named as rape. Not only has this understanding forced a re-conceptualization of the humanist and feminist presumptions about the subject of rape but it has in very significant ways redefined *dalit* politics itself” (Pappu, 2001).

Broadly understood, “Dalit Feminist Standpoint (DFS) is about historically locating how all our identities are not equally powerful, and about reviewing how in different historical practices similarities between women have been ignored in an effort to underline caste-class identities or at other times differences ignored for ‘the feminist cause’” (Rege, 1998b:47-52; Rege, 2000). Dalit feminists have formulated the position of three-way oppression of *dalit* women (Chakravarti, 2003:142-143):

- i) as subject to caste oppression at the hands of the upper castes;
- ii) as labourers subject to the class-bound oppression, also mainly at the hands of the upper and middle castes who form the bulk of landowners;
- iii) as women who experience patriarchal oppression at the hands of all men , including men of their own caste.

An important documentation in the context of gendering untouchable/Dalit movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century has been attempted by Moon and Pawar (2003:48-56). It was during the protest to the custom of Dalit girl as *devadasis*, the earliest initiative of Dalit women in the movement took place. A turning point was the emergence of Dr. Ambedkar and his various activities in the field of women empowerment. Be it a movement for taking water from the public wells in 1927 in Mahad or Satyagraha movement in Nasik to enter Hindu temples in 1930, women in masses participated in these events. Their impressive presence in the conference of women at Nagpur in 1942 was even underlined by Dr. Ambedkar. The broad agenda of Dalit women activists during those struggling period included free and compulsory education for girls; women’s representation in State legislative assemblies, local bodies; training for self-protection of untouchable women, such as wielding of sticks or karate; starting a women’s wing in the Samta Sainik Dal (Equality Volunteer Corps); and prohibiting child marriages along with prostitution (Moon and Pawar, 2003:51).

In 1990s several independent and autonomous dalit women's organizations were established. The All India *Dalit* Women's Forum was formed in 1994. Later on, National Federation of *Dalit* Women in 1995 and All India *Dalit* Women's Forum was formed in 1996. At the same, various regional level *dalit* women's organizations emerged. These forums and organizations provided the platform to the Dalit women to express their views on various issues primarily caste and gender in the women's movements and patriarchy within the family and community. Subsequently, the oft-quoted thesis of 'Dalit women talk differently' (Guru, 2003:80-85) emerged. It is based on following arguments:

- i) It is not only caste and class identity but also one's gender positioning that decides the validity of an event;
- ii) Dalit men are reproducing the same mechanisms against their women which their high caste adversaries had used to dominate them; and
- iii) The experience of Dalit women shows that local resistance within the dalits is important.

The All India Democratic Women's Association organized 'Convention Against Untouchability and *Dalit* Women's Oppression' in December 1998. Dalit women across class profile voiced their experiences of exploitation (by upper caste women also) and subsequent modes of resistance. In many narratives it came out that "when it comes to taking water from a hand pump, notions of ritual purity are invoked, when it comes to the extraction of labour in the field, it does not matter at all that the seed is planted, the crop is tended and the grain harvested by the same untouchable. The same applies in the case of rape as social revenge/punishment/coercion" (Malik, 1999:323). Another important event in the *dalit* feminist discourse was the UN World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa in 2001. It provided an opportunity to contextualise the *dalit* (mainly *dalit* women) oppression similar to racism. The National Federation of *Dalit* Women was more vocal on this issue (Kannabiran, 2004:160-163).

The growing assertion of *dalit* women can be situated broadly into two specificities. First is the intense violent backlash of the upper and middle castes due to *dalit* assertion on the whole; secondly, there is a "tendency in women's movements to play down the caste

factor and to emphasise the unity among women as victims of violence *thus* the question of untouchability has not been thoroughly confronted” (emphasis mine, Dietrich, 1992:73). Moreover, as it has been argued that “not all women feel and respond in the same or similar manner; their responses are varied and are contextualised politically, culturally and historically. The differences in the perception of and ideological stand on the question of subjugation of women and the strategies undertaken to counter it reflect how women conceptualise ‘reality’ differently” (Mehrotra, 2002:64). Additively, unlike the upper and middle castes, the women in *dalit* community are more independent and assertive in the family, as they work mostly as daily wage labourers outside the home for additional income.<sup>13</sup> Such participation increases their decision-making capability in the family.

The emergence of *dalit* feminism is firmly based on the specific socio-economic features of the *dalit* community on the whole and the nature of violence they experience. Rege (1998b) argues that “An analysis of the practices of the caste basis of violence against women reveals that while the incidence of dowry deaths and violent control and regulation of their mobility and sexuality by the family is frequent among the dominant upper castes, Dalit women are more likely to face the collective and public threat of rape, sexual assault and physical violence at the work place and in public.”

National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and National Federation of *Dalit* Women jointly organized National Conference on Violence Against *Dalit* Women on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> March 2006.<sup>14</sup> The conference concluded with adopting ‘Delhi Declaration’. Various forms of violence recognized were rape, murder, physical assault, sexual harassment and verbal abuse. It was also pointed that the issues leading to violence are land, livelihood, share in natural resources, governance in panchayat and forced labour. The Declaration demanded that:

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<sup>13</sup> For a critique on this position, see Omvedt, G. (1979). “The Downtrodden among the Downtrodden: An Interview with a Dalit Agricultural Laborer.” In *Signs*, Summer. 4(4):763-774.

<sup>14</sup> National Conference on Violence Against *Dalit* Women.  
Web Address: <http://www.dalits.org/delhidecl.htm>

- Recognise *Dalit* Women as a distinct social group in the Indian population, recognizing the complex and specific nature of historical and continuing prevalence of untouchability, discrimination and social exclusion and the resultant violence committed against them.
- Study the complex interfaces of caste-class-gender to inform and provide the basis of policy-strategy direction, principles and guidelines for addressing issues and concerns of *Dalit* women.
- Ensure that disaggregated data on *Dalit* women and girl children is collected and reported in all census reports, progress reports and action taken reports in the development and human rights aspects and well as when reporting to international treaty bodies.
- Recognise the contribution of *Dalit* women in national productivity and well-being and ensure that she has a share in the country's wealth and resources.
- Include the concerns of *Dalit* women in the mandates and activities of both *Dalit* and women's movements.

Thus, the basic issues of mainstream feminist movement i.e. dowry and violence are nearly absent in the *dalit* feminist discourse. Moreover, such issues are being redefined by the *dalit* feminism as it “focused on sexual violence as important to the reproduction of the brahminical order. Rape, the stripping and parading of women, and other gendered forms of humiliation by upper-caste men are significant because they are gendered practices of violence through which untouchability is perpetuated. In fact sexual violence and the hyper-exploitation of *dalit* women's labour are two of the most important issues around which feminists' awareness of caste has been mobilized” (Rao, 2003).

### 1.9 Emerging Issues and Stakes

The women's movements in India are at cross roads in present times. There are various reasons to emerge as victorious and there are many pitfalls also. There have been legal battles won but at the same time the social attitude towards the women's issues are still in the primordial state. It has been observed that

“The unevenness of advances made by women within wider, ‘successful’ movements must therefore always be noted: enabled by Gandhian strategies to



enter the public sphere of politics, but only as spiritualized, traditional essences; enlightened by the educational opportunities offered by societies such as Arya Samaj, but under the strict tutelage of men; empowered by the communist party to stand shoulder to shoulder against class enemies, but also shouldering the burden of sexual morality. Not all instances of collective action in which large numbers of women participated necessarily empowered them. Nor were all forms of empowerment necessarily replicable across caste and class divisions. Indeed some forms of empowerment were only enabled by the disempowerment of others, and in this sense women were no exception" (Nair, 1994:90).

Some of the significant issues discussed here are women's movements and its interaction with legal discourse, women's movements and future of autonomous movement, viability of NGOs in the women's movement among other things. The women's movements have been successful in forcing the state to enact several laws protecting the rights of women and at the same time, the laws have been amended in the changed scenario. Subsequently, such laws include crimes against women both under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special & Local Laws (SLL).

The Crimes under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) are i) Rape (Sec. 376 IPC); ii) Kidnapping & Abduction for different purposes (Sec. 363 - 373 IPC); iii) Homicide for Dowry, Dowry Deaths or their attempts (Sec. 302/304-B IPC); iv) Torture - both mental and physical (Sec. 498-A IPC); v) Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC); vi) Sexual Harassment (referred in the past as 'Eve-Teasing') (Sec. 509 IPC) and vii) Importation of girls (upto 21 years of age) (Sec. 366-B IPC). The Crimes under the Special & Local Laws (SLL) include i) Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956; ii) Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; iii) The Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 1979; iv) Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 and v) Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987.

Yet, there are certain issues where the law has been restricted and thus has to accommodate the social values and norms. Krishnaraj (2003:4536) argues that recourse to legal remedies is not sufficient to bring changes in entrenched attitudes and values in society. The foremost issue of concern is the increasing incidents of violence of all kinds against women in spite of such legal recourses. As a case study, the issue of domestic violence is discussed as there is very less information (data) available on it.

The struggle of women's movements to address the issue of domestic violence began in the late 1960s itself. During the struggle for effective laws "Broadly three kinds of definitions of violence and cruelty against wives emerged: a narrow definition which often left out acts which many women consider as violence, as for instance rape within marriage. Second expert or professional definitions of violence, for example those of sociologists and psychologists who often focus on the 'breakdown' of the family, and third, a broader, feminist position which focused not only on the actual manifestations of violence against wives but also the ever present 'fear of violence' through which compliance with the patriarchal family norms is sought. Such a position reveals that across caste and class boundaries there is a continuum of violent practices against wives" (Rege, 1995:235).

After a prolonged struggle, it was in 1983 that domestic violence was recognized as a specific criminal offence. Accordingly, Section 498A (Section 304B in 1986) was introduced into the Indian Penal Code dealing with cruelty by a husband or his family towards a married woman. More specifically, four types of cruelty were emphasized like i) conduct that is likely to drive a woman to suicide; ii) conduct which is likely to cause grave injury to the life, limb or health of the woman; iii) harassment with the purpose of forcing the woman or her relatives to give some property, or iv) harassment because the woman or her relatives is unable to yield to demands for more money or does not give some property.

Thus, "The criminalisation of domestic violence in the form of Sec 498A and 304B (dowry death) sought to increase the certainty and severity of legal responses, thereby correcting historical, legal, and moral disparities in the legal protections afforded to abused women. It sought for the first time to bring the issue of domestic or family violence out of the protected private realm of the family and into the public domain in India" (Kothari, 2005). Yet, even the enactment of such laws were of little help for the victims of domestic violence as "A study covering more than 10,000 women in Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Lucknow and Bhopal conducted by the International Centre for Research on Women found that 45 per cent of women have experienced at least one episode of violence (excluding slapping). The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2

recorded data on violence acknowledging that suffering domestic violence is a contributory factor in women's ill-being. It found that one in three women over 15 years has experienced some form of violence."<sup>15</sup>

Subsequently, The Protection from Domestic Violence Bill 2002 was drafted and introduced. According to the Bill, domestic violence constitutes i) habitually assaults or makes the life of the aggrieved person miserable by cruelty of conduct even if such conduct does not amount to physical ill-treatment; or ii) forces the aggrieved person to lead an immoral life; or otherwise injures or harms the aggrieved person. It miserably failed to address the issue at hand and thus "attracted criticism from women's groups due to its regressive features such as a narrow definition of domestic violence; a self-defence clause for husbands; mandatory counselling and ill-defined jurisdiction of the courts" (Suneetha and Nagaraj, 2005). As an historic moment for the women's movements in India, a more gender sensitive initiative on domestic violence was witnessed as on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2005 the Domestic Violence against Women (Prevention and Protection) Bill 2005 became a reality. The new law accepts the rights of 'other women' and the multiplicity of domestic violence apart from physical acts of violence. It is too early to comment on the viability of the new law.

Another important issue is female infanticide that has emerged as a single most concern in the 2001 census. It has been observed that "all the states that have shown large declines in child sex ratio between 1991 and 2001 – Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Chandigarh and Delhi – are economically well developed and have recorded a fairly high literacy rate" (Premi, 2001:1875-1880). The act of killing the female baby is multifaceted and most of the time the patriarchal social values and norms are its basic cause. Additively other reasons like caste honour and marriage and dowry expenses at the later stage are also there.

Even the stringent laws are of little help in curbing such incidents. The overall scenario is described by Athreya and Chunkath (2000:4345-4348) in following words: "The mother,

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<sup>15</sup> Women: Discouraging Violence. October 26, 2002 [Online]

Available at: <http://www.epw.org.in/showArticles.php?root=2002&leaf=10&filename=5069&filetype=html>

grandmother or an elderly female relative of the infant, who are usually compelled (or otherwise pressured) by the patriarchal male leadership of the family (or neighbourhood social group) to carry out the actual act – would be arrested and punished. Those who incited the crime – often the father of the infant threatening to throw out the mother if she did not kill the female infant – would escape the long arm of the law by concocting suitable alibis.”

In the similar way, the incidents of committing Sati are also a concern for the women’s movements in India. After a long gap, the debates on it are in the context of rise of rightwing politics and Dalit assertion and deepening of women’s rights. The incident of Charan Shah committing Sati in Satpura hamlet of Mahoba, Uttar Pradesh in the month of December 1999 has raised the problematic issue of ‘sanskritisation’ of Sati practice (Khan, 1999). Again in Panna District (Madhya Pradesh) Kuttu Bai committed Sati in August 2002. In another incident Ramkunwari committed Sati in Bahundari village in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh in June 2005.

Although the events are capable of challenging the women’s movements on their own of the latter’s viability and strength, what is more disturbing is the fact that “A prominent section of intellectuals like Ashish Nandi and Madhu Kishwar have been arguing for protecting old cultural practices *including Sati*” (Viswanath, 1999). Then there are issues of abortion, sexual harassment of women at the workplace and other institutions (Vishakha judgement of August 1997) along with “culture policing during 1997 Miss World Contest in Bangalore, protests of celebration of Valentine Day and movie ‘Fire’, multiple sexualities, right to body and reproduction (Phadke, 2003:4573-4575) and passing of Women’s Reservation Bill.

The data from National Crime Records Bureau for the year 2005 reveals a distressing figure. According to the Report, there were altogether 1,54,333 and 1,55,553 incidents of crime in 2004 and 2005 respectively<sup>16</sup> as reflected in Table A.

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<sup>16</sup> Snapshots - 2005 [Online]  
Available at <http://ncrb.nic.in/crime2005/cii-2005/Snapshots.pdf>

**Table A: Incidents of Crime Against Women (2001-2005)**

Sl. No.	Crime Head	Year				
		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
1	Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)	16075	16373	15847	18233	18359
2	Kidnapping & Abduction (Sec. 363 to 373 IPC)	14645	14506	13296	15578	15750
3	Dowry Death (Sec. 302/304B IPC)	6851	6822	6208	7026	6787
4	Torture (Sec. 498A IPC)	49170	49237	50703	58121	58319
5	Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC)	34124	33943	32939	34567	34175
6	Sexual Harassment (Sec. 509 IPC)	9746	10155	12325	10001	9984
7	Importation of Girls (Sec. 366-B IPC)	114	76	46	89	149
8	Sati Prevention Act, 1987	0	0	0	0	1
9	Immoral Traffic (P) Act, 1956	8796	6598	5510	5748	5908
10	Indecent Rep. of Women (P) Act, 1986	1052	2508	1043	1378	2917
11	Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	3222	2816	2684	3592	3204
<b>Total</b>		<b>1143795</b>	<b>1143034</b>	<b>1140601</b>	<b>1154333</b>	<b>1155553</b>

Crimes Against Women [Online]

Available at: <http://ncrb.nic.in/crime2005/cii-2005/CHAP5.pdf>

However, a more serious issue is the future of autonomous women's group's movement<sup>17</sup> which was discussed recently on the occasion of the celebration of 25<sup>th</sup> birthday of Saheli, an autonomous women's group (AWG) on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2006 at New Delhi<sup>18</sup>. The theme of celebration was 'strengthening autonomous politics'. Various issues were discussed in the meeting ranging from initiatives taken by women's groups in pre-independence era to the emergence of a more organized form of autonomous women's group to the contemporary challenges confronting the same. Apart from resisting the dominance of women's frontal organizations of various political parties and other 'dominant voices'<sup>19</sup>, the autonomous women's groups today are grappling with new issues. Some of these are Women's Reservation Bill for political representation, education, health and social security in the era of globalization. Additively a systematic and comprehensive action plan has to be envisaged to tackle the class and caste dimensions of reality influencing women.

It is in this context that the participation of Dalit women in naxalite movement in Bihar has to be analysed. It presents various dimensions of the women's movements in India. Foremost, it can be seen as a strategy (among many) to counter the gender discrimination and resisting patriarchy. It is so because the struggles and sites of resistance are situated in a specific socio-cultural milieu. Thus, the experiences and the retaliations are mediated through such structures. Additively, it brings out the issue of violence at the forefront of the women's movements. Another significant feature is the 'othering' of Dalit women as the upper and middle caste women seldom have experienced the violence Dalit women faced. Thus, the caste and gender dimension holds much importance in our analysis. Most importantly, it situates the viability of autonomous women's groups/movements since the struggle in Bihar is led by the women's frontal organization of CPI(ML) Liberation's AIPWA. AIPWA calls itself an autonomous women's movement yet it is anchored in its parent political party. Such issues are dealt in the subsequent chapters.

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<sup>17</sup> Saheli, Manushi, Vimochana, Asmita, Forum Against Oppression of Women, Anveshi, Awaaz-e-Niswaan, Sama and Samparna are some of the contemporary autonomous women's group (AWGs).

<sup>18</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on Saheli see, Mehrotra (2002; 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Generally referred to as the 'Seven Sisters' – it includes All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), All India Women's Conference (AIWC), Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), Joint Women's Programme (JWP), Mahila Dakshata Samiti (JMS), National Federation of Women in India (NFIW) and Young Women Christian Association of India (YWCA).

# **CHAPTER**

# **II**

## Chapter 2

### Historicizing Bihar

Bihar is situated in northeastern India. It is bordered by Nepal on the north, West Bengal on the east, Jharkhand on the south, Chhattisgarh on the southwest and Uttar Pradesh on the west. Its latitude is 21 58' 10" to 27 31' 15" North and longitude is 82 19' 50" to 88 17' 40" East. Bihar has been the reverent place of three of the six major religions in India i.e. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Historically, Bihar was part of the ancient kingdom of Magadha. Mhd. Bakhtiyar Khilji invaded Bihar in 1197 and subsequently it was invaded by Delhi Sultans in 1497.

In 1765 the British merged Bihar with Bengal. Although in December 1911, Bihar & Orissa were separated from Bengal yet Bihar State was first formed in 1912. Orissa ceded away from Bihar on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1936 under the Government of India Act, 1935 as an independent separate state and the Province of Bihar came into being as an administrative unit of British India. The British rule in Bihar was marked by numerous revolts<sup>1</sup> and most importantly, Gandhi's Champaran struggle. After independence in 1947, the erstwhile Bihar province formed the State of Bihar as a part of the Republic of India. In 1956, about 3,150 sq. miles (8,160 sq. km.) situated along Bihar's south-eastern boundary (predominantly the district of Purulia) was separated and incorporated into West Bengal under the Linguistic Reorganization of Indian States. On 14<sup>th</sup> November 2000, southern half of Bihar (45 percent of its territory) became the State of Jharkhand.

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<sup>1</sup> The most prominent revolts against the British were Santhal Pragana revolt of 1781-82, the Hoj agitation of 1820-21, Kol agitation of 1831-33, etc. All these revolts were finally shaped into the revolt of 1857 led by Kunwar Singh (landlord from Ara, Bihar). The publication of *Bihar Times* in 1894 demanded a separate State.



Figure 2.1: Political Map of Bihar



**Table 2.1: Bihar - Human Development Fact Sheet**

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

Bihar - Human Development Fact Sheet [Online].  
 Available at: <http://www.undp.org.in/Programme/undpini/factsheet/bihar.pdf>

## 2.1 Socio-Agrarian Structure

Regarding the nature of agrarian structure, the caste system was superimposed on the agrarian class as it “served two purposes: one, they reminded the raiyats of their location in the caste-cosmology and second, they ritualized subjugation and thereby sought to normalize it” (Kumar, 2003:4978). The social hierarchy of different castes in Bihar can be studied by broadly categorizing them in three social groups. The first social group is of upper castes that include Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumihars, and the Kayasthas. Bhojpur, Rohtas and Buxar districts are the areas of Brahmins. Although all customarily wear the sacred thread yet Brahmins enjoy ritual dominance (Srinivas, 1987:10-11) as only they are learned in the Sanskrit texts. Both Rajputs and Bhumihars is the major landowner in Bihar. Rajputs are concentrated in Madhepura, Saharsa and Purnea districts. The districts of central Bihar like Patna, Jehanabad, Monghyr and Gaya are areas of Bhumihars. Although Kayasthas is not a landowning caste, yet its elite status stems from its traditional occupation of ‘writers’ or ‘scribes’. It is one of the most educated castes having a large presence in the government services (Gopal, 1989:173).

The second social group is constituted by the backward castes (further divided in to upper and lower backward castes). Tenants and agricultural laborers mainly constitute this social group. The upper layer of this caste group i.e. Yadav derives its economic strength from its share in agricultural activities and dairy practices while Kurmi and Koeri practice cultivation along with doing the tenancy work (Kohli, 1990:208-209). The third social group consists of lower castes and untouchables or *Harijans*, also known as Scheduled Castes in constitutional vocabulary. The major sources of livelihood are menial occupations, agricultural labourers and or landless laborers. The major caste categories in this group are *Chamar*, *Pasi*, *Musahar*, *Dom*, *Dhobi*, *Dusadh*, etc Among this group, *Musahar* community is the poorest of all.

The population distribution of various castes and communities as outlined by Blair (1980:65) needs mention. Brahmin (4.6%), Bhumihar (2.8%), Rajput (4.2%) and Kayastha (1.2%) come under Forward category that is 12.7 percent of the total population. Bania (0.6%), Yadav (10.7%), Kurmi (3.5%) and Koeri (4.0%) are in Upper

Backward category. It is 18.8 percent of the total population. Other backward population includes lower backward (15.6%) and Other Shudra (15.6%). Thus, the overall population of backward castes is nearly 50 percent of the total population. Scheduled Castes (13.8%) and Scheduled Tribes (8.9%) totally account for 20.7 percent of total population. Rest is the population of Muslim (12.2%) and Bengali (2.4%).<sup>1</sup>

For the vast population of Bihar, the major source of income is agricultural activities. Thus, the analysis of social groups has also to be seen in the perspective of agrarian social categories i.e. class also. According to the 1981 Census, 79.07 percentage of the total population is engaged in agricultural activities. 37 percent of the total labour force is agricultural labourer. Here in, the caste overlaps with class as the proportion of upper castes in this category is very low i.e. 0.3 percent. Likewise, backward castes 34 percent, Scheduled castes 40 percent, Scheduled tribes 13.8 percent and Muslims constitute 13 percent of the agricultural labour force (Singh, 2005:13). Thus, the ownership of land becomes an important criterion in demarcating the different classes. However, as argued this class structure does not exist in vacuum rather it is deeply embedded in the caste order prevailing in Bihar. The upper castes i.e. Brahman, Bhumihar and Rajput own more than two third of the total land and as the consequence the lower castes have been reduced to the category of tenants, agricultural labourer and in most cases bonded labourer (Das, 1979:3-29; Bharti, 1990:2124-2125; Brass, 1999:110-130; Chakravarti, 2001:282-286).

## **2. 2 Peasant Movements in Bihar**

The history of peasant revolts in Bihar dates back to the beginning of colonial period. The main cause of these revolts was the lack of equal ownership of the land. The *Sannyasi* Rebellion in 1770 in Bengal had its repercussion on the Ho tribal peasants of Chotanagpur in Jharkhand (northern part of undivided Bihar) that revolted against the British in 1820-21. The consecutive years of 1820, 1832 and 1890 were marked by the *Oraon* - another tribal community – rebellion. Covering the states of Bihar, Orissa and Bengal; the *Santhal* uprising of 1855-57 against British domination was one of most

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<sup>1</sup> For another discussion on this aspect, see Roy (1994:224).

widespread revolt. It was only in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the areas of North and Central Bihar came under influence of these massive peasants uprisings (Jha, 1997).

Divine right of the upper caste on the system of land ownership (Bandyopadhyay, 1993:A-149) was conferred legal status when the British enacted the Permanent Settlement Act, 1793 (Jha, 1980:55; Mitra, 1985:34). It gave rise to three tenure systems i.e. *Zamindari* tenure (initiated in Bengal by Lord Cornwallis in 1793 and was later on extended to parts of Bihar, Orissa and Madras), *Mahalwari* tenure (Agra and Oudh and later on in the parts of Punjab) and *Ryotwari* tenure (Bombay, in most of Madras, parts of Bihar and Assam). It formed a new set of hierarchy further fuelling various peasant movements (Jha, 1997). The situation is represented in figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Hierarchy of Interests in Land

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

Source: Jannuzi, (1974:11).

An organised form of peasant movement in Bihar began in late 1930s with the formation of the Patna District Kisan Sabha under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati in 1927.<sup>2</sup> However, it is important to note that Swami Vidyanand led a significant peasant campaign against the leading landlord, Raj Darbhanga in 1919-1920 itself. "This campaign was massive as it involved thousands of peasants from four of the seven districts of north Bihar, .....from a peasant studies perspective Swami Vidyanand's 1919-1920 campaign is much more important than the Champaran Satyagraha" (Henningham, 1984:227). The Patna District Kisan Sabha later became the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS) in 1929 with Swami Sahajanand Saraswati as its president. At the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1936, the All-India Kisan Congress (AIKC) came into existence<sup>3</sup> and Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha (BPKS) became its foremost provincial unit struggling against zamindari (Battacharya, 1986:17-22).

The various issues of Kisan Sabha movement were zamindari abolition, *Begar* (forced labour), *Abwab* (illegal exactions) and *Baksht* land right among others (Rasul, 1974:36,47; D.N., 1989b:661). Among these *Baksht* land right was more significant (Henningham, 1984:227). Due to ideological differences BPKS gradually disassociated itself from Gandhi and Bihar Provincial Congress Committee (Battacharya, 1986: 20; Mundargi, 1990:1217-1222). One of the serious drawbacks of the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha was that it relied much more on the rich and upper-middle peasants for its support and programmes that was very suicidal as it marginalized the agricultural laborers and petty cultivators (Omvedt, 1986:172-173). After Sahajanand's death in 26<sup>th</sup> June 1950, the BPKS gradually came in the hands of Karyanand Sharma who was a CPI activist (Battacharya, 1986: 23).

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<sup>2</sup> There were atleast three important phenomenon of regionally organized expressions of the so-called 'agricultural labourers' in the late 1930s. In north India, Rajendra Prasad and Jagjiwan Ram began to organize landless labourers in opposition to the Socialist-dominant All India Kisan Sabha. The *Bihar Khet Majur Sabha* was established in 1937; organizing work in Gujarat and Orissa was also reported; and a *Bhumiheen Khetihar Majdur* Conference was held in February 1938 at the time of the Haripura Conference (Omvedt, 1986:177).

<sup>3</sup> The All Indian Kisan Committee met at Niyamatpur in Gaya district, Bihar, on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1937 and changed the name of organization to All India Kisan Sabha instead of All Indian Kisan Committee

Another initiative to solve “land problem in the usual democratic way without bloodshed” (Diwakar, 1959:818), Vinoba Bhave conceived of *Bhoodan* based on Gandhian notion of trusteeship (Srivastava, 1967:206-215) in village Durgawati (Shahabad district) on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1952. Till June 1956, 2,147,842 acres of land was pledged. The all-India conference of *Bhoodan* workers at Kerala in 1956 changed *Bhoodan* into *Gramdan* i.e. gift of whole village (Oommen, 1984:308). After the departure of Vinoba Bhave from Bihar in 1965, J. P. Narayan, an ardent disciple of the former, actively participated in the *Bhoodan* movement. By March 1966, the movement claimed to have distributed only 311,037 acres of land to previously landless families in Bihar (Jannuzi, 1974:100).

The overall performance of *Bhoodan - Gramdan* movement in Bihar has been viewed as “nothing but a part of a wider counter-counter insurgency in *Gandhian mode of action* to stamp out armed peasant struggle from the face of Bihar” (Rasul, 1974:62-63; Battacharya, 1986:26). Apart from lack of organizational capability of the movement other factors like sub-standard land being pledged also added to the movements’ decline. Many a time, these pledges were only temporal in nature and to avoid various measures of land reforms i.e. ceiling and consolidation of lands (Jannuzi, 1974:97-104; Oommen, 1984:xviii; Bharti, 1988:2519)

### **2.3 Land Reforms**

The issue of land reform is based on three agrarian theses. These were *Congress Agrarian Committee* constituted in 1949, Communist Party of India’s *Political Thesis* (1948) aiming at ‘land to the tiller’ and militant mobilization of the peasants for an agrarian revolution and third Gandhian approach followed by Vinoba Bhave’s *Bhoodan Gramdan* movement in 1948 (Joshi, 1975:38-39). Land being the State subject, Bihar was the first state in independent India to legislate on land reforms in 1950. The various acts aiming at land reform measures passed by Bihar state government are shown in Table 2.3 in next page.

Table 2.3: Bihar Land Reform Legislations

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

Source: Besley and Burgess (2000).



Various provisions in land reform measures permitted the *zamindars* to keep enough homestead land and land for the purpose of trade, handicraft or commerce and for storage etc. (Battacharya, 1986:29-34). Along with it, huge monetary compensation was given to the *zamindars* by the State for acquiring their land (Singh, 2005:27-28). The State acquired 'surplus land' and its subsequent distribution was marred by frequent litigation favouring upper caste landed gentry (Prasad, 2001:81). Similarly, Bihar Tenancy Act, 1885 miserably lacked the protective provisions for the protection of under-*ryots* and or the non-occupancy tenants. It was observed that

“...as of the summer of 1970, a situation existed in Bihar in which (a) unknown thousands of landholders retained holdings in excess of the ceiling area, few steps having been taken to determine the size of their holdings; (b) unknown thousands of tenants or under-*raiya*s had either been evicted from their holdings or continued to till them in fear of imminent eviction; (c) no one in government knew how much surplus land would vest in the state (and be available for distribution to landless agricultural laborers to be farmed individually or collectively, as prescribed by the act; (d) no surplus land had been available for distribution as a direct result of ceilings legislation; and (e) no under-*raiya*s had been recorded as *raiya*s having a permanent occupancy right, as would have been possible had the act been implemented” (Jannuzi, 1974:85).

Thus, it can be safely concluded that land reform measures were throttled at its very embryonic stage (Sinha, 1978:1759; Ghosh, 1979:1850-1853). The *zamindars* were helped through legal exemptions clearly as the State – represented by the legislature and bureaucracy – was overwhelmingly dominated by the upper caste landed gentry themselves as “a staggering 83 percent of the bureaucracy personnel were of upper caste” (Kumar, 2003:4978).

## **2.4 Rise of *Kulaks***

The various measures of land reform did not failed completely as it did gave birth to the class of 'kulak' i.e. small capitalist farmer class of backward castes (Yadav, Koeri and Kurmi) that derived its improved socio-economic status from miniscule successful implementation of the land reforms and pale green revolution (Singh, 1986:55). In this context, it has been argued that “...the political process set into train by this new awakening will, of course, be subjected to a backlash from those who have enjoyed power and privilege for close to half a century. Also, the new bearers of power from the deprived sections will not necessarily pursue the interests of the large masses in whose

name they are likely to assume power (as some of them already have); for the masses there is still a long road ahead” (Kothari, 1998:35-36).

The economic ascendancy of the kulaks was the result of two factors among other things; first, the gradual consolidation of land holdings due to the implementation (although limited) of land reforms (Desai, 1986: 23-28; Kohli, 1990:210-234) and second, the provision of reservation for the backward castes and classes in the government services and jobs.<sup>4</sup> Increased political power was another tool of domination (Blair, 1980:68). Although the kulaks manipulated caste solidarity having economic interests in their minds (Battacharya, 1986:47-55; Prasad, 1979:481; Prasad, 1980:215) yet it is difficult to establish a cause-effect relationship between these two variables i.e. whether the increasing economic strength was the outcome of the increase in the political power or the political power flowed from the barrel of agricultural change (Prasad, 1991:1923; Louis, 2003:51).

With the emergence of kulak, the agrarian scene became more violent and exploitative. Some of such incidents are briefly discussed. The chain started with the Belchhi (Patna) massacre on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1977 in which 8 *Harijans* and 3 of *Sunar* caste were burnt alive by Kurmi landlords (Ranjan, 1978:25-37). The brutal incident was the fallout of growing assertion by the Dalits under the Harijan leader Sindhwa who was also a supporter of MCC. On the other hand, the Kurmis led by Mahavir Mahato who on account of the economic prosperity started exploiting the Harijan landless labourers. It was retaliated by the Harijan leader Sindhwa. Thus, the police records documented that it was not a massacre rather a gang war. Later on, the Harijan locality of the Pipra village (Patna) was attacked by near about 200 gun wielding Kurmi landowners on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1980. In all 14 people were killed including 5 women, 3 adults and 6 children.

On the whole, the resultant struggles between these camps were of twofold in nature; first, it took the shape of caste wars i.e. upper caste vs. lower caste and the second, which was more dangerous and deceitful was class war i.e. lower class vs. upper class and

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<sup>4</sup> The Janata party government headed by Karpoori Thakur announced on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1977 to reserve 26 percent of the seats and jobs for the Other Backward Classes and castes.

kulaks. The agricultural fields of Bihar soon became the “flaming fields of Bihar”.<sup>5</sup> Thus, “...in caste terms, the state-level ruling class is the upper castes and its traditional rule is being challenged mainly by the upper middle castes. This is the caste character of the current political struggle in Bihar which is essentially the phenomenon of class struggle (Prasad, 1991:1925).

## 2.5 Advent of *Naxalism*

Mohanty while commenting on “the nature of the movement and the political challenge it posed to the Indian state” advanced three propositions which were: “i) The Naxalite movement was a pre-organisational movement; ii) it practiced ideological parallelism to a large extent mechanically applying formulations of the Chinese revolution to contemporary India; and iii) the strategy pursued by the Naxalites was a narrow construction of revolutionary strategy and was not always one of revolutionary violence” (Mohanty, 2006:3163). The class based agrarian exploitation (Dhangare, 1983; Gough, 1974:32-34) of the Dalit landless agricultural labourers was challenged by pursuing the militant tactics of the Marxist-Leninist and Maoist ideology. The freedom from the age-old traditions was thus sought by violently striking the very basis of feudal domination (Chatterjee, 1999:171).

The Naxalite movement in Bihar can be divided into two phases: the formative phase from 1967 to 1977 and the current phase from 1977 onwards (Bhatia, 2005:1536). The first naxal upsurge took place in April 1968 at Musahari, a community development Block in Muzaffarpur district in North Bihar under Kisan Mazdoor Sangram Samitis. It later on gathered momentum in Bhojpur district (Sinha, 1978:90; Das, 1979:154-163; Yadav and Mukherjee, 1980). The main issues were occupancy right over land, increase in the wages and violated dignity (Kala et.al, 1986:258-259; D N, 1989a:231). Although it was severely crushed by the State yet the movement later on spread to several neighbouring districts.

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<sup>5</sup> This much written about term has been extensively discussed in *Report From the Flaming Fields of Bihar: A CPI(M) Document*. P. Bhattacharya, Calcutta (1986).

It was Ekwari village (Sahar Block in Shahabad district) where the naxalite ideology was realized to its maiden optimum practice. Ekwari was the biggest village in Sahar Block in Shahabad district having nearly 90 percent of rural population at the time of movement. Along with benefits of green revolution (due to British-built river *Sone* canal) Sahar was also a model Block of the Intensive Area Development project (IADP). These led to stark inequalities between upper caste (37.45%) landlords and lower caste (40%) labourers. It was during resisting booth rigging done by upper castes in Assembly election (17<sup>th</sup> February 1967), Jagdish Mahto alias 'Master Sahib' (activist of CPI) was beaten up. The beginning was with the killing of Sheopujan Singh who was mercenary of landlords on 20<sup>th</sup> May 1971. However, the police firing on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1973 in Chauri village in Sahar Block (Bhojpur) on the agricultural labourers (termed 'naxalites) demanding higher wages was a turning point. The resultant struggle under *Kisan Mazdoor Sangram Samitis* led to killings of various class enemies since February 1971. From Ekwari the struggle spread to Punpun in early 1973 and later to Masaurhi in early 1975 (both are Blocks in Patna district).

Caste based violence became an order of day<sup>6</sup> as the naxalites drew in heavy participation of the poor and landless peasants despite the overlapping tendency of caste and class (Editorial EPW, 1987:913). As a part of naxalite movement, the *Bhartiya Khet Mazdoor Union* (CPI (pro-Soviet)) launched the 'Land Liberation' movement on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1970 at Patna (D N, 1988:459; Mukul, 1992:1780).<sup>7</sup> Nearly 20,000 acres of land were occupied in various districts like Purnea, Champaran, Bhagalpur among others (Guru Prasad, 1986:127).<sup>8</sup>

The mid-1970s was the most violent phase of naxalite movement and its 'counter insurgency' by the State. National Emergency in 1975 gave immense brute power to the

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<sup>6</sup> Purnia in North Bihar saw the first caste massacre at *Rudaspur Chandwa* village when peasant *adivasis* (tribals) were gunned down by the farm managers of the then Bihar Assembly Speaker, L.N. Sudhanshu, in 1969. The assault was led by Lakshmi Barain Sudhanshu, the son of the then Bihar Assembly Speaker, L.N. Sudhanshu.

<sup>7</sup> This argument has been critiqued by those who point out Socialist's contribution in rural agrarian struggles. See Surjeet, 1986:108-110.

<sup>8</sup> The 1970s 'Land Grab' movement initiated mainly by CPI fizzled out soon due to the inherent organizational inability of the Left parties to sustain it for the optimum results. However, this movement again resurfaced in the 1990s in form of 'Bhumi Mukti Andolan' (Land Libereation Movement) launched jointly by the CPI, CPI (M) and the Indian Peoples' Front.

State to tackle naxal 'menace'. The Bhojpur police launched 'Operation Thunder' in May 1976 to liquidate the naxalites and to suppress the uprising. The violence resulted in the brutal killing of the leaders of naxalite movement like Jagdish Mahto, Rameshwar Ahir, Narayan kavi, Chamku Mushar and others. Along with them, several hundreds of landless poor agricultural labourers mostly belonging to Mushar community were branded 'naxalites' and killed. The following observation will suffice the everyday scene of 'Operation Thunder':

"Every time a jeep with government markings swings down the dusty strip of the road that slices the Sahar countryside, word goes round. Half-naked Mushars and Chamars, with their ribs sticking out, are hustled into standing jeeps as bayonets prick their back. Often resistance is offered and a skirmish ensues – the smell of power lingers, a few corpses on either side litter the open space; women linger in the shadows while their men are led away, their hands roped to their backs. One part of 'Operation Thunder' is over, the rest, not visible at close range, is more sordid. It continues" (Mukherjee and Yadav, 1982:119-120).

At present, the naxal movement is strongly entrenched in more than eight districts. Among these Bhojpur, Jehanabad (Correspondent EPW, 1986:813; Bharti, 1988:2519)<sup>9</sup>, Aurangabad (Sinha, 1985:343), Gaya and Patna (PU DR, 1986:1531) are most important. Jehanabad has witnessed to the maximum number of massacres since the late 1970's. The mass peasant militant mobilization is done primarily by three radical polity based left-wing groups: CPI(M-L) Party Unity [now re-designated Peoples War Group (PWG) after its merger with the Andhra Pradesh based PWG)], Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and CPI(ML) Liberation [[popularly known as Ma Le; 'Maaley' in local dialectics (Ma stands for Marxist while Le stands for Leninist)]. Among these, both the MCC and Party Unity are banned since 6<sup>th</sup> December 2001 by Central government under section 18 of the Prevention of Terrorist Act, 2002 and under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 2004 thus they wage underground struggles. Appendix I presents the frontal organizations of these naxalite organizations in central Bihar. A brief introduction of each organization is given below.

As a result of merger between two CPI(ML) groups, CPI(ML) Unity Organization and Central Organizing Committee CPI(ML), Party Unity emerged on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1982. In

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<sup>9</sup> Jehanabad has witnessed to the maximum number of massacres since the late 1970's.

Bihar, the Peoples War Group<sup>10</sup> established its presence with the merger of CPI(M-L) and CPI-ML (Party Unity) on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1998. The unified group named itself as is CPI(ML) People's War (PW). Since then the outfit has expanded and consolidated its area of operations in many districts. The fighting force of the PWG was formed in December 2000 known as the People's Guerrilla Army (PGA). At present, the PWG is active in Patna, Aurangabad, Gaya, Jehanabad, Rohtas, Buxur, Saharsha, Khagaria, Banka and Jamui districts.

Aurangabad and Gaya in Bihar are the strongholds of Maoist Communist Centre (MCC)<sup>11</sup>. Gradually it expanded its influence to other parts of state also. At present, it is active in Patna, Aurangabad, Gaya, Jehanabad, Arwal, Nawada, Kaimur, Rohtas, Bhojpur, Motihari, Sitamarhi, Sheohar, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and Jamui. The most entrenched areas of its operation are Bhagwanganj and Sigori in Masaurhi subdivision of Patna district and Konch and Imamganj areas of Gaya district. It functioned mostly as underground organization till 1982. It has formed 'guerilla zones' to achieve its objectives. The basic issue of struggle is redistribution of surplus land among the agricultural labourers and poor peasants. It counters the caste discrimination and violence through economic blockade and social boycott of landed gentry.

The first ever killing along with party objectives was in early January 1973 in Gaya. Later on MCC formed Krantikari Kisan Committees (Revolutionary Peasants Communities) to mobilize the mass to struggle for people's power. Subsequently, on 7<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The official name of People's War Group (PWG) is Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist) (People's War) -- CPI-ML (PW). The People's War Group was formed in Southern Indian State of Andhra Pradesh on April 22, 1980 by Kondapalli Seetharamaiah. He was one of the most influential Naxalite leaders in the State and a member of the erstwhile Central Organising Committee of the Communist Party of India—Marxist-Leninist, (CPI-ML). The eventual objective is to install a "people's government" through the "people's war". The PWG traces its ideology to the Chinese leader Mao Tse Tung's theory of organised peasant insurrection. It rejects parliamentary democracy and believes in capturing political power through protracted armed struggle based on guerrilla warfare. This strategy entails building up of bases in rural and remote areas and transforming them first into guerrilla zones and then as liberated zones, besides the area-wise seizure and encircling cities.

<sup>11</sup> During the formation of Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) with the merger of several Maoist groups in 1969, one left-wing extremist group, *Dakshin Desh*, did not join and decided to retain its independent identity. Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) as a left outfit came into existence, in its earlier version, on October 20, 1969, as *Dakshin Desh*. In 1975, the outfit was renamed as the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC). It traces its ideology to the Chinese Communist leader Mao Tse Tung's dictum of organised peasant insurrection.

October 1986, it killed 11 persons belonging to the Rajput community in Darmia village Aurangabad district. However, the massacre of 42 persons belonging to the Rajput family at Dalelchak-Baghaura village in the same district on May 29, 1987 brought the outfit into headlines. Its trail of violence aimed against the upper castes landed gentry has thus far resulted in massacre of 37 members of the landowning upper caste at Bara village, Gaya district on February 12, 1999 (Chaitanya, 1992:761-765); and massacre of 34 persons in Senari village, Jehanabad district on March 18, 1999.

Although the objectives of MCC are more or less same as of other Left parties i.e. fighting for minimum wages, "land to the tiller" and resisting multiple forms of feudal social oppression, yet skirmishes between MCC and other Left parties have also taken place resulting in loss of life on both sides (Correspondent EPW, 1999:308; Louis, 2002:274-277). More recently, MCC launched a fierce attack on Jahanabad district jail and abducted about 12 *Ranvir Sena* cadres on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2005. Maoists later on claimed that 'Operation Jailbreak' was planned to coincide with the 'great November 13 Russian revolution' (Bhatia, 2005b:5369-5370; Louis, 2005:5371-5372).

The basic tenet of CPI(ML) Liberation is to merge parliamentary and non-parliamentary struggles (militant peasant mobilization) in such a manner that these two play complementary roles with each other. At the same time, (ML) will boycott elections in and for any revolutionary causes (Mishra, 2000:18). It has powerful presence in Bhojpur, Patna, Jahanabad, Aurangabad, Gaya, Rohtas, Siwan and other places. The first Congress of CPI(ML) Liberation<sup>12</sup> was held underground<sup>13</sup> on 15-16 May 1970 at Kolkata. Comrade Charu Mazumdar was elected as General Secretary and a 21-member central committee was formed. It focused on intense armed peasant struggle. Due to ideological fragmentation in 1972-1972, a new Central Committee was formed on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1974. The CPI(ML) Liberation in Bihar became more prominent after the Emergency of 1975. In between 1974-76, its armed squad *Lal Sena* was responsible for many 'justifiable' actions taken on the landowners.

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<sup>12</sup> The 'Liberation' suffix to CPI(ML) is as its magazine 'Liberation' has been the central organ of AICCCR from May 1968 and then after CPI(ML) from April 1969.

<sup>13</sup> With the police raid on the office and printing press of the *Deshabrati Prakashani* on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1970, all party organs of CPI(ML) had to go underground.

Comrade Vinod Mishra became General Secretary after the martyrdom of Comrade Jauhar on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1975. The second Congress of CPI(ML) Liberation was held at 26<sup>th</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> February 1976 in Gaya district in Bihar. Here onwards CPI(ML) had 'Liberation' as its aim of struggle. It focused on an anti-Congress united front. A mass rectification movement was initiated aiming at sidelining the militarist style of functioning and intensifying mass peasant movement. In 1978 *Mazdur Kisan Sangram Samiti* was formed. A special All India Conference was held in Bhojpur, Bihar from 26<sup>th</sup> April to 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1979. It emphasized on the formation of various trade unions, students' organisations and other mass organizations. Consequently, Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha was revitalized on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1981 (Battacharya, 1986:A3-A4; Chaudhry, 1988:53). Subsequently, Indian People's Front (IPF) was launched in three-day Conference held on 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> April 1982 at New Delhi as a mass political organization to enter into parliamentary process of government formation.<sup>14</sup>

The third Congress of CPI(ML) Liberation was organized at Giridih district of Bihar (now Jharkhand) from 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> December 1982. It was significant as a separate 'Agrarian Programme' was adopted. A Central Committee was also formed consisting of 17 full and 8 alternative members. After much debate, the idea of parliamentary democracy was accepted under IPF. IPF contested in Legislative election in 1985 from Ara constituency. Although the brief spell of IPF gave thousands of dalits a new *izzat* (Bharti, 1990b:980) and provided them means of assertion, the State machinery saw it as "gradual increasing influence of the 'extremism'" (Prasad, 1987:851). The increasing political assertion of *dalits* due to IPF made the upper caste landed gentry apprehensive and it retaliated with *Tiskhora* carnage led by R.L.S. Yadav's *Bhartiya Kisan Sangh* in January 1991.

The fourth Congress of CPI(ML) Liberation was held at Hazaribagh district of Bihar (now Jharkhand) from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> January 1988. During the meeting, a 21-member central committee and a 3-member central control commission was elected. It coined the slogan of 'Left and Democratic Confederation' as it sought to establish interaction with the rest

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<sup>14</sup> IPF won one parliamentary seat in 1989. It also sent 7 members in 1989 and 6 members in 1995 to Bihar state assembly. Yet, its political performance gradually declined. See Shishir K. Jha.



of the left movements across globe. Special All India Conference of CPI(ML) Liberation was organized at Delhi in 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> July 1990. It aimed at meaningful intervention in the national politics. At the same time, IPF organized a massive national rally on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1990 in New Delhi. The fifth Congress of CPI(ML) Liberation was held at Kolkata on 20<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> December 1992. It was significant as after more than two decades of underground operation, Comrade Vinod Mishra made his first public appearance. It called for aggressive militant resistance against the growing fundamentalism. In 1994 *Mazdur Kisan Sangram Parishad* (MKSP) was formed.

All India Organisational Plenum of CPI(ML) Liberation was organized at Diphu, Karbi Anglong (Assam) on 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> July 1995. It voiced its concern on the low proportion of women in the membership and in Party committees as a serious limitation of the movement. Moreover, Indian Institute of Marxist Studies (IIMS) was also formed. The sixth Congress of CPI(ML) Liberation was organized at Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh in 20<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> October 1997. It emphasized mobilizing mass to stop the increasing tide of religious fundamentalism. The seventh Congress of CPI(ML) Liberation was held at Patna, Bihar from 25<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> November 2002. It was a significant meeting as Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya presided it as the new General Secretary of party.

Subsequently, CPI(ML) Liberation revitalized and reorganized Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha (BPKS) to address agrarian issues on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1981. In its year of formation itself, BPKS organized 17 demonstrations in Patna district to address the agrarian issues. At All India Kisan Conference on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2002 at Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh, CPI(ML) Liberation launched the All India Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (AIKSS).

The intense peasant mass mobilization by the Left political parties has led to a deep polarisation in caste and community (Bharti, 1990:1181-1184). As the peasants mostly were from the lower class and caste, it was generalized that the whole gamut of the peasantry is indulging in the naxal activities. The upper castes landed gentry joined together to counter the 'extremists' resulting in *Rupaspur - Chandwa* incidents in 1971 (which involved the former Speaker of Bihar Legislative Assembly), and at *Gahlaur* and *Chauri* (Prasad, 1987:851). Thus the politics of naxalism entered into a more violent

phase of caste-class struggle often seen as the clash between various Left outfits<sup>15</sup> and private caste armies or caste *senas*.

## 2.6 Emergence of Private Caste Militia/Army or 'Sena'

The private caste army or *Sena* is basically founded by the landowners of respective castes (Louis, 2000:2206-11). The main aim is to counter the peasant assertion (violent and non-violent) under the banner of various naxalite groups. These are operating in different parts of the State. These armies are created and financed primarily by landowners to protect their land and properties. As the name itself suggests, these private armies are invariably formed on caste-line so as to mobilize, or at least, to attract their respective caste-men.<sup>16</sup> Although the function as well as the organization of these armies are very difficult to trace, yet one thing is for sure that these private caste armies receives the support both from the state as well as the rich urban class, the former provides the 'protection from the law' and the latter provides the finance to carry out the operations (Das, 1986:15; Editorial EPW, 1989:179-183). Private caste armies and naxalite groups have clashed many a time over various issues ranging from social prestige to the economic issue of minimum wage.

The *senas* culture in Bihar roughly started in 1979 when under the threat of mass militant peasant movement by naxalites; the rich Kurmi peasants landlords formed *Kisan Suraksha Samiti*. It had patronage from various political quarters (Chaudhry, 1988:55). Subsequently, its more militant professional armed gang *Bhumi Sena* emerged in early 1982 operating in Masaurhi, Poonpoo and Naubatpur Blocks of Patna District. The slogan of '*Mazdoor kisan bhai-bhai, Naxali beech mein kahan se aai*' (Agricultural labourers and peasants are like brothers, why allow the Naxalite to come in between?)

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<sup>15</sup> There have been significant changes in the organization and structure of the naxalite groups. Party Unity had merged with the People's war group on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1998 and formed Peoples' War (PW). Further merging activities among the Maoist organizations gave rise to Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI) in January 2003. On 14<sup>th</sup> October 2004, PW and MCCI have merged and become the Communist Party of India (Maoist).

<sup>16</sup> "Krishna Singh (a Bhumiwar and a one-time Congress (I) MLA) with his *Brahmarshi Sena* and Anand Mohan Singh (a Rajput, and a leader of anti-reservation movement) with his *Krantikari Samajwadi Sena* are the two pioneers of the *Sena* culture in Bihar. Seemingly enjoying the support of their general caste-men, these ringleaders are in constant touch with the landed nobility, readily lending a 'helping hand' whenever such a 'necessity' arises" (Battacharya, 1986:71).

was raised. Gradually, *Lorik Sena* of Yadavs, *Brahmarishi Sena* by Bhumihars were formed.

There are two common features of these organizations; i) All the *senas* have successfully inspired and convinced a section of caste fellows, irrespective of their class background, that the dalit-Naxalite alliance is their common enemy. ii) When the landowners of the same or neighbouring districts realized the achievements of caste *senas* in dealing with the Naxalites, they also formed their own *senas* (Chaudhary, 2005:134). A comprehensive chronology and areas of operation of private caste armies is given in Appendix II.

In the whole process of the emergence and violent activities of *sena* culture, role of state was more biased than being the harbingers of law and order (Das, 1986:17; Broken People, 1999:73-81) as it supported the rise of the caste based armies to counter the 'extremism' problem (Sinha, 1978:92). It was so as the politics of the survival was at stake. Caste bias of the political establishment was visible in 'encounters' (Chaitanya, 1992:761). The State eliminated many landless agricultural labourers having sympathy with naxalites in pretext of maintaining the law and order (Editorial EPW, 1986:949; Dutta, 1986:1146; Prasad, 1987:852; Editorial EPW, 1988:1300). The case of Arwal killings by the police and its subsequent defense needs mention as burning example of State laxity towards its duty (Dutta, 1986:1146-1147; Louis, 2002:207-208).

State acting as a systematic tool of repression of the naxals and peasants (Desai, 1990:143-231; Louis, 2002:249-258) launched Operation "Task Force" in 1985-1986 to issue 200 gun licenses to the landlords to counter 'naxal menace' (Das, 1987:843). The MCC retaliated in a violent manner in *Baghaura-Dalelchak* massacre of 54 *Rajputs* in the Madanpur region of Aurangabad in 1987.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, apart from killing as many as 119 supporters and activists of naxalite movement during last two decades; the police has

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<sup>17</sup> However, the MCC being the mastermind of this caste violence has been refuted in Bihar: Caste Violence. Editorial. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pg. 913. June 13, 1987. Blaming Yadavs as mastermind of this massacre, the article concludes that the "Aurangabad carnage had a clear caste bias and the class factor was missing. The victims were not big landlords."

arrived at the massacre scenes much after the violence has taken place thus giving ample time to the perpetrators to escape (Louis, 2002:253-257).

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

By the 1990s, most of the *senas* were not in the position to confront the Left onslaught. It was with the formation of the *Ranveer sena* by Brahmeshwar Singh in September 1994 in Belaur village of Udwananagar Block, Bhojpur a more intense assault on the naxal activities was revived<sup>18</sup>. It was as a merger of other private caste armies like *Savarna Liberation Army* and the *Sunlight Sena*. *Ranveer sena* has carried out much carnage since its formation (Sinha and Sinha, 2001:4096; Louis, 2002:234; Chaudhary, 2005:139). The worst form of violence has been inflicted on Jehanabad district “which over the past 22 years has witnessed 35 massacres, including 31 directed against dalits and members of extremely backward castes (EBCs). The massacres have claimed the lives of 339 persons – 276 dalits, 50 upper caste men and 13 members of EBCs” (Sinha and Sinha, 2001:4095).

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<sup>18</sup> Ranvir Sena chief Brahmeshwar Singh, the mastermind behind 36 massacres that left at least 400 persons dead over the past six years, including 63 Dalits in a single strike at Lakshmanpur-Bathe in 1997, was arrested in Patna on 29<sup>th</sup> August 2002. Brahmeshwar Singh, the former mukhia (village panchayat head) of Khopira panchayat of Sandesh Block in Bhojpur district, assumed the leadership of the Ranvir Kisan Sangharsh Samiti from Sheo Narain Chowdhury, the mukhia of Belur Block, in 1994. The former turned the samiti into a militant organisation and named it after Ranvir, a former armyman who worked for the welfare of the villagers, mostly Bhumihars. He is an accused in several murder cases. These include cases relating to the incidents of Lakshmanpur-Bathe, Mianpur (where the number of people killed was 36), Shankarbigha (18), Bathe (22), Sarthua (8), Nagari (10), Haibaspur (15), Bathani Thola (21) and Santani (13). These villages are located in Bhojpur, Jehanabad and Gaya districts of central Bihar (Chaudhuri, K. (2002). Chaudhuri, K. (2002). “End of a Terror Trail.” In *Frontline*, 19(19), September 14–27.

Some of the incidents like the mass killing of 22 persons at Bathani Tola in July 11, 1996 (Sinha and Sinha, 1996:2908-2912); Lakshmanpur-Bathe massacre in December 1, 1997 killing 61 people (Bhatia, 1997:3242; Chaudhuri, 1997; Banerji, 1998) and massacre of 23 dalits in Shakarbigaha village on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1999 (Chaudhuri, 1999) is still to be surpassed by any militant outfit (including Left outfits) indulging in violence. Appendix III presents the chronology of massacres in Central Bihar (1977-2001).

One of the initial impacts of *sena* was the subsequent decline of Naxalite activities in Bhojpur (Chaudhary, 2005:141). Its women's wing *Ranveer Mahila Sangh* trains upper caste women in the use of arms against naxalite violence (Louis, 2000:2206-2211; Singh, 2005). The Bihar State government banned the *Ranveer Sena* under severe public pressure after it massacred *dalits* in Sarathua in Bhojpur in July 1995.

The links between various politicians and Ranveer Sena are open secrets. In 1996 General elections, it supported Janata Dal (now Rashtriya Janata Dal) candidate Chandradev Prasad Verma. In 1998 it supported Samata party candidate Hardwar Prasad (Mishra, *Yeh Jung Jaroor Jetein*:4). It became the first-ever private army to contest election in Bihar in 1999 as it fielded its candidate under its peasant organization *Rashtravadi Kisan Mahasangha* (Sinha and Sinha, 2001:4095). After the Lakshmanpur-Bathe massacre (1<sup>st</sup> December 1997) the State commissioned Amir Das Commission to probe the nexus between political leaders and *Sena* activists. The recent arrests of Ambuj Sharma (prime accused in the Miyanpur caste massacre in 2000) on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2006 and Awadesh Sharma (an 'area commander' accused of killing 12 people in Sandani village in the Gaya district in April 1999) on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2006 have hampered its 'massacre operation'.

There is marked difference in the ways of countering Ranveer *Sena* by the Left organizations. For MCC, it is counter terror not only for *Sena* but also for its supporters. People's War resorts to class struggle and uses economic Blockade and social boycott against *Sena*. Differing from these methods of resistance, CPI(ML) Liberation sees *Sena* as gang of landowners and the only way out is self-defence by armed *dalits*. The violence and counter violence from the both sides resulted in various massacres claiming many

lives. “These conflicts between the underclass and dominant caste – who constitute the dominant class – have encompassed issues of status and dignity as well as economic issues. The former includes the resistance against sexual assaults by men of dominant castes on women of depressed social groups; the latter includes demands for the payment of statutory wages, or the distribution of public land and land above the ceiling to the landless” (Chakravarti, 2001:1450). Additively, all massacres are not clearly based on the upper vs. lower caste or vice versa rather there are also cases of violence perpetuated by the rich upper backward caste i.e. kulak lobby on the poor peasants belonging to lower castes (DN, 1988a:941; Frankel, 1989:122; Chaitanya, 1991:2612; Hindwan, 1996:24).

**CHAPTER**

**III**

### Gendering Naxalite Movement: Sites of Resistance

*“Jal rahi hai tarai,  
Jal rahe hain humlogon ke hriday  
Naxalabadi ke khalihan jal rahe hain  
Saat kanyaaon ke liye<sup>1</sup>.”*

*Julm badh raha tha  
Garib-gurba ekjut ho rahe they  
Bagawat ki lahar aa gayi thi  
Isi bichh ek din  
Naxliyon ki dhar-pakad karne aayi  
Police sey bhid gayin  
Kaithar Kalaa ki Auratein (Pandey, 1990:92)<sup>2</sup>*

The present chapter is an attempt to document the multiple sites of women's militant and violent struggle. By multiple sites, the study means sites including various facets of life and survival. These sites are as micro as body of a woman and as macro as economy and political issues involved in day-to-day life course. In the process of struggle towards emancipation and its retaliation (frequently violent in nature), the body of a woman becomes a site of identity politics. On one hand it is mutilated and defiled to assert the dominant caste hegemony and its counter assertion on the other hand sparks a cycle of further repression and terror. The patriarchy as well as the discrimination based on caste system is maintained through 'appropriation' of *Dalit* women's sexuality. Then there is site of access to economic resources mainly the land. How the 'feminine' body participates violently in this struggle and marches towards its liberation is discussed further.

Major issues discussed here are struggle for economic resources and 'izzat' i.e. dignity of self. Most importantly, the massacre violence not only by the dominant castes but also by those who are resisting the system has immense effects on the life world of women.

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<sup>1</sup> A folk song in memory of seven women agricultural labourers who were killed by Para-Military forces in Prasadujot village, Naxalabadi in the beginning of the movement itself. It attests the militant and aggressive participation of women in such movements.

<sup>2</sup> It attests the participation of women in Kaitharkalan village in Bhojpur during naxalite movement in early 1970s. It has been well documented that women countered the police for nearly 72 hours at stretch.



Women as a 'victim' and women as a 'survivor' of violence have different meanings to different set of peoples. The most defining determinant is the caste discourse. It is important, as the experiences of lower caste women are something not discussed frequently in the corridors of upper caste women. The present chapter unfolds the different realities of the experienced violence.

### **3.1 Bodhgaya Land Movement Vs. Naxalite Movement**

"The normative structure of agrarian society, however, ascribes an unequal position to women. These women who are mostly illiterate and belong to the lower castes or tribes, are economically marginalized with negligible or nil access to productive resources, are subject to wage discrimination, are socially subjugated and are politically powerless groups, unrepresented or under-represented in decision-making bodies. Their contribution to the household economy and to society is often undervalued and goes unrecognized. The societal norms and values of patriarchy, caste and ethnicity and values of female subordination and sex segregation, perpetuate the inferior position of the female" (Roy, 1992:1).

The Bodhgaya (Gaya, Bihar) land struggle in 1978 against the *Mahants* of *Shankar Math* (known as *Bodhgaya Math* which is a religious establishment) can be seen as a site of multiple struggles. It can be seen as a non-violent direct action based peasant movement aimed at redistribution of land rights to lower castes and class. It can be seen as lower caste movement to achieve equal land rights. It can be conceptualized in broad framework of participatory democracy initiated by Jayaprakash Narayan (J.P., a popular socialist leader of Independence movement who later joined the Gandhian movement). Here it is important to note that it was the J.P. initiated movement launched as *Chhatra-Yuva Sangarsh Vahini* (a student and non-student youth organization for social and political transformation in January 1975; CYSV hereafter), which later on culminated as the Bodhgaya Movement. Most importantly, it is seen as the struggle of women for equal land rights within the family and community as can be seen from the following observation:

"The CYSV viewed the woman question as part of the general movement, as reflected in two important slogans: *Aurat ke sahbag bina, har badlav adhura hai* (without women's participation, any social transformation is incomplete), and *Aurat, harijan aur mazdoor, nahin rahenge ab mazdoor* (women, the low castes and labourers will no longer be at the mercy of others). In the Vahini's view, the struggle for women's liberation is a struggle against the entire existing class-caste-based socio-economic and political structure" (Kelkar and Gala, 1990:94).

Since the movement focused on the land rights of women, it will be useful to go through the various understandings in the said context. It is difficult to define land rights due to intricate overlapping among the legal and customary laws. Rights over land not only have to be constitutionally enforced, but also have to be socially recognised. Broadly speaking, land rights are based on inheritance (customary laws and practices), transfers from the State (inheritance rights enshrined in constitutional body), tenancy arrangements (land reform measures) and purchase of land (market dynamics). More over, the distinction between the legal rights and their social acceptance has to be taken into serious concern. Many a times, a law fails to achieve its objective, as its social acceptance was not at optimum. Mere ownership of land can not lead to women's land rights, equally important is the effective control over it i.e. the 'say' on whether to sell or keep the piece of land.

It has been argued "that there is a crucial overlap between women having direct access to land rights, and not just rights mediated via male members, and theirs and their children's economic and social well-being. In poor households, in particular such access could reduce women's risk of poverty, improve intra-household gender distribution of resources for basic needs, facilitate women's access to agricultural credit, technology and information, provide some economic security during periods of crisis, help maintain and even improve female earnings from wage employment, and provide some protection against gender-related violence within the family and outside" (Agarwal, 1988:570).

It is in the above context that the Bodhgaya movement has been studied. A brief chronology and the specificities of the movement are useful at this stage. As already stated, the movement was aimed at redistribution of land. The lower caste landless labourers and sharecroppers who worked as agricultural labourers led it. The *dalit* women from *Musahar* caste participated in this struggle in a significant way as observed from the following observation:

"In fact, it is women have been most vocal in raising the voices for ownership of their *Raiyati Homestead Land* (usually almost a 4 *kattha* plot measuring 5400-6700 sq. feet). In this regard the land movement for the right of Homestead land in Bodhgaya against the *Mahants* of Bodhgaya *Maths* in the eighties is one of the burning example where the *Musahars* women played a key role in securing their rights. In this *Musahar* women played an important role in mobilizing their community strength. In the *Sangharsh Vahinis* that consisted mainly of village

activists, *Musahar* women had a fair representation. Looking at their critical role in running and providing strength to the whole movement at grassroot level many women members of the *Shangharsh Vahini* were provided the '*Paarchhas*' of their *Rajyati Homestead Lands*. In fact, one of the major agenda for the Bodh Gaya land movement had been facilitating in getting '*Paarchhas*' for *Musahar* women."<sup>3</sup>

The total area of land i.e. 9,500 acres was controlled by *Mahants* of Bodhgaya *Maths* in the gross violation of land ceiling laws. Although the movement was initiated in 1975-76 itself, it was only in the 1978 that things really started taking shape. In the month of April 1978, the CYSV organized the first mass level meet of the labourers working on the land. Women agricultural labourers also attended the meeting that resolved to struggle against the *Math* authorities. The slogan was "*Jo zameen ko boye jote, voh zameen ka malik hai*" (The one who sows and reaps is the owner of the land).

In the harvesting season in November the same year, the activists of the movement jointly decided to keep the harvested crops along with themselves rather than to give at *Maths*. This decision was aggressively (and violently) opposed by the *Maths*. Even here, women activists played equal part at this stage. The resultant violence was targeted both at the men and women but it was the latter who suffered the most. Later on, a huge demonstration having women as forefront rallied under "*Zameen kenkar? Jote onkar*" (Who owns the land? Those who plough it) (Manimala, 1985:149-176).

At the same time *Mazdoor-Kisan Samiti* was formed and was resolved to get registered the land in the name of women rather than in family or household (Agarwal, 1994:103). The subsequent meetings not only focused on movement rather they even addressed private affairs of patriarchy and violence. "The praxis included two major related campaigns, against wife-beating, drinking, child-marriage, and for social equality of women as well as their rights to land and other resources" (Kelkar and Gala, 1990:98).

In November 1980, the labourers and peasants seized around about 3,000 acres of land and started cultivation on their own. There were once again violent attacks by the *Math* and hired musclemen at the time of harvesting. However, the activists resisted it and they

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<sup>3</sup> People Initiative: Dalit Resource Centre, Gaya (Bihar). [Publication: date not given]  
Web Address: <http://www.deshkalindia.com/people-initiative.htm>

successfully harvested the crops. Women were in the forefront courting arrests and going to jails. “Throughout the CSYV movement against the *math*, women constituted thirty to forty percent of those actively engaged in struggle. They were in leadership positions in the struggle in the villages of *Gasainpersa*, *Pipparahatti* and *Shekhwara*. Hundreds of women faced the bullets of the *math* and the state police. Many of them were injured in fights against the *mahant* and were arrested” (Kelkar and Gala, 1990:94).

At the end of October 1981, about 1,000 acres of land was recognized by the government for redistribution. However, the administration prepared its own list of benefactors. Resisting this approach, a gender sensitive list was prepared giving priorities to the women by the CYSV. Such demands of land rights by women led to strong reactions among the male activists of the movement as can be seen from following observations:

The demands were soon opposed by the male members of the *Samitis*, who argued that: ‘Men have ploughed land since the known period of human history. And, that is why they are the owners of land.’ The women retorted by saying, ‘Women sow the seeds and do most of the weeding, why can they not be owners of land?’ (Kelkar and Gala, 1990:100).

The male peasant activist argued: ‘What difference does it make in whose name the land is registered?’ The women responded: ‘If it doesn’t make a difference, then put it down in the woman’s name. Why argue over it? And secondly, if it makes no difference who owns the land, then why not let it continue to be owned by the *Mahant*?’ (Agarwal, 1994:107).

In February 1982, two villages of *Bija* and *Kusa* were selected where only the women will be given land. It resulted in the protest by the State administration on the ground that such a practice was not accepted. In this context it has been rightly observed that “...bureaucracy and even judiciary, typically affect the implementation of laws in male interests” (Agarwal, 1988:571). However, due to the strong support by the rest of the villagers these women were allotted the land. Eventually, the surplus land was allotted to the landless labourers where women were given priority in distribution. Of the total 1,100 acres of distributed land, about ten percent – 1000 acres – was distributed in the names of the women (Kelkar and Gala, 1990:103).

Regarding the impact of Bodhgaya land struggle on women, Agarwal (1994:446) has argued that “The Bodhgaya women’s ability to ultimately overcome these multiple layers

of opposition appears to have depended on the interactive effects of several variables. One, the strength of women's participation in and their considerable contribution to the struggle, which over time was recognized by the men as not merely supportive but crucial for a movement's success. Two, the growing solidarity among women and their articulation of their gender specific interests as distinct from those of the men of their class and community. Three, the involvement of some middle class women activists with a feminist perspective in *Vahini* and four the process of discussion in which women insisted on their demands and persuasively countered opposing arguments."

### 3.2 AIPWA: Stakes in/of Resistance

"As for gender the Naxalite groups are perhaps only just beginning to absorb the significance of multi-pronged struggle against patriarchy. Each group has many women cadres and even soldiers in *dalams* and has a women's wing as well. However, patriarchal attitudes and practices persist within Naxal organisations and any programme for women's liberation is still not a prominent part of the people's democratic revolution. Thus it has to be stressed that the Naxalites' ideological formulation is still not adequately developed on the issue of class-caste-gender relationship" (Mohanty, 2006:3164).

"The police said to me, 'What's all this, Bagmati, now you're getting the women to beat up the police?' I said, 'You wield rifles and *lathis* every day, why does it bother you so much that women pick up sticks just for one day?' They replied, 'This is not Bagmati speaking, it's the *Maley* speaking.' And I said, 'It's the same thing!'. I can't keep quiet if a woman is being harassed or exploited, and I'm in *Maley* because I want to fight for justice and dignity. They told me, if you stay in *Maley*, you'll get killed. I said, 'If I die, I'll die fighting, I won't die like a rat holed up in the house.'"<sup>4</sup>

Among various frontal organizations of CPI(ML) Liberation, the All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) deserves special mention.<sup>5</sup> A unified front of various active women's organizations in districts of Bihar *Pragatisheel Mahila Manch* (Progressive Women's Forum) was formed in 1991. The aim of this forum was to address the women's issues within the broad framework of struggle for egalitarian social order. Subsequently, All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) was launched at

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<sup>4</sup> AIPWA Conference: Women Activists Speak of their Lives and Struggles. *Liberation*, January, 2005.  
Web Address: [http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year\\_2005/january/women\\_speak.htm](http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year_2005/january/women_speak.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Among other women wings of political parties are the Communist Party of India's National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), the Communist Party of India-Marxist's All-India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) and the All-India Coordinating Committee of Working Women (AICCW).

national conference of CPI(ML) (Liberation) at New Delhi on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1994. As Mishra (2001, 96-97) has argued,

“...it was a convergence of issue of women liberation and Marxism. There were some focal issues to be addressed by the communist women organization. Foremost, such organization should play an important role in demolishing the ideologies which enslave women. It can be done by publishing its ideas and spreading these among the population. Not only the formation of laws aiming at equality between man and woman, rather their implementation is more an important agenda of such organization. It should organize women to resist domestic violence. All the more no movement can be successful if women are not at the forefront. To ensure this, communist women organization should mobilize women in the peasant and national movements. It should always extend its support to any other woman organization in every issue of struggle. Significantly, the equality among the sexes within the family should be of prime concern and ultimately to transform women as an agent so that she can emancipate herself on her own” (Mishra, 2001:96-97).

State units of AIPWA were formed in fourteen States like Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tripura, Tamilnadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. *Tehreeq-e-Niswan* was launched in at the same time to ensure the participation of Muslim women in the ongoing struggle. Other major Naxalite women’s organisations are *Nari Mukti Sangharsh Samiti* (NMSS) formed in 1987 of the CPI(ML) People’s War and *Nari Mukti Sangh* (NMS) under Maoist Coordination Centre (MCC) formed in 1989.

AIPWA exhorts one to join it as it “fights against all kinds of oppression, for equality of women; is part of the struggle of left and democratic forces for social change; and does not run on government funds and depends on the might of common women<sup>6</sup>.” It sees itself as an autonomous women’s movement aimed at addressing the issues of women. Its membership is extended to all those women who are above 16 years of age and have faith and belief in its tenets. The membership fee is Rupee 1 only. The basic tenets of AIPWA accept the dual nature of exploitation experienced by women. Such exploitation is primarily based on patriarchy and its main manifestation, the State. It argues that only in a socialist society, women will be finally liberated.

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<sup>6</sup> *Why Join AIPWA?*

Web Address: <http://www.cpiml.org/pgs/frontorg/aipwa/aipwa.htm>

Some of the other women's organizations affiliated to AIPWA are K.N.C.A. (Assam); Bodo Women's Justice Forum, Guwahati (Assam); Tehreeq-e-Niswan, Patna (Bihar); Shramik Mahila Morcha, Pune (Maharashtra); All Tiwa Women's Association, Guwahati (Assam) and Mishing Women's Organisation, Guwahati (Assam). Among the major Publications of AIPWA are *Aadhi Zameen* (The tri-monthly magazine in Hindi); Women's Voice (magazine in English); *Pratividhan* (Magazine in Bengali); *Aider Jonaki Baat* (Magazine in Assamese); Women and Socialism (Hindi) and *Parcham Banta Aanchal* (Hindi). A special issue of *Aadhi Zameen* (The tri-monthly magazine in Hindi) was brought out on the completion of ten years of its publication in December 2001. An English journal titled *Women's Voice* was also launched in 1998. Among these *Aadhi Zameen* began as 'converging the ideas of Left and feminism and thereby establishing Marxism as basic tenet of women's liberation' (Tiwari, 2001:8).

The various issues of struggle involve democratisation of women's commission; implementation of 33% reservation in Parliament and Assemblies as well as in employment for women; struggle against gender discrimination in jobs; enactment of pro-women laws e.g. property rights, equal wages; struggle against increasing violence on women; struggle against anti-woman impacts of economic liberalization; struggle against prostitution, sex-tourism and illegal trafficking of women; struggle for revamping of the public distribution system; struggle for education, employment, working women's hostels and crèche facility; struggle for women's right over their own bodies — for this, ban on dangerous contraceptives; struggle against commodification of women's bodies; and solidarity with other progressive women's movements and democratic struggles (*Aadhi Zammen*, 1997:30).

An attempt is here made to elaborate the above understanding focusing on various initiatives taken by AIPWA. A Mahila Adalat (Women's Court) was organized in the Miller High School ground on 28<sup>th</sup> September 1996 in Patna by AIPWA. Chairperson of the National Human Right Commission, Justice R. Mihsra along with Dr. Niroj Sinha, Dr.Sahida Hasan and Dr. I.C. Kumar chaired it. Various cases related to rape and caste violence in Bathani Tola, custodial rape in Nawada district and other incidents of women atrocities were discussed.

AIPWA organized its National Council meeting in Guwahati, Assam on 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> January 1997. The prime objective of the meeting was to reflect upon the successes and failures of AIPWA as a women's organization. Discussions were also held on the socio-economic scenario within the broad frame of political context. Issues at hand were many like Women's Reservation Bill (WRB), Assam crisis and impending violence on women, etc. The second National Conference of AIPWA was organized on 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> April 1997 at Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. The context of Conference was the emergence of struggle for political supremacy between BJP, SP and BSP and its subsequent implications both for Dalit and Muslim women (Pati, 1997:4-7). Chairperson of Centre for Women's Development Studies's Veena Majumdar inaugurated the Conference. Some of the important issues discussed were to increasing the membership of AIPWA among the middle class women and viability of joint struggle as these joint meetings have resulted in distancing the units.

Among the most important issues to be addressed by AIPWA was the issue of State-level Women's Commission in Bihar. The struggle for the same dates back to 1980s when through *dharnas* and seminars its need was underlined. Later on, as a solace an organization Mahila Vikas Nigam was formed in 1991. However, the struggle for a constitutional body did not stopped. Subsequently, in October 1997 the organizational set up of State Women's Commission announced had Development minister Tulsi Singh as chairperson and all its 16 members were male. The struggle and mass mobilization for the same was not effective to the optimum as it is not mandatory for the National Commission for Women or the Government to constitute the commission. It was after a sustained struggle State Women's Commission Act 1999 was passed.

It was in this context that AIPWA unit of Bihar organized a state-level seminar at Vidyapeeth Bhavan, Patna on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1997 to debate on the issue and to further mobilize the people. Theme of the seminar was "Need for Women's Commission in Bihar". Coming back to issues of resistance for AIPWA, a national seminar was held in Patna in September 1998 addressing the issue of WRB by AIPWA. Given the fact that even the left AIDWA was against quota-within-quota framework, the Marxist approach



on reservation was also debated. For the same demand, AIPWA marked 15<sup>th</sup> December 2000 as 'Protest Day'.

The third National Conference of the AIPWA was held in Patna in March 2001. At the same time it organized a rally critiquing the anti-national BJP government involved in the *Tehalka* revelations. The Conference focused on the dimensions of gender justice and survival question of women. Impacts of globalization on women were discussed. Additively, the increasing fascist incidents on women were condemned. The step taken by the State government to dissolve 33 percent to women in Panchayati elections was also critiqued.

In July 2001, Tanishq (Titan, Tata group company) put up a hoarding/ billboard read "*Vivah zewar shuddh na hon to beti par kya gujregi*". This incident was taken very seriously as it was a gross violation of the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 along with Dowry Prohibition Act [The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (Act No.28 of 1961) [20<sup>th</sup> May, 1961]] (originally passed in 1961 and amended in the 1984 and 1986). AIPWA leader Comrade Saroj Choubey along with other State functionaries and concerned people launched their protest with the authorities. The hoardings were subsequently removed. Srivastava (2004:1) has pointed out various such incidents.

Marking the decade of liberalization, privatization and globalization of Indian economy, the Bihar unit of AIPWA organized a workshop on 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> September 2001 in Samastipur. It was observed in the context of women workers that "women workers are largely concentrated in the unorganized sector particularly in the agricultural sector. This includes both cultivations and agricultural labourers in the unorganized sector. Women participation in all major agricultural operations which include 40% in preparation of land, 20% in sowing of seeds and basal application of fertilizers, 80% in transplantation, 80% in weeding, 10% in plant protection measures, 60% in harvesting, 50% in post harvest operation and 70% in caring mulching animal and poultry<sup>7</sup>."

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<sup>7</sup> *Women in Agriculture*

Web Address. <http://www.indianngos.com/issue/agriculture/resources/articles9.htm>

Comrade Saroj Chaubey in her study in Bhabhua district highlighted the mechanization of agriculture via harvester and its impact on women agricultural labourers (Chaubey, 2001a:15-16; Chaubey, 2001b:116-118). The emergence of 'harvester culture' in the fields of Bihar has radically altered the discourses of employment and wage of women agricultural labourers. Moreover the hired labourers from nearby states are being given contract-based work.

Comrade Meena Tiwari and Anita commented on the state of women's education in Bihar. It was highlighted that due to the privatization and limited options available, girls are being forced to leave the studies in-between. Apart from it, the security of the girl students is also a matter of grave concern. On the theme of women's development in Bihar, Comrade Shashi Yadav pointed out basic issues of women empowerment. She argued that to achieve over all development of women the priority areas are education, health care system, social security package and employment generation.

The twin issues of wages and land rights of the women agricultural labourers are most critical theme of women their mass participation. In a research done by AIPWA among women agricultural labourers, it was pointed that "agricultural labourers are increasingly women; women are at the forefront of agricultural labourers' struggles; women agricultural labourers are facing a crisis of employment; and sexual violence is used as a weapon of repression and terror against women agricultural labourers by feudal-fascist forces"(Aadhi Zammen, 2003:29-31).

*Aadhi Zameen* (AIPWA's Hindi organ) and AIPWA organized a national seminar on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2001 to celebrate the former's completion of 10 years of publication. The theme of the seminar was "Women's Empowerment – Declarations, Ground Realities and Tasks Ahead." Among the various issues discussed was reality of women empowerment, impact of globalization on women, working conditions of women agricultural labourers across India among others. Maitrayi Pushpa released a special edition of *Aadhi Zameen* titled '*Nari Shakiti Nari Mukti*'. At this juncture, it will be useful to summarize various sites of struggle being pursued by AIPWA. The following Figure 4.1 reflects the agenda of radical women organizations.

Figure 4.1: Agenda of the Radical Women Organisations

Ser. No.	AGENDA / THEMES	AIPWA	NMSS	NMS
1.	<b>Gender Opression Agenda</b>			
	Sexual Violence	*	*	*
	Dowry	*	*	*
	Dowry Murders	*	*	*
	Other Gendered Violence	*	*	*
2.	<b>State / Sena Repression Agenda</b>			
	Massacres by Sena	*	*	*
	State Repression	*	*	*
3.	<b>Economic Agenda</b>			
	Equal Property Rights	*		
	Equal Right to Land	*	*	*
	Equal Wage	*	*	*
	Employment	*		
4.	<b>Development Agenda</b>			
	Fighting Back Bureaucratic Feudalism	*	*	*
	Women Development Schemes	*		
5.	<b>Guarantee for Basic Civic Facilities</b>			
	(i) General and Reproductive Health	*		*
	(ii) Sanitation	*		*
	(iii) Education	*		*
6.	<b>Cultural Agenda</b>			
	Prostitution			*
	Vulgar Culture			*
	Liquor Consumption		*	*
7.	<b>Creating Alternative Culture</b>			
	Radical forms of Collective Marriage		*	*
	Radicalisation of <i>Holi</i> Festival			*

Source: Bharti, (2002:314).

In the context of rising incidents of atrocities on women, AIPWA organized a massive rally with the slogan 'Apna Haq Hum Lekey Rahengey' in Patna on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2002. According to a documented estimate, in between 1987 to 1997 there have been 19905

incidents of atrocities on women out of which 38.97 percent were incidents to rape (*Rabri Raj aur Mahilayen*, 1999:27; Chaubey, 1999:12-15). A massive rally marked the Bihar State Conference of AIPWA held on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2004 in Bhagalpur. The slogan of the conference was 'Resistance Against Repression, Fight for A Share in Political Power'.

The 4<sup>th</sup> National Conference of the AIPWA was held on 24-25 November 2004 at the Shaheed Manju Devi Hall (Gaur Bhavan) in Delhi. It paid a tribute to the women activists like Manju Devi, Jharo Devi and others who actively participated and were killed by the feudal elements in the struggle. The formation of Working Women's Cell in AIPWA was proposed. Subsequently, AIPWA organized a conference to give a platform to the revolutionary women participating in the struggle for dignity and better wages. Various women activists from ranging from colliery worker from Jharkhand, those working in power looms and match factories of Tamil Nadu, employees at the tea gardens of Assam, agricultural labourers from Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Eastern Uttar Pradesh attended the seminar and voiced their concerns<sup>8</sup>.

As rural women are the main bases of AIPWA (Pati, 2003-04:11), another significant aspect of women's mobilization is for political rights through participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions at panchayat and Block levels. To quote Krishnaraj (2003:4538), "what is women's political role? Given the nature of the political system and the low political weight of the gender equity lobby, women face severe handicaps. May be women's groups should spend some more time on institutional capacity building. As important as influencing policy at national or state level is local intervention."

This site is of immense struggle as there have been very few elections for PRIs in Bihar till date. The first one was in 1978. Then it was in 2001. The latest election was held from 15<sup>th</sup> May to 12<sup>th</sup> June 2006. A brief discussion is done here. The total number of seats of contest was 2.61 lakh whereas there were 5.61 lakh candidates. There were 8,200 polling booths in the naxalite area. Total number of villages and Blocks was 38,000 and 534 respectively. Out of total 8466 Mukhiyas elected, the percentage of women Mukhiya was

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<sup>8</sup> AIPWA Conference: Excerpts of Interviews with Revolutionary Women. *Liberation*, January, 2005. Web Address: [http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year\\_2005/january/women\\_speak.htm](http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year_2005/january/women_speak.htm)

44.6. The total number of Dalit women elected as Mukhiyas was 1173 which is 31 percent of total women elected as Mukhiyas. The gendering of naxalite militant struggle is all the more visible as there are seven women who are chairpersons of District Council in naxalite areas (*Aadhi Jammen*, 2006:6). During the campaign, there were many violent incidents (killings, threats of life, killings of relatives) reported against women (Kumar, 2006:82-85). Even after such stiff resistance, AIPWA supported altogether 220 women contestants (excluding Ward and *Panch* seats) won the elections (*Aadhi Jammen*, 2006:9).

Thus, AIPWA argues that the oppression and exploitation of women is based on patriarchal values. The situation becomes more complex with the entry of State joining hands with the latter. Thus, women's liberation has to counter both the patriarchal mindset as well as the repressive powers of State. In the recent past, the ideology of communal fascism has led to increase in the incidents of assaults on women. Such assaults are of dual nature. On one hand, it gives birth to the identity politics with in the feminist discourse thereby dividing women in the camps to weaken the movement. On the other hand, it takes help of the women themselves to launch assault on the 'other' women. It is a complex situation to deal with. Such an apprehension became stark reality in the Gujarat genocide where Hindu women participated aggressively in attacking 'other' i.e. Muslim women.

It was a historic victory for AIPWA and other women's organizations when Governor of Bihar passed the Bihar State Women's Commission Adhiniyam on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1999. Subsequently, it was documented in the Extraordinary Issue of the Gazette of Bihar on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1999. The Commission was formerly inaugurated by the then Chief Minister Smt. Rabri Devi on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2001. Since its inception, its functioning has been hampered due to official apathy by the State in financial and well defined working parameters. According to documentation, (Mishra, 2006:17-20) the total number of cases filed under SWC from 19<sup>th</sup> September 2001 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2004 was 5228 out of which 3526 (67.4%) cases were disposed by commission. There were 458 cases of dowry murders out of which 258 (56.3%) were disposed off. The percentage of disposed off

cases in dowry atrocities was 56.8, in rape cases was 64.4, property issues 58.8, issues of abduction 71.9 and other issues was 83.1.

An important study exploring the theme of gendering naxalite movement in the context of Bihar has been done by Bharti (2002:304-306). In her study, she has traced three phases of gendering naxalite movement. The first stage is the underground phase (1967-71) characterized by struggle against 'societal' patriarchy. By 'societal' patriarchy, what is meant is the patriarchal attitude of upper caste landed gentry towards Dalit women. Thus, it focused more on the sexual exploitation and sexual violence of Dalit women. In this phase, the leadership provided by the females at the grass-root level was negligible. It was more of participation 'mediated' by the patriarchy. Women's participation took various forms. The most visible form was fighting with the traditional arms and using chili powder against the attackers. This method was widely used during the first naxal upsurge in April 1968 at Musahari (a community development Block in Muzaffarpur district). Delaying the police searches in homes, helping men activists, etc. were other forms of participation. The most significant achievement of this phase was drastic decrease in the sexual exploitation of the Dalit women.

The second phase is the mass phase (1977-1989) struggling against societal as well as State patriarchies. State patriarchy manifests in the cooperation of State machinery in the incidents of violence against Dalit women. It was deeply enmeshed in the emerging assertion of the Kulaks (backward caste small rich farmers). Kulaks became powerful in the changed political situation and they increased their atrocities against Dalit women. Thus, State as well as caste patriarchy became the foci of struggle in this phase. It became more violent and militant with the emergence of private caste armies having tacit support from the various political parties and leaders. The women issue became all the more important and thus there was increased women participation at the village level. The 'massacre widows' (Sinha and Sinha, 2001:4095) became assertive of their rights.

The third phase of gendering naxalite movement is from 1987 onwards characterised by emergence of various autonomous Women's Organizations (WOs) resisting the family patriarchy. The turning point was the formation of *Nari Mukti Sanstha* in 1977 by the

largest faction of the CPI(ML) Provisional Coordination Centre (PCC). It collided with another mass organization *Chhatra-Yuva Sangharsh Vahini* which played significant role in the Bodhgaya land movement. As we have already discussed, in here women not only participated as activists they also provided leadership. Gradually, Naxalite women's organisations were formed. *Nari Mukti Sangharsh Samiti* (NMSS) of the CPI(ML) People's War was formed in 1987. Maoist Coordination Centre (MCC) formed Nari Mukti Sangh (NMS) in 1989. Subsequently, All India Progressive Women's Association (AIWPA) was formed as CPI(ML) Liberation's women's wing in 1989.

The grass-root unit of organisations is Village Committee. It provides a vibrant and vocal platform for addressing the issues at local level. All the women participating in it in respective village are its members by default. The strength of Village Committee depends on the level of participation of women in the respective village. Naxalite Women's Organizations have their own Women's Committees respectively. It is the second most powerful decision making unit for addressing women's issues. It manifests its activities through *Jan Adalat* (the People's Court).

In another attempt while documenting gendering of naxalite movement Louis argues that "even a cursory glance at the radical peasant movements of central Bihar reveal the valiant role played by common ordinary women of Bihar" (Louis, 2000b:29). Further to attest his argument, he presents narration of some activists cutting across the women's front of naxalite organizations. For Kanthi Devi, the leader of *Nari Mukti Sangharsh Samiti* (the women's front of the CPI(ML) People's War), her childhood began similar to her mother, grandmother and so on. It was only when she participated in the agrarian struggle, she learnt reading and writing and was able to comprehend the various sites of struggle leading to women's emancipation.

The realisation that both Dalit and women share the same history of exploitation and discrimination was the product of participation in women's struggle as a member of AIPWA. Along with the above observation Uma Devi argues that violence is inevitable, as one has to fight for one self's right. The presence of both the public and private spheres of responsibility sometimes deter the participation, yet the urge for greater social

equality infuses Malti Devi of *Nari Mukti Sangh* (women's front of the Maoist Coordination Centre (MCC)) with strength to further carry the struggle. The following observation further argues for the effective participation of women in the struggle for equitable justice.

The development of the revolutionary movement in the country marks a great hope for women all over the country. Women too must move forward collectively, unitedly to demand what it is theirs by right, to oppose the continuing atrocities and discrimination, to participate in the struggle for a new democratic society. If the women's movement moves forward hand in hand with the revolutionary movement for new democratic revolution only then the root causes of women's oppression can be smashed and concrete steps forward for the emancipation of women taken. Women's liberation can be achieved as part of the transformation of the entire socio-economic set-up<sup>9</sup>.

### **Profiles of Some Activists**

At this juncture of analysis, it will be more than useful to document lives and struggles of some of those women who despite many odds and hurdles, aggressively participated in such struggles against all forms of exploitation. Although it is not possible to give an extensive description of such participation, yet some of them are documented. This description begins with those women who were in the forefront in the first phase of naxalite movement. Thus, they became a role model for the coming generation of activists. Subsequently, in the second phase those who struggled along with other AIPWA activists are documented. Thus, an attempt is made towards documenting the life history of those women who are struggling for reordering the exploitative social order

There are multiple sites of such struggle and resistance; these are everywhere from 'personal is political' resisting the patriarchy within the family and community to counter the sexploitation and caste discrimination in the broader framework. Additively, "It may be understood that in the concrete everyday life-situations of women in the male-dominated world of contemporary societies, both forms of conflictual practices and processes may work simultaneously, i.e., the art of *resistance* at the individual level and organized collective movements often reinforcing each other" (Singh, 2001:273). There are countless instances in everyday life characterized by such vigour and intensity.

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<sup>9</sup> Appeal for March 8 (International Women's Day) by the Central Committee of Communist Party Of India (Maoist) [Issued on Monday, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2005] [Online]. Available at: <http://www.freelists.org/archives/ppi/03-2005/msg00587.html>



The naxalite movement in Bihar although started at Mussahari in Mujaffarnagar, yet it was Ekwari and Chaura in Bhojpur which shot into prominence as naxalite area. The militant struggle between the upper caste landed gentry and poor peasants became order of the day. It was during such struggles that women along with their male activists participated at every level. Be it struggle for land or wage or most importantly, the issue of prestige and dignity. Many lives were lost in defying the well-armed attack by the feudal elements in retaliation to such fights for dignity (Choudhary and Shrikant, 2001:318-322).

Moreover, as already discussed, violence is an inevitable part and parcel of such struggle. Many a times, struggling women are 'warned' of retaliation. In many cases rape, molestation and killing are resorted as a violent strategy by the antagonists to weaken the participation of women. Given the mass participation of activists in militant peasant struggle, it is not possible to chronicle most of them, yet there are some who stand out for their dedication and undying commitment for the 'revolution', even after their death they continue to infuse inspiration to the rest of the comrades.

The women killed became the foci of songs of resistance. They underlined the 'visible' participation of women in naxalite movement. Among them was 'Lahri' (party name of the activist) a landless aged 18. She was from Ramasandh village (Sandesh, Bhojpur) and participated in the movement as 'Mahila Commander'. She was killed by police on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1975 by the police in the same area. Along with her was Sonamati ('Agni' party name of the activist) of lower peasantry class aged 25 of Sandesh (Sandesh, Bhojpur) who participated in struggle as activist. The struggling mass still remembers their bravery and martyrdom as it echoes in the fields in form of songs of resistance<sup>10</sup>. Then there is an academician Sheela Chaterjee (*Tutu*) who was an activist killed by police in Ekwari on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1976.

With the gradual spread of naxalite movement and changes in the party functionary brought forth a new line of thought. Along with the militant struggle, parliamentary democracy was thought of as another tool for resistance. Thus, a new group of women

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<sup>10</sup> Based on talks with Comrade Saroj Chaubey, Comrade Meena Tiwari and Comrade Ramjee Rai.

activists emerged who not only participated in the movement and thus were 'underground' but also came forward to be 'visible'. It involved high risks as the faces were visible, the names known and activities can be monitored by the antagonistic feudal elements. Yet, women chose this path to further their cause. Such daring move on their part infused self-confidence and determination among the masses of passive women and thus liberated them from the clutches of inactivism. As the stakes were high, the price of such activism was paid highly. Some are briefly scripted<sup>11</sup>.

During the initial days of organized struggle, there were few women who came forward as activist. Among them was Shanti Devi 1979 joined the party. She was a Class IV employee in the municipal corporation. Very soon she became a full time activist participating in various protest marches and demonstration. In the year 1983, she became vice-chairperson of Working Women Organization. She led the road Blockade for three continuous days in protest of killing in *Naya Gaon*. She also was the forerunner in the protests of Arwal massacre.

Comrade Manju (14<sup>th</sup> April 1970-10<sup>th</sup> November 2003)

Comrade Manju was born on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1970 at Lodipur Kharsa village of Kaler Block in the present Arwal district of Bihar as first child in agricultural worker family. Her parents as well as others in the area were supporters of party. Her first experience of party activity was as a member of search team organized by *Janwadi Mahila Samiti* (the then women's wing of the Party in Bihar) to look for the body of martyr Comrade Chittranjan Mishra murdered on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1988. She also participated in rescuing Comrade Ram Pravesh Das from upper/middle caste landed gentry in 1989.

Gradually her political career unfolded as she was elected member to Party's Jehanabad District Committee in the district conference held in 2000. By this time she became a full time member and a dedicated activist of AIPWA. This phase of her involvement in

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<sup>11</sup> In writing this section, various issues of *Aadhi Zameen* and "*Koi bhi hinsa rok nahin sakti, Bihar ki nai bahadur mahilaon ke kadam*" a party booklet brought on *Saheed* Comrade Manju, newspaper clippings were consulted for information. Most importantly talks with the party members Comrade Saroj Chaubey, Comrade Meena Tiwari, Comrade Ramjee Rai and others helped in organising this section. I also acknowledge Amitabh Das Gupta for his comments and suggestions.

grassroot movement saw her playing a lead role in organising a protest movement against the killing of students by the police at Imanganj on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2000. The movement concluded as State government constituted a committee to enquire the incident. She was elected as President of the district AIPWA Jahanabad unit.

She contested for the post of member of District Council from Vanshi-Sonebhadra-Surajpur constituency in the then undivided Jehanabad district in the Panchayat elections held in Bihar in 2001. Among 16 candidates she polled 4240 votes and thus emerged victorious even though Ranvir Sena supported her opponent candidate Rena Devi from Serari. Her prime agenda was to curb the incidences of atrocities against women by police and feudalist elements.

Her major initiatives taken for empowerment and resistance against the caste-class violence of women took many forms. As a member of District Council, she organized a demonstration protesting against a rape attempt in Karpi Bazar in 2002. She played a lead role in organizing many such protest demonstrations against killings by Ranvir Sena in Karpi Block; killings of peasants in Puraan village and murder of a peasant in Murari village. Jehanabad was later on divided into two districts Jehanabad and Arwal. In the elections for the new district panchayats in 2003, Comrade Manju contested for the membership of Arwal district panchayat.

Although she lost her election yet her dedication towards the struggle remained affirmed. It was with this dedication she attended a meeting of the Khet Majdoor Sabha on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2003 along with other comrades. The meeting was to plan for successful organizing the All India Khet Majdoor Sabha in Ara commencing from 14<sup>th</sup> November 2003. The Ranvir Sena supporters in firing killed her at Purana Gaon, (Karpi) while she was returning from the meeting. Comrade Avdhesh Singh (member of Karpi Block committee) was also injured in the attack.

Her death due to killing was condemned by CPI(ML)-AIPWA and it organised various protest marches in State demanding killers to be hanged. A funeral procession was taken out on 12<sup>th</sup> November and a *Sankalp Sabha* was organized in Jahanabad addressed by

Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya. There was protest march in New Delhi the same day. A huge rally by poor peasants in *Ramna Maidan*, Ara was also organized. A 'Protest Week' (13<sup>th</sup> November to 20<sup>th</sup> November) was launched by AIPWA. The Ranveer Sena owned the responsibility of killing in a press release dated 17<sup>th</sup> November.

A massive protest rally was organized by AIPWA on 15<sup>th</sup> December with slogan '*Rabdi Devi sharm karo, ab toh gaddi chod do*' which later on gathered at State Legislative Assembly. Even after many investigations including one by National Commission For Women (NCW) and protest demonstrations, the killers have not been nabbed. Although a case was registered on 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2003 at Karpi Police Station, yet no action was taken. In the report submitted by the NCW team led by Nafisa Husain 'political pressure from the above' in favour of Ranveer Sena supported State Health Minister Akhilesh Sharma was underlined (*Aadhi Zameen*, 2004:18-21, Chaubey, 2003:16-17).

Comrade Jharo Devi (-11<sup>th</sup> October 2004)

Jharo Devi was born in a landless peasant family. She joined CPI(ML) in 1990 during struggle for her land rights and resistance to feudal elements. She played an important role in distributing the AIPWA party magazine *Aadhi Zameen*. At the same time, she also collected funds for the party struggle. She earned her living by running a small vegetable shop. A major agenda of her party activities was resistance to eviction of the urban poor by the administration without adequate resettlement. Other issues were incidents of rape and killings of dalit women.

Along with a member of Patna West Area Committee of CPI(ML), Comrade Jharo Devi was State Councilour as well as Joint Secretary of Patna City Committee of AIPWA She was a delegate to the 6th Congress of Party held at Varanasi. She was also a delegate to the 6th and 7th Bihar State Conferences. In due course of resistance, she mobilized people to protest the rape of dalit woman in Jehanabad by Uma Singh (a activist of PWG, Jehanabad). In retaliation, supporters of PWG killed her on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2004 at Panchavati Nagar (Digha, Patna).

Then there are those who are undeterred by such violent retaliation and are committed for the empowerment of women. In this context it is important to note that the incidents scripted above are only a fraction of those mass of toiling women who encounter feudal atrocities on everyday basis. As discussed in the study, the aggressive mobilization for the equal political rights has been a basic agenda of AIPWA. It has become all the more significant as the elections at the local level (PRIs) are now being held. As there have been very few PRI elections, the 2001 became significant for local level elections. Many cases of violence against women candidates were reported ranging from rape and murder and implication in false cases. In such situation the issues of participation and resistance are being discussed through Damyanti Sinha<sup>12</sup>.

Damyanti Sinha of Dhanarua (Patna) contested election for the post of member of District Council in 2001 and won. She is member of both National Council of AIPWA and CPI(ML) Liberation district committee. It was in 1993 when her land was grabbed by the ex-Mukhiya of her village. During that time, AIPWA was conducting signature campaign for speedy formation of State Women's Commission. She was given the responsibility for collecting signatures and thus the journey to emancipation began.

At the initial stage, her family did not approved of her party activities but later on they gave in to her arguments. Given the marketisation and criminalisation of elections even at local levels, it was the party which provided her total mass support and ensured her victory. Her style of functioning and effective organizational skills also played an important role. According to her, although these elections are important yet lack of any significant power to the candidates renders the goal of empowerment at grassroot level useless. The only way out is the sustained form of resistance and movement.

Her victory is important for the women movement at larger level, as it will create a network among the grassroot worker/activists and those who are aiming for gender sensitive policy and programmes. The participation in political activities and movement

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<sup>12</sup> Based on interview given in *Aadhi Zameen*. The interview was titled "*Panchayat Pratnidhiyon ko sarkar khulal banana chahati hai.*" *Aadhi Zameen* (2001). October-December, 10(4):34-35.

has changed the attitude of the rest of the people. Earlier the people did not care about you but now they hear you and also give you regards.

### **3.3 Violence of /for/and 'Izzat'**

The issues of 'izzat' and violence are deeply enmeshed. It is so because any violation of 'izzat' of a woman is violence on her and seldom in the case of Bihar, any violence has taken place without violation of 'izzat' of a/some/many woman/women. Thus there are two issues to be addressed. First, violence not resulting in death i.e. sexual molestation and rape during the struggle and its retaliation by the counterpart and second violence resulting in death of women. While the former is the outcome of day-to-day struggle, the latter is more a characteristic of massacres.

As already discussed, the incident on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1973 (police firing on the landless labourers demanding higher wages in Chauri village, Sahar, Bhojpur) marked the visible presence of naxalite movement in Bihar. The reason is documented as "The facts of *Chauri* revealed a state of tension that existed prior to the events of 6<sup>th</sup> May 1973. It was a common knowledge in the surrounding villages that poor Harijan women who slept with Bhumihar scions got an extra bundle of grain to carry home. One of the reasons for growing unrest was the fact that the Bhumihar landlords of the Chauri were coercing the lower-caste female labourers to do harvesting work at nights for obvious sexual benefits. Added to this was a problem of reduced or inadequate wages paid to the labourers" (Mukherjee and Yadav, 1982:122).

A significant form of violence termed as 'customary violence' needs mention here. It includes violence against Dalit women in particular, which are part and parcel of patriarchal and exploitative caste hegemony. Among these *Dola Pratha* needs mention. It is difficult to ascertain the birth and origin of such a practice as it existed as far back as 'Dalit memory' recalls. *Dola* literally means palanquin which is used to carry newly wed bride to her husband's house/village. Due to oppressive caste system and economic exploitation, the landed gentry took it as their birth right. Subsequently, it became a

“cultural practice” under which the newly wed girl was to spend her first night with the local upper caste landlord.

The most authentic and figurative documentation of *Dola Pratha* manifested in “*Mahteen Mai Ka Mandir*” has been done by Maheshwar (1992:8-10; 1997:35-39). This ‘temple’ is near the platform of *Bihya Bajar*, Ara (Bhojpur). A weekly *Hat* on Tuesday sees women along with their children from nearby villages flocking to this temple. They come here to worship *Mahteen Mai* and ask for blessings along with fulfillment of their wishes. Probing the genealogy of *Mahteen* reveals not only the exploitative system but also the reinvention of History by the patriarchy.

There are two different versions of *Mahteen Mai*. The ‘Sanskritic’ version says that the local landlord of Shahabad, Ranpal Singh raped a newly wed Ragmati when her *Dola* was passing through his area. Her subsequent suicide led to tension in the area. To avoid further troubles, Ranpal Singh spread the story that before he could lay hands on her, She glowed and left to heaven. Thus she was not an ordinary woman but a deity. Since she was a Brahmin and married to Mahanth, she along with the temple is addressed as *Mahteen Mai Ka Mandir*. The ‘Dalit’ version states that it is not so as Ranpal Singh was habituated of molesting and raping poor Dalit women. Leaving apart the ‘contested history’, *Mahteen Mai Ka Mandir* stands still today as a testimonial to *Dola Pratha*.

Another ‘ritually sanctioned exploitation’ was during the Holi festival. During this time, the upper and middle caste men aggressively took advantage with lower caste poor women. This practice again dates back to many years. Although such incidents have reduced due to mass militant mobilisation and violent retaliation by the left organizations, such incidents even occur today. An infamous incident of this kind was Danwar-Bihta incident on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1991 when on the day of Holi itself, 15 women were gang raped (*Mahilaon ki Samajik Suraksha par Badhta Hamla*, 1994:5). As usual, the laxity of administration to address this issue was evident.

Incidents of everyday violence against Dalit women include teasing, sexual exploitation of the brick kiln labourers and subjected to mass or gang rape among others. It is very

difficult to give even a brief account of such atrocities, as many of the cases are not reported by the victims due to social stigma and most importantly due to fear of retaliation. All the more, the law and order machinery is of little help as it sides with the perpetrators. At the same time, the sexual exploitation of agricultural women labourer was the accepted norm and practice of the rural side of not only Bihar but India also. Such incidents are still being documented and reported more than often. Resistance to such established norms of violence by the victims was retaliated more violently the powers to be.

Even today such incidents are happening as on 28<sup>th</sup> August, 2000 Saraswati Devi, a Dalit woman of Pakri-Pakohi, Karja Block, Muzaffarpur district was paraded naked on accusing her of practicing witchcraft. A dozen persons tortured her and forced her to swallow human excreta. Even after lodging complaint at police no action has been taken. On 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2000 Ranveer Sena killed three Dalits including a woman at Barheta village, Jehanabad. On 20<sup>th</sup> April 2002 an incident of gang rape of three adivasi women at the brick kiln - Juli, under Hilsa Police Station, Nalanda was reported. More recently, seven Dalit women of Ramnagar-Gopalpur village, Lakhisarai were allegedly raped by powerful landed upper caste men of their village in August 2006. The incident happened as the women did not voted for the candidate of landed upper caste men. It was only after the intervention of Bihar State Women Commission that the local police registered complain. Thus, everyday incidents of violence against *Dalit* women to establish the 'casteist patriarchy' have to be understood as:

Placed within the context of both gender and caste discrimination, more often than not inhabiting rural areas of severe impoverishment, *Dalit* women become an easy target for exploitation and violence. Given that women embody the concept of honor, violence against women becomes a symbolic gesture of exploitation and discrimination within *Dalit* communities. Thus, sexual harassment by landowners, moneylenders and their hired thugs is common. Rape, gang rape, parading of women through the streets naked, and beatings are common actions taken against women and girls by both the police and members of the upper-castes. Reasons for these practices vary from using violent means of punishment, to viewing sexual relations with *Dalit* women as their caste right, to using sexual torture as a means of embarrassing and punishing the woman's family (Kumar, 2005).

A more barbaric and militant form of violence against Dalit women is the violence perpetuated by the private caste *Senas* during various massacres. In the Pipra village of



Patna district, 5 women along with 9 others were killed by the Kurmi landlords on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1980. On 11<sup>th</sup> November 1985, 12 persons were killed by the Yadav community in Laks'himpur, Monghyr. The victims belonging to *Bind* (a low caste) community alleged that their women were also gang raped.

Such incidents have increased manifold with the formation of *Ranveer Sena* in 1994 as 'Femicide' is the special feature of its killing (Sinha and Sinha, 2001:4096). Ranvir Sena targets women, as they are the ones who would "give birth to Naxalites" and their children who would "grow up to be Naxalites" (Sahar, 2006:43-47). Some of the incidents are briefly documented. The *Savarna* Liberation Front (later merged with Sunlight *Sena* to form *Ranveer Sena*) reportedly raped more than one hundred Dalit women in the Gaya and Jehanabad districts in March and July 1992<sup>13</sup>. On 10<sup>th</sup> April 1997, *Ranveer Sena* killed eight persons in Ekwari village in Bhojpur. A fifteen-year-old girl and a woman who was eight months pregnant were among those killed. Women were raped before being killed.

The *Sena* began its 'killing the demon in the womb' campaign in Jehanabad (Sinha and Sinha, 2001:4096). In a more gruesome incident, it massacred nearly 61 one persons in the village of Bathe-Lakshmanpur, Jehanabad on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1997. Those who were killed included 16 children, 27 women and 18 men. Eight of the women were killed were pregnant.<sup>14</sup> During the attack, at least five girls around 15 years of age were raped and mutilated before being shot in the chest.

Again, on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1999, at least twenty-two Dalit men, women and children were killed in Sharkarbigha, Jehanabad. On 10<sup>th</sup> February 1999 its members killed twelve and injured seven in Narayanpur village, Jehanabad. 12 people including four women and a baby were killed on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1999 in two neighboring villages in the Gaya district. In Mianpur, Aurangabad district 35 persons were killed on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2000 which included 20 women and 2 children. More recently in Khadasin (Jahanabad-Arwal) 4 women were

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<sup>13</sup> *Savarna Liberation Army* (SLA) was formed in late eighties by Ramadhar Singh Diamond. For details see, Ramakrishnan (1999).

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix IV for details.

killed. Apart from these, there are various 'stray' incidents involving killings of men and women alike<sup>15</sup>.

What is more important is not the violence perpetuated on the Dalit women rather its context. It is now a well documented argument that with the advent of naxalism the old bastions of power are systematically and aggressively challenged by the Dalits. In the process the 'ritual social order' is experiencing a transition. The upper caste landed gentry thus in retaliation kills not only the men but also target the women and (children in some cases). In an interview given to Human Rights Watch, Ramchandar Ram (a former DSP, Patna), on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1998 commented reflected on the nature of massacres:

"There are 106 widows in Ekwari. At least fifty women have also been killed in the past several years. The Dalit men go to jail and get sentenced, while the Ranvir Sena has enough money to fight the case all the way to the Supreme Court. Dalit women are made homeless, and the children cannot go to school because the family needs the money to fight the cases against the men. The Ranvir Sena cares only about high numbers. They also rape the women. The police send innocent people to jail. No one can surrender for fear of so-called police encounters. They do not get justice from the police. That is the main factor."

The picture thus emerges is that of intersection of gender and caste. In the caste system, those who are at the lowest level are asserting their rights under the influence of left organizations. It has resulted in the violent retaliations by the upper caste landed gentry aiming to 'keep them at their place'. In such retaliations Dalit women become easy targets of violence. Even the State machinery 'cooperates' in the perpetuation of violence on them (Bihar PUCL, 2001). The following observation is in the same context:

"The *senas*, which claim many politicians as members, operate with impunity. In some cases, police have accompanied them during their attacks and have stood by as they killed villagers in their homes. In other cases, police raids have followed attacks by the *senas*. The purpose of the raids is often to terrorize Dalits as a group, whether or not they are members of guerilla organizations. During the raids, the police have routinely beaten villagers, sexually assaulted women, and destroyed property. Sena leaders and police officials have seldom (more often never been) prosecuted for such killings and abuses"<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> For details see, *Rabri Raj aur Mahilaayen* (1999:29-30); *Aadhi Zammen*, (2003-04:23); *Yeh Jung Jaroor Jeetein*, (25,29,31); *Sahar*, 2006:43-47.

<sup>16</sup> Violence Against "Untouchables" Growing, Says Report: Indian Government Fails to Prevent Massacres, Rapes, and Exploitation. 14th April 1999.

Web Address: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/1999/04/14/india879.htm>

However, women are the victims of violence and killings by the left organizations. Chaudhary (2005:133-144) has discussed this issue. Some of the incidents discussed by the author are briefly discussed. Naxalites killed the husband of 25-year-old Gita in Belaur village in 1994. Today she washes clothes and looks after the kitchen of neighbours to sustain herself and her three daughters. According to her, “we wish to die; but death does not come, though we do die every day. My in-laws beat me up. They do not give me food, so I collect food left over by others.”

According to Pushpa of Tarasi village, “Liberation killed my husband. Now my in-laws do not care whether I am dead or alive. They were killed but it is the women who suffer the most.” Lalsa Kumari (now Kuer after becoming a widow) from Belaur village comments that “None of the family members behave with me properly. They accuse me of being unfortunate. There is no one to share my burden.” For Geeta Kaur, things are not different as her husband was killed for the so-called cause of the Ranvir Sena several years ago. She rues that “none of its members has come to see me.”

In here, the other side of the picture becomes clear. In the violence and counter violence it is the women who suffer the most. Woman as a universal category emerges where the caste lines blur. Most of the time it has been discussed that the violence experienced by the Dalit women is different from that experienced by upper caste women. In the cycle of violence and counter-violence in Bihar, such a differentiation is problematic. In most of the incidents among those who get killed, men outnumber the women. It is true for both the sides i.e. massacres committed by private caste militias and naxalite organizations. One fine line of distinction is that women widowed by the massacres outnumbered those widowed by the naxalite counter-massacres. However, apart from quantitative analysis, the notion of women suffering the most in such violence is undeniable. The following observation aptly describes the plight of women of both sides:

“Every attack targeted the weakest link in the other’s chain. In Bathe, those killed by the Ranvir Sena were poor Dalit women and children. Near Jehanabad, the victims were Bhumihar women. There are villages in the Naxalite areas of Bihar which has few men and only women, mostly widows. Grown-up girls in these villages cannot get married because nobody would accept a bride from such dangerous areas and put their own lives at risk” (Sharan, 2004:36).

### 3.4 Economic Issues: Land and Wages

Oommen has classified the agrarian classes on the basis of “ownership and control of land and management and work patterns on land” (1995:130-133). Following is the brief discussion of five classes:

- i) Landlords: This class owns the land but gets it cultivated through intermediaries like sharecroppers. They lead their ‘feudal’ life style based on other exactions like rent and forced labour. They are mostly from upper castes like Brahmin and Rajput.
- ii) Rich farmers: This is the product of green revolution who also benefited from State sponsored subsidies. Although they do not till the land yet they are cultivators as they supervise agricultural activities. They include traditional landowning castes along with peasant castes like Jats, Ahirs, etc.
- iii) Middle peasants: This class participates in the agricultural activities. It also hires labourers if and when need arises. Some of the landowning backward and lower castes are in this category along with others.
- iv) Poor peasants: They own uneconomic landholdings and participate in the agricultural process. They also work as labourers on others land to maintain themselves. Backward and Dalit castes constitute this class.
- v) Landless agricultural labourers: This class does not own the land and totally depends on the above classes for survival. In due process, it sells its labour. The majority of such labourers are from Dalit castes. This class can be also termed as agrarian proletariat.

Thus, the economic basis of caste is manifested in the access to resources on the account of position in the caste system. Subsequently, the complex relation between caste and gender comes in to picture. Although the female agricultural labourers do the major agricultural activities, yet due to the lack of any proper legal land right, they do not own land. In this context, the economic issues (land and wages) become an important issue of exploration.

A brief statistical description of labour force is given here to grasp the subsequent points. Agriculture has been a main source of livelihood for women in India. It was all the more important for their survival prior to the 1990s economic reforms. At the country level, in 1951, the percentage of total female worker involved as cultivators was 45.42 percent and it was 31.39 percent for agricultural cultivators. The percentage was 57.73 and 23.86 in 1961; 29.61 and 50.46 in 1971; and 33.03 and 45.57 in 1981 respectively for cultivators and agricultural cultivators. On the whole the distribution of women workers in agriculture was 76.81 percent in 1951, 79.59 percent in 1961, 80.07 percent in 1971 and 78.60 in 1981.

In the case of Bihar, the percentage of total female worker involved as cultivators was 54.72 percent and 29.37 percent for agricultural cultivators in 1961. The percentage was 17.35 and 73.63 in 1971; and 25.70 and 62.54 percent in 1981 respectively for cultivators and agricultural cultivators. The Work Participation Rates (WRR) in total population of Bihar is 33.7 percent in 2001 as compared to 30.6 percent recorded in the 1991 census. According to the 2001 census, the percentage of workers in Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe is 39.7 and 45.2 respectively. Male work participation rates during 2001 census for total population, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are 47.4 percent, 49.2 percent and 52.9 percent respectively. Female work participation rates during 2001 census for total population, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are 18.8 percent, 29.5 percent and 36.9 percent respectively. The percentage of overall cultivators in 2001 for total population, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is 32.2 percent, 8.7 percent and 23.9 percent respectively. The percentage of agricultural labourers for total population, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is 42.9 percent, 75.4 percent and 60.9 percent respectively.

The access to any property resource for the women has been channelised through her immediate male relatives. Most of the time, it is through her relationship with a man in marital alliance (as a wife). The implicit point here is that in any kind of marital insecurity or discord, the women loses her control over the land. Moreover, another forms of denial from land are divorce or desertion. Traditional practice of patrilocal marriage also plays a negative role towards women land rights. In it, the married women

losses her land rights (if any) in their natal family (ancestral property). Moreover, as it has been already pointed out, her subsequent land rights are based on durability of marriage relationship. In the case of divorce or death of the husband, she is unable to practice her land rights. Due to patrilocal marriage, women move outside of their village and thus from their land. It reduces her physical control and access to her land.

The relation between assets and vulnerability is well outlined in Vatsa (2004:25-26). The higher is the index of asset owning, the lower is the chance of vulnerability. In this context, land being an asset, the vulnerability of women increases manifold if she is denied any land rights. This access to property has been a major point of concern for the women's movement. It has been argued that the unmarried daughters as well, as the married one's should be legally eligible for property rights including landing property. The practice of land being inherited patrilineally is very much common and is unchallenged.

Gender biases in the access of land are further visible in the lack of security of access to the women. Given the agricultural base of economy and additional dimension that women participate in the agricultural practices more than men means that it is the women who should be accorded the legal rights of tenancy rather than men. At the same time, insecurity in such tenure system makes the women further vulnerable. Land reform measures in India have failed miserably in addressing such issues and many a times, development induced displacement hits women more than men as the former are not provided title rights on land.

Summarizing the overall scenario, the picture that emerges is that "in most communities social conditions are far from conducive to women claiming their legal share in their parental or marital homes, or functioning as independent farmers. Customary practices governing post-marital residence, the choice of marriage partners, female seclusion and freedom of movement, sexual control over women, the hold of traditional ideology in customarily patrilineal communities, all impinge on this, although the extent to which these become constraints varies considerably across regions. Patrilocal residence, in particular, is a serious liability" (Agarwal, 1988:571).

Broadly women's ownership of land can enhance her capacity in various ways (Kelkar and Nathan, 2002:9-10):

- Use women's knowledge, which is not directly available to men;
- Improve women's access to credit;
- Use and develop women's management skills;
- Utilize the positive incentive effects of direct control over income; "If land is in our name, then we will work more vigorously and under less pressure.";
- Utilize the possibility that women might use productive assets more efficiently, as well-established in the case of micro-finance; and
- Take account of gendered responsibilities in the household (e.g. women's greater responsibility in household provisioning of food, leading to cultivation of multiple crops, rather than more risky mono-cropping).

The CPI(ML) Liberation in its Organisational Report adopted at the Fourth Party Congress, 1987 stated increase in the wages of agrarian labourers; seizure of surplus, vested and homestead land under the occupation of landlords, *mahants* and rich peasants and distribution of the same among landless and poor peasants; social dignity of *dalits*; and backward castes as primary aims of peasant movement. Later on, it broadened its scope in Sixth Party Congress meet in 1997 to include demands like *pattas* to be issued in the names of both men and women; to counter menace of private caste militias and police brutalities on cadre members; and corruption in State machinery among others issues.

In the same line of argument, the participation of women in the struggle is manifested in the struggles for land, minimum and equal wages and sources of income. It has been documented by Karat (2005:98) in the following observation:

"But through the difficulties and the deprivation, what stood out most of all was the power of female resilience. In one example in Jahniharpur Block of Madhubani district, women *machuaris* (fisherwomen) related how they had formed a group which challenged the hegemony of a local mafia gang and got control of three fish tanks in the area. In Darbhanga, in several villages women had not only played a leading role in struggles for surplus land over the ceiling but were also instrumental in defending the land. The most popular demand in these areas was that for land titles in the name of both the husband and the wife" (Karat, 2005:98).

In the events of struggles many a women become victims of violence. Such violence is perpetuated on them along with their kinsmen on the issue of increasing wages. It has a long history. Some of the incidents are briefly discussed. Way back in March 1977, the agricultural labourers organized a strike in Karghar Block (Rohtas) for demanding minimum wages. In retaliation, their huts were burnt down and three labourers were also burnt alive. In another incident in June 1977, many women were molested in the attack by the upper caste landed gentry in Gopalpur. In the same year, in Patahada village (Bhagalpur) altogether 36 agricultural labourers including women were brutally assaulted. In Bhagalpur, three women agricultural labourers were shot dead by the police on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1986.

Thus, even after nearly fifty years of land reform measures, the situation has hardly changed. At best the laws have been a mockery as even by the modest calculation thousands of acres of land are still under the control of feudal lords of Champaran, Purnea, and estates like Shikarpur, Dumaria, Bilaspur among others (Urmilesh, 1991:59-63). The situation described by Jannuzi in 1970s has hardly changed. Still today there is no security of tenants as they are being evicted without any proper rehabilitation measures in places like Katihar, Purnea, Bhagalpur.

The place where the most aggressive land struggle has been waged is West Champaran. It is called 'State ruled by Estates' due to many estates occupying thousands of acres of land<sup>17</sup>. Some of these estates are Shikarpur estate owned by Kayastha families owns around 5,000 acres of land under their possession. Bhaisahi estate of Kalwar caste family has 2,500 acres of land. Known as Ramnagar royal dynasty, the Ramnagar estate having more than 5,000 acres of land is owned by Rajput caste family. Bhumihar caste owned Vilaspur Estate has more than 3,000 acres of land. Apart from these there are Dumaria State (1,500 acres) and Bargaon Estate (1,500 acres) among others.

In such a scenario, the struggle for land has intensified and land rights of women have been aptly recognized. There has been tremendous participation of women in such

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<sup>17</sup> Liberation (2002). Land Struggle in West Champaran Reaches New Heights. September. Web Address: [http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year\\_2002/september/cover%20feature.htm](http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year_2002/september/cover%20feature.htm)



struggles. Some of the major land struggles under the CPI(ML) Liberation through militant peasant struggles reflects the situation. In Chiutanha (Mainatand Block, West Champaran) struggle took place to free 300 acres of *benami* land grabbed by the local landlord. Along with it, 450 acres of ceiling surplus land was wrested back from Shivji Marwari in Sonvarsha- Matiyariya in Gaunaha Block after a prolonged struggle in 2004.

At many places, Ranveer Sena along with the State machinery has violently retaliated to the land struggles by the poor peasants. Prominent places among these are Sahar, Sandesh, and Charpokhri Blocks in Bhojpur. Moreover, in villages of Bara-Bela-Tarari of Naubatpur Block (patna district), the land struggle involves Ranvir Sena and Bhoomi Sena along with State. Kaimur district is another place with intense land struggle between the upper and middle caste landed gentry and poor peasants. Places like Awaraiya-Ajgari of Kudra Block (31 acres), Khanav of Bhabhua Block (62 acres of ceiling-surplus land) and Dimri in Rampur Block (2 acres of homestead land) reflect the absurdity of land reform measures.

At this place some of the songs of resistance is discussed<sup>13</sup>. These are manifestations of women agricultural labourers along with sympathizers of the struggles.

Enough of this oppression  
The landless and the peasant have risen  
Now all have equal rights  
Enough to eat  
And a roof overhead  
In a literate land no one will be worthless.  
Akhari CPI(ML) Liberation, Bhojpur

Take to arms  
The rulers are slumbering.  
Ranvir Sena, Ganga Sena, thugs and felons  
Are all cronies of the rulers.  
Smash the coterie of

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix V for details.

Overlord, crook and the police

Declare a war on them.

Simran, CPI(ML) Liberation, Patna

A new star has risen on the horizon

Ours is half the land

Ours half the sky

For aeons we have been ornaments

Traded for pleasure

As goddesses or as slaves

A change is now about

Ours is half the land

Ours half the sky

Nari Mukti Sangh, Gaya

Fear not, my friend

Fear not, brother

A bright future will be ours, too.

Our blood has smeared this land

Our tears have woven many a tale

Our dream too will come true one day

Friend, do not lose heart.<sup>19</sup>

Kanthi, Nari Mukti Sangharsh Samiti, Masaurhi, Patna District

Coupled with the struggle for access to land rights, struggle for minimum wages is another issue of participation (Chaudhary, 2006:48-61). As early as in its second Bihar State conference in September 1995, the main agenda of discussion was 'equal wage for equal wage'. Subsequently, AIPWA conducted a survey in four districts (Patna rural, Bhojpur, Rohtas and Siwan). It was found that the wage rate varied from Rs. 2 to Rs. 20 whereas the official rate was Rs. 39.30 as the minimum wage for agricultural labourer per day (*Aadhi Zameen*, 1998:11). Moreover the wage depended on the area of work also. As

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<sup>19</sup> Source: Louis (2002).

is the case with rest of the country, women are paid lower wages than their male counterparts. Many a times they are given half the wages. More than often it is justified on ground of women being 'less efficient'. Various struggles have taken place to increase the wage for agricultural labourers.

Some of the successful struggles are briefly described. In Gaunaha Block (West Champaran) wages were increased by 1-3 kilos after intense struggle. After a strike which nearly lasted two years in Sabajpura and Rakasiya (Dulhinbazar Block, Patna district) wage rate was increased to Rs. 41.50 along with hours resting period in between work. In Punpun Block, wage was increased to Rs. 41.50 after struggle. Wages were raised up to 3.5 kgs. in Koil village (Kaler Block, Jehanabad-Arwal). In Jamuaon village of Sandesh Block in Bhojpur equal wages for men and women at the rate of Rs. 38 was achieved. Villages in Tarari intensified struggle to increase wage from rupees 5 to 15. The wage struggle at Pavarpur village (Buxar) became violent due to involvement of Ranveer Sena. However, the struggle was successful as women's and men's wages increased to Rs. 30 and Rs 40 from 10 and 20 rupees. The Table 3.1 summarizes the achievements of wage struggle through militant peasant struggles.

Table 3.2: Wage Differences Made by the Advent of the Agrarian Movement

Category of labour	Before	After
<i>Banihar harwaha</i> (attached labourer)	1.5 <i>seer kachchi</i> (paddy), <i>sattu</i> as breakfast and 8-10 <i>kattas</i> of land for personal cultivation	2 kg. <i>Pakki</i> (grain like rice or wheat), breakfast and 10-12 <i>kattas</i> of land for personal cultivation
<i>Chuta Mazdur</i> (free labourer)	2 <i>seer kachchi</i> (paddy) and <i>sattu</i> as breakfast	2 kg. <i>Pakki</i> (grain like rice or wheat), breakfast and lunch
For harvesting	1/16 or 1/21 <i>bhojas</i> (bundles) harvested	1/8 or 1/10 <i>bhojas</i> (bundles) harvested

Source: Louis, (2002:215).

**CHAPTER**

**IV**

### In Lieu of Conclusion

“Take Kusumlal, a landless labourer who barely survived the massacre that the landlords of Danwar Bihta carried out on election day in 1989. Unable to overcome the ruthless repression by peaceful means, some Dalits like Kusumlal support militant Naxalite groups such as the People’s War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) who believe in armed struggle to end upper-caste domination. Many more join the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), known locally as “Maaley”, which seeks to combine parliamentary politics with militant peasant struggles. Kusumlal doesn’t want money. He wants to be treated with dignity. He wants the landlords to stop sexually exploiting and raping Dalit women. He wants the landlords’ private army, the Ranbir Sena, to halt its massacres” (Das, 1999).

“Naxalism is the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country...the movement has gained in strength and has now spread to over 160 districts all over the country...the extremists are trying to establish ‘liberation zones’ in core areas where they are dispensing basic state functions of administration, policing and justice<sup>1</sup>.”

As we come to the conclusion of the study, it will be a worthwhile exercise to re-look the aims and objectives with which the study began. The study analyzed the participation of women in the naxalite movement in Bihar as a strategy of their empowerment and liberation from gender exploitation along with the patriarchy operating within the family and community. Such an exploration formed the basic tenet of what the study meant by gendering the naxalite movement. Such mode of resistance encountered different set of oppression and sites yet shared the platform of women’s movements. The basic issues of participation were that of equal land rights and recourse to retaliation in cases of violation of dignity and violence.

In due process, several pertinent points were taken into consideration. The study located women in the naxalite movement in Bihar through their effective participation in the same. The manifestations of such participation were the militant struggle waged against the feudal elements. The issue of dignity of Dalit women was at the core of assessing the impacts of naxalite movement. Most importantly, as the women’s movements at macro level have addressed the issues at stake in a given socio-structural dimension, in the same

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<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister Manmohan Singh noted in his address to the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of Standing Committee of Chief Ministers on Naxalism on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2006.

way Dalit women in Bihar are responding and effectively countering the threats to dignified life and survival in their own context. The feudal violence has been countered not only through violence rather it has also taken a democratic discourse manifested in All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) which is a frontal organization of CPI(ML) Liberation. The slippery categories of caste along with class emerged as of prime importance in due course of analysis.

Additively, the process of analyzing gendering the naxalite movement was situated in the broad framework of women's movements in India. The latter emerged aiming at emancipation of women from all forms of inequality primarily manifested in gender discrimination. The various issues of mobilization like economic, social and political representation and sites of struggle were outlined. The emergence and gradual strengthening of women's movements passed through stages of aggressive mobilization along with further fragmentation of the 'universal sisterhood'. Some of the significant issues are briefly discussed.

The arrival of colonial powers in India was a watershed. It strongly influenced the status of women that at that time was anchored deeply in various superstitions, dogmas and rituals thereby exploiting women of all castes. More troublesome was the fact that these were 'sanctioned' by the religious scriptures and texts. Deeply influenced by the 'enlightenment philosophy' and liberal democratic principles, many distinguished personalities like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Jyotiba Phule, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Maharshi Karve, M.G. Ranade, B. Malabari and others took social reform initiatives. These were aimed at three social customs in particular i.e. *suti*, the prohibition of widow remarriage and prevalence of child marriage. Gradually, due to sustained mobilization on such issues and support from colonial power these issues were effectively addressed and countered.

Mass mobilization and participation of women in the public arena during freedom struggle was an important period. The emergence of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi in 1920s provided further impetus to it through initiating women's participation in his non-violent methods. Consequently, A.I.C.C. in 1930 passed a special resolution marking women's contribution to Satyagraha movement. At the same time there was emergence

of various women's organizations like Women's Indian Association in 1917, National Council of Women in 1925 and the All India Women's Conference in 1927. These focused on women's education and child marriage among other things. Apart from such participation, women also participated in violent movements as many secret societies had come into existence in Bengal during 1905 and later on. Thousands of women actively participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942.

The euphoria of independence was further questioned by "*Toward Equality: The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India*" in 1975. The report revealed severe gender discrepancies in terms development of women. The internal emergency in 1975 deeply influenced the women's movement. Another significant feature of the women's movement at this time was the emergence of women's studies across the country. In late 1970s, 'second wave' of Indian feminism emerged focusing on violence in all the forms against women. These included primarily incidents of dowry deaths and rape. During 1980s, the media reported numerous cases of 'burning brides' where newly wed girls either 'committed suicide' or were 'burnt alive' by her husband and in-laws over dowry disputes. The struggle by women's movements resulted in some changes oriented towards women like The Indian Penal Code (Section 498A and 304B) was amended twice during the 1980s, first in 1983 and again in 1986. In 1983, under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code 'cruelty by husband or relatives of husband' was defined as cognizable offence.

Another aspect of violence against women was 'domestic violence'. These include wife battering, marital rape, female foeticide, female infanticide, dowry harassment and murder, forced abortions, and unpaid household labour. Another issue of equal importance was incidents of rape (custodial rape) and subsequent acquittal of accused due to lack of concrete constitutional remedies. Incidents like gang-rape of Rameeza Bee in March 1978 by several policemen, rape of Mathura (a 14 year old *dalit* girl) at the police station in 1980 and custodial rape of Maya Tyagi on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1980 at Baghpat, Haryana and acquittal of those involved reflected the patriarchal mindset of law and State machinery. Mass uproar against such decisions the government was forced to amend the Indian Evidence Act 1872, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Penal Code and

introduced the category of 'custodial rape'. The Indian Evidence (Amendment) Act, 2003, provided deletion of clause 4 of Section 155 by specifically providing in Section 146.

Drastic increase in incidents of sex determination and sex selection tests with the use of new reproductive technologies like chorionic villi biopsy, amniocentesis and ultrasonography resulted in declining all-India female/male child ratio in 0-6 age-group (juvenile sex ratio). It was 976/1000 in 1961, 964/1000 in 1971, 962/1000 in 1981, 945/1000 in 1991 and 927/1000 in 2001. It was another area of concern for women's movements. Subsequently, the Forum Against Sex Determination and Sex Pre-Selection (1986) and Doctors against Sex-Determination and Sex-Preselection Techniques (DASDSP) were formed. Subsequently, the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act was passed by the Centre in 1994. Later on, the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act was amended in 14<sup>th</sup> February 2003 and became Pre-Conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act.

The eighties witnessed the period of several new women's organizations and autonomous groups focusing on the needs and concerns of women. It was also during later years of 1980s that issues of rights of women and emergence of identity politics became enmeshed through Uniform Civil Code. The case of Mohammad Ahmed Khan vs. Shah Bano Begum (known as the Shah Bano case) in 1985 infused multiple identities of religion (Hindu and Muslim), of gender (patriarchal Hindu and patriarchal Muslim), of 'our women' and 'their women' (Hindu women and Muslim women). Another incident, which split the 'universal sisterhood', was *Sati* case in Deorala village of Sikar district in Rajasthan on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1987. Both the incidents questioned the tenets of 'universal sisterhood' as in both the cases 'women' were against 'women'.

With the coming of 1990s, women's movement discussed the 'rolling back of Welfare State'. In the liberalized economy, the withdrawal of funds and subsidies from education and health negatively affected the primary education of the girl child in particular. More serious is the emerging scenario where women are being pushed out/marginalized of the organized sector to the unorganized sector. Significantly, there was emergence of various



new non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on the women's issues. The period also saw consolidation of right wing ideology and Dalit assertion.

From 1995 itself the women's movement struggled for reservation for women in State legislatures and the Parliament. The 81<sup>st</sup> Constitutional Amendment Bill, popularly known as the Women's Reservation Bill (hereafter WRB) was thus drafted and introduced on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1996. It has been stalled many a times since then on grounds of caste as quota for OBC women were demanded. It was suggested that every recognized political party must nominate women candidates in one third of the constituencies later to be critiqued by women's organizations as candidates might be fielded from 'defeat-prone' and 'violence-marred' constituencies. Similarly, another alternative proposed in July 2003 intended to create dual-member constituencies in one-third of all electoral districts has been stalled as the number of Parliamentary seats has been frozen until 2026.

In the years of 1990s, the rise of right-wing Hindu political parties like *Bhartiya Janata Party* and *Shiv Sena* have become a concern for women's movement. Some significant manifestations of women as agents of violence are mass participation in '*Ram Janambhoomi Movement*' in the early 1990s; communal violence targeting minority women in Mumbai riots in 1992-93 as *Shiv Sena Mahila Agahdi* and recently in Gujarat riots in early 2002 through *Rashtra Sevika Samiti* and *Durga Vahini*. *Matrishakti*, (literally, the power of motherhood) one of the women's organizations affiliated to the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP) has also been in the forefront of such militant activities aimed towards 'other' women. Such participation on one hand have provided the access to public sphere to the erstwhile 'domesticated' women yet very little of women empowerment can be derived from such shifts. Such acts of 'betrayal' have taken caste in to consideration also as evident in anti-Mandal agitations in 1990s. In such conditions, the certain sections of upper and middle caste women vented their anger (violent expressions) against the women of lower castes.

Such incidents of violence have seriously questioned and reevaluated the notion of universal sisterhood in the women's movements. Additively, under the broad rubric of *dalit* assertions and movements in the post 1990s, there is emergence of Dalit feminism.

The basic tenets of Dalit feminism take caste, class and gender into consideration. Due to the lowest position in the caste hierarchy, they suffer caste discrimination. As they are primarily landless agricultural labourers, they also become easy targets of exploitation by the landed gentry. Then there is patriarchy operating at the family and community level leading to further exploitation.

It is against these exploitations, Dalit Feminist Standpoint (DFS) poses itself as foci of Dalit women struggles. In 1990s several independent and autonomous dalit women's organizations were established like the All India *Dalit* Women's Forum in 1994, National Federation of *Dalit* Women in 1995 and All India *Dalit* Women's Forum in 1996. These organizations put forth the arguments often quoted in academia as the different experiences of Dalit women. An important event for such discussions was 'Convention Against Untouchability and *Dalit* Women's Oppression' in December 1998 organized by the All India Democratic Women's Association. The UN World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa in 2001 provided another platform for such issues. More recently, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and National Federation of *Dalit* Women jointly organized National Conference on 'Violence Against *Dalit* Women' on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> March 2006.

Thus, the women's movements in India have come a long way. There have been various issues of mobilization and participation. It gave birth to an increasing awareness of gender discrimination and different effective strategies to counter these. However, in the due process, it has become fragmented either on the lines of religious identities, caste boundaries or class base. Additively, the divide between the rural and middle class urban educated foci of movement was another determinantal aspect of the movement.

The most important aspect of such fragmentation in the context of our study is the realization that experiences are mediated through the primordial identities along with class considerations. These affect the capability and capacity of women regarding her access to power resources. Additively, the emergence of multiple strategies and coping mechanisms of gender discriminations opened a new site of struggle. Thus, on the whole the homogenous nature of women's movements subsequently gave way to a multiplicity of 'voices' of resistance. Such a shift did not weaken the former rather it reflected the

matured decision of respecting the peripheral voices while sharing the basic tenets at the same time.

The Dalit women participating in the naxalite movement in Bihar is one such 'voice' of resistance. At this place it will be necessary to have a discussion on socio-historical specificities of Bihar that gave rise to such an observation. The agrarian structure of Bihar mirrors the caste system. The first social group is that of upper castes including Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumihars, and the Kayasthas. Although they are numerically very small, they are the traditional landlords and are often termed as landed gentry. The second social group is constituted by the backward castes (further divided in to upper and lower backward castes). The upper layer of this caste group i.e. Yadav, Kurmi and Koeri is economically more powerful than the rest of the group due to its agricultural activities. The third social group consists of lower castes and untouchables or *Harijans*, whose major sources of livelihood are menial occupations, working as agricultural labourers and or landless laborers. This group has significant presence of bonded labourers. Thus, at the top was the upper caste landlord who indulged in conspicuous consumption (thus no sign of capitalist mode of production). For the vast population of Bihar, the major source of income is agricultural activities.

The British enacted Permanent Settlement Act, 1793 gave rise to three tenure systems i.e. *Zamindari* tenure, *Mahalwari* tenure and *Ryotwari* tenure. The *Zamindari* tenure was thus deeply entrenched in Bihar. An organised form of peasant movement in Bihar began in late 1930s with the formation of the Patna District Kisan Sabha under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati in 1927. It later became the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS) in 1929. The various issues of Kisan Sabha movement were zamindari abolition, *Begar* (forced labour), *Abwab* (illegal exactions) and *Baksht* land right among others. Although, along with Kisan Sabha movement *Bhoodan- Gramdan* movement also tried to minimize the land owning disparity. However, the situation could not be salvaged.

It was the State enacted land reform measures in 1950 that brought some (yet very significant) miniscule changes in agrarian structure. These were aimed at abolition of zamindari, conferring rights of permanent tenancy, imposition of ceiling on landholdings and providing for acquisition of occupancy rights by *under-raiyats*. The upper caste

dominated State machinery however diluted the impacts of these measures. However, the miniscule success of land reform measures gave rise to the class of 'kulak' i.e. small capitalist farmer class constituted by backward castes (Yadav, Koeri and Kurmi). The economic ascendancy of the kulaks was the result of two factors among other things; first, the gradual consolidation of land holdings due to the implementation (although limited) of land reforms and second, the provision of reservation for the backward castes and classes in the government services and jobs. With the emergence of kulak, the agrarian scene became more violent and exploitative as reflected in the Belchhi (Patna) massacre on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1977 in which 8 *Harijans* and 3 of *Sunar* caste were burnt alive by Kurmi landlords and Pipra (Patna) massacre where Harijan locality was attacked by Kurmi landowners on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1980 killing altogether 14 people.

The emergence of the naxalite movement in Bihar can be located in such violent incidents of caste discrimination. The naxalite movement can be divided into two phases: the formative phase from 1967 to 1977 and the current phase from 1977 onwards. The first naxal upsurge took place in April 1968 at Musahari (Muzaffarpur district) under *Kisan Mazdoor Sangram Samitis*. It later on gathered momentum in Bhojpur district. The main issues were occupancy right over land, increase in the wages and violated dignity. Although it was severely crushed by the State yet the movement later on spread to several neighbouring districts (primarily to Ara). Later on Ekwari village (Sahar Block in Shahabad district) became the foci of naxalite movement. However, the police firing on 6<sup>th</sup> May 1973 in Chauri village in Sahar Block (Bhojpur) on the agricultural labourers (termed 'naxalites) demanding higher wages was a turning point.

National Emergency in 1975 gave immense brute power to the State to tackle naxal 'menace'. The Bhojpur police launched 'Operation Thunder' in May 1976 in which many leaders of naxalite movement were liquidated. At present, the naxal movement is strongly entrenched in more than eight districts in Bihar. Among these most important are Bhojpur, Jehanabad, Aurangabad, Gaya and Patna. Jehanabad has witnessed to the maximum number of massacres since the late 1970's. The mass peasant militant mobilization is done primarily by radical-polity based three left-wing groups.

CPI(M-L) Party Unity [now re-designated Peoples War Group (PWG) after its merger with the Andhra Pradesh based PWG] is active in Patna, Aurangabad, Gaya, Jehanabad, Rohtas, Buxur, Saharsha, Khagaria, Banka and Jamui districts. Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) is active in Patna, Aurangabad, Gaya, Jehanabad, Arwal, Nawada, Kaimur, Rohtas, Bhojpur, Motihari, Sitamarhi, Sheohar, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and Jamui. CPI(ML) Liberation [[popularly known as Ma Le; '*Maaley*' in local dialectics (Ma stands for Marxist while Le stands for Leninist)] has its presence in Bhojpur, Patna, Jahanabad, Aurangabad, Gaya, Rohtas, Siwan and other places.

The basic tenet of CPI(ML) Liberation is to merge parliamentary and non-parliamentary struggles (militant peasant mobilization) in such a manner that these two play complementary roles with each other. The CPI(ML) Liberation in Bihar became more prominent after the Emergency of 1975. Comrade Vinod Mishra became General Secretary after the martyrdom of Comrade Jauhar on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1975. Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha was revitalized on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1981. Subsequently, Indian People's Front (IPF) was launched in three-day Conference held on 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> April 1982. In 1994 *Mazdur Kisan Sangram Parishad* (MKSP) was formed. IPF contested in Legislative election in 1985 from Ara constituency.

The brief spell of IPF gave thousands of dalits a new *izzat* and provided them means of assertion. It was retaliated with *Tiskhora* carnage led by R.L.S. Yadav's *Bhartiya Kisan Sangh* in January 1991. The seventh Congress of CPI(ML) Liberation was held at Patna, Bihar from 25<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> November 2002 presided by Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya as the new General Secretary of party. The upper castes landed gentry joined together to counter the 'extremists' resulting in *Rupaspur - Chandwa* incidents in 1971 (which involved the former Speaker of Bihar Legislative Assembly), and at *Gahlaur* and *Chauri*.

The agrarian fields of Bihar soon became 'flaming fields' with the emergence of private caste army founded by the landowners of respective castes. The *sena* culture in Bihar roughly started in 1979 when under the threat of mass militant peasant movement by naxalites; the rich Kurmi peasants landlords formed *Kisan Suraksha Samiti* having patronage from various political quarters. Gradually, *Lorik Sena* of Yadavs, *Brahmarishi Sena* by Bhumihars and others were formed. In the whole process of the emergence and

violent activities of *sena* culture, role of state was more biased than being the harbingers of law and order as it supported the rise of the caste based armies to counter the 'extremism' problem. The case of Arwal killings by the police and its subsequent defense needs mention as burning example of State laxity towards its duty.

By the 1990s, most of the *senas* were not in the position to confront the Left onslaught. It was with the formation of the *Ranveer sena* by Brahmeshwar Singh in September 1994 in Belaur village of Udwantnagar Block, Bhojpur a more intense assault on the naxal activities was revived. It has carried out much carnage since its formation. The worst form of violence has been inflicted on Jehanabad district that has witnessed 35 massacres. Some of the incidents like the mass killing of 22 persons at Bathani Tola in July 11, 1996; Lakshmanpur-Bathe massacre in December 1, 1997 killing 61 people and massacre of 23 dalits in Shakarbigaha village on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1999 is still to be surpassed by any militant outfit (including Left outfits) indulging in violence.

The links between various politicians and Ranveer Sena are open secrets. After the Lakshmanpur-Bathe massacre (1<sup>st</sup> December 1997) the State commissioned Amirdas Commission to probe the nexus between political leaders and *Sena* activists. It was dissolved when it was about to submit its report indicting many in the ruling party. The violence and counter violence from the both sides resulted in various massacres claiming many lives. Additively, all massacres are not clearly based on the upper vs. lower caste or vice versa rather there are also cases of violence perpetuated by the rich upper backward caste i.e. kulak lobby on the poor peasants belonging to lower castes.

It is in such incidents of violence the Dalit women's participation in naxalite movement has been located. Additively, the issues of 'izzat' and violence are deeply enmeshed. In the case of Bihar, seldom any violence has taken place without violation of 'izzat' of a/some many woman/women. Violence such as sexual molestation and rape during the struggle and violence such as killing in massacres are interrelated. The feudal elements take the issue of sexploitation as their birth right ritually sanctioned by the caste order. As already discussed, one of the issues of its resolution is countering such incidents.

In case of Bihar, such organized resistance is waged under the All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) which is a frontal organization of CPI(ML) Liberation. It was formally launched at national conference of CPI(ML) (Liberation) at New Delhi on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1994. It sees itself as an autonomous women's movement aimed at addressing the issues of women. The various issues of struggle involve implementation of 33% reservation in Parliament and Assemblies and women struggle against gender discrimination. Among the most important issues to be addressed by AIPWA was the issue of State-level Women's Commission in Bihar. AIPWA organized its National Council meeting in Guwahati, Assam on 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> January 1997 focusing on issues like spreading AIPWA among the middle class women and viability of joint struggle as these joint meetings have resulted in distancing the units. AIPWA unit of Bihar organized a state-level seminar at Vidyapeeth Bhavan, Patna on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1997 to debate on the issue of State-level Women's Commission.

The third National Conference of the AIPWA held in Patna in March 2001 focused on the dimensions of gender justice and survival question of women in era of globalization. The twin issues of wages and land rights of the women agricultural labourers are most critical theme of women their mass participation. The 4<sup>th</sup> National Conference of the AIPWA was held on 24-25 November 2004 at the Shaheed Manju Devi Hall (Gaur Bhavan) in Delhi focusing on women activists participating in the struggle for dignity and better wages.

The women killed in such struggles became the foci of songs of resistance. They underlined the 'visible' participation of women in naxalite movement. Among them were 'Lahri', Sonamati ('Agni'), academician Sheela Chaterjee (*Tutu*) and many others. Shanti Devi (1979) was the party activist in the beginning times. Comrade Manju (14<sup>th</sup> April 1970-10<sup>th</sup> November 2003) and Comrade Jharo Devi (-11<sup>th</sup> October 2004) were killed during the struggles.

Such militant participation of women in naxalite movement sharply brings out the issues of mobilization and protests. The sites of resistance are violated dignity and equal wages along with land rights. A significant form of violence termed as 'customary violence' is the *Dola Pratha*. Due to oppressive caste system and economic exploitation, the landed

gentry made it a “cultural practice” under which the newly wed girl was to spend her first night with the local upper caste landlord. Another ‘ritually sanctioned sexploitation’ was during the Holi festival. During this time, the upper and middle caste men aggressively took advantage with lower caste poor women.

Incidents of everyday violence against Dalit women include teasing, sexual exploitation of the brick kiln labourers and subjected to mass or gang rape among others. A more militant form of violence against Dalit women is the violence perpetuated by the private caste *Senas* during various massacres. Such incidents have increased manifold with the formation of *Ranveer Sena* in 1994 as ‘Femicide’ is the special feature of its killing. In subsequent massacres it committed, it has targeted women and children in particular. What is more important is not the violence perpetuated on the Dalit women rather its context. More often, these violent retaliations by the upper caste landed gentry is aimed to ‘keep them at their place’.

Additively, the economic basis of caste is manifested in the access to resources on the account of position in the caste system. As discussed before, the percentage of total female worker involved as cultivators was 54.72 percent and 29.37 percent for agricultural cultivators in 1961. The percentage was 17.35 and 73.63 in 1971; and 25.70 and 62.54 percent in 1981 respectively for cultivators and agricultural cultivators. Female work participation rates during 2001 census for total population, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are 18.8 percent, 29.5 percent and 36.9 percent respectively. Thus, the participation of women in the land struggle through naxalite movement is also important.

The Dalit women’s participation in Bodhgaya land struggle in the late 1970s can be seen in this context. The study however accepts that this was waged through non-violent mode of actions though the retaliations by the landed gentry included violent means. The Bodhgaya (Gaya, Bihar) land struggle in 1978 against the Bodhgaya *Math* under as *Chhatra-Yuva Sangarsh Vahini* has been seen as site of multiple struggles. Apart from peasant movement aimed at redistribution of land rights it has been analysed as the struggle of women for equal land rights within the family and community.



During the struggle, women were in the forefront courting arrests and going to jails. The issues of Bodhgaya land struggle not only focused on land rights only rather they went beyond and discussed private affairs of patriarchy and violence. Most significantly, female agricultural labourers and peasants demanded independent ownership of landholdings. Such demands of land rights by women led to strong reactions among the male activists of the movement. It was however after a prolonged discussion and debates, lands in two villages were distributed in the names of the women only.

Another form of economic struggle is the wage struggle. In here also, women have participated along with their counterparts. In various places it was found that the wage rate varied from Rs. 2 to Rs. 20. However, the official rate was Rs. 39.30 as the minimum wage for agricultural labourer per day. Additively, female agricultural workers were paid less and were not given any kind of incentives. Such struggles have been retaliated by the landed gentry and many times women are the sufferers.

Thus, the strands of fragmentation in the women's movements in India are visible in gendering of naxalite movement in Bihar. The naxalite movement is perceived as an alternative mode of resistance of the sexploitation and gender discrimination. Additively, there is a process of 'othering' the Dalit women as such discriminations are not only centered on them but also are solidified by the women of landed gentry. In the process of gendering the naxalite movement, Dalit women not only resist the incidents of violence and violated dignity by the landed gentry but also liberate themselves from the patriarchy that operates also at the household and family level. Thus, the participation becomes a strategy for women's empowerment and liberation towards which the women's movement has been constantly marching.



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# **APPENDIX**

Appendix I: Frontal Organizations of three Naxalite Organizations in Central Bihar

CPI(ML) Liberation	CPI(ML) Party Unity/ People's War	Maoist Communist Centre
<b>Mass Organization</b>		
Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha Jamhuri Muslim Conference	Mazdur Kisan Sangram Samiti (MKSS) Mazdur Kisan Sangram Parishad (MKSP) Lok Sangram Morcha All India People Resistance Forum (AIPRF)	Krantikari Kisan Committee (KKC) Jan Suraksha Sangharsh Manch (JSSM) Jan Pratirodh Sangharsh Manch (JSPM) All India Struggling People's Forum (AISPF)
<b>Women's Front</b>		
All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA)	Nari Mukti Sangharsh Samiti (NMSS)	Nari Mukti Sangh (NMS)
<b>Political Front</b>		
Indian People's Front (IPF)		
<b>Student and Youth Front</b>		
All India Students' Association (AISA)	Democratic Students' Union (DSU) Bharat Navjawan Sabha (BNS)	Revolutionary Students' League (RSL) Communist Yuva League
<b>Cultural Front</b>		
Jan Sanskriti Manch Yuva Niti	Abhiviyakti	Krantikari Sanskriti Manch All India league of revolutionary Culture (AILRC)

Source: Louis, (2002: 238).

Appendix II: Major Private Caste Senas in Bihar

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

\* The organizer Rohtas was killed in 1985. Fight for supremacy led to disintegration.

\*\* Though claiming to represent Kurmis, the lower Kurmis did not support it.

@ The leaders were killed by ML squads and others were put in jail. It was responsible for massacres at Belchi, Patna (27<sup>th</sup> May 1977) killing 11 and Pipra, Patna (27<sup>th</sup> February 1980) killing 14 people.

@@ In 1986 one of the leaders, Ramanand Yadav, was killed; others were also eliminated. It was responsible for massacre at Nonhi Nagwa, Jahanabad (16<sup>th</sup> June 1998) killing 19 people.

# The main leaders were eliminated by ML squad. It was responsible for massacres at Parasbigha, Aurangabad (6<sup>th</sup> February 1980) killing 11 and Kaithibigha, Aurangabad (May 1985) killing 12 people.

## The main leaders were eliminated by ML squad.

\$ The main commander Yogeshwar Tyagi was killed.

\$\$ Many of its leaders were eliminated; still active in some areas.

% The leaders were eliminated by ML squads and others were arrested.

%% Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav had supported this sena.

^ Jwala Singh was the chief. Once he was killed, it disintegrated.

^^ Mainly operative in the *diara* belt of Ganges.

^^^ It has committed over two dozen massacres. The most dreaded *Sena* at present.

Source: Louis, (2002:228-229); Kumar, (2005:33-37)

Appendix III: Chronology of Massacres in Central Bihar (1977-2001)

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



	Arwal	Jehanabad	Police	MKSS cadres	24
	Kansara	Jehanabad	Upper caste/Brahmarshi Sena	Backward caste/agri. labourers	8
	Parasdih	Aurangabad	Upper caste/Satyanendra Sena	SC/agri. labourers	5
	Darmian	Aurangabad	Upper backward/middle peasants	Upper caste/landlord	11
1987	Chotki-Chhechani	Aurangabad	Upper caste/Satyanendra Sena	Upper backward/Middle peasants	7
	Dalelchak-Bhagaura	Aurangabad	Upper backward/middle peasants	Upper caste/landlord	52
1988	Narhan	Jehanabad	Upper backward/dacoits	Upper backward/poor peasants	4
1989	Nonhi-Nagwan	Jehanabad	Ramashish-Rajdev group/Nagwan	Upper backward SC/agri. Labourers	18
	Daumha	Jehanabad	Ramashish-Rajdev group/Nagwan	Upper backward SC/agri. Labourers	9
1990	Dariyapur	Patna	Upper backward/Kisan Sangh	SC/agri. Labourers	5
1991	Tiskhora	Patna	Upper backward/Kisan Sangh	SC/agri. Labourers	15
	Dev-Sahara	Bhojpur	Upper caste/Jwala Singh group	SC/agri. Labourers	15
	Savanbigaha	Jehanabad	Swarna Liberation Front/upper caste	SC/agri. Labourers	7
	Theendiha	Gaya	Sunlight Sena/upper caste	SC/agri. Labourers	7
	Mein-Barsima	Gaya	Swarna Liberation Front/upper caste	SC/agri. Labourers	10
1992	Bara	Gaya	Upper backward/middle peasants	Upper caste/landowners	34
	Chainpur	Rohtas	Police	PU cadres	4
	Ashabigha	Gaya	Police	MCC cadres	6
1993	Dadar	Rohtas	Police	Liberation cadres	3
	Ekwari	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	4
1994	Aghoura	Rohtas	Police	Party Unity	4

	Nadhi	Bhojpur	Police	Liberation cadres	9
	Matgharna	Gaya	Police	MCC	11
1995	Khopira	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Sarathua	Bhojpur	do	SC/agri. labourers	6
	Gulzarbigha	Aurangabad	Police	PU Cadres	4
1996	Chandi	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	4
	Pathalpura	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri- labourers	3
	Mathanbigha	Aurangabad	Police	MCC cadres	7
	Nanaur	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri- labourers	5
	Nadhi	Bhojpur	CPI-ML cadres	Upper caste/landlords	8
	Nadhi	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	9
	Morath	Bhojpur	Upper caste/ landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Bathanitola	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC and Muslims/agri. labourers	22
	Purhara	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	4
	Khanet	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	5
	Ekwari	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	6
1997	Khanet	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Machil	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Haibaspur	Patna	Upper caste/landlords	SC agri. labourers	10
	Akhopur	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC'agri. labourers	4
	Jalpura	Patna	PU cadres	Upper caste/landlords	11
	Indo	Patna	Police	PU cadres	6
	Ekwari	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC'agri- labourers	10
	K-hadasin	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC'agri. labourers	8
	K-odihara	Patna	Police	PU cadres	2
	Katesar Nala	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	6
	Lakshmanpur-Bathe	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	58
	Chauram	Jehanabad	CPI(ML) Liberation	Upper caste/landlords	9
1998	Nagri	Bhojpur	Upper caste landlords	SC/agri. labourers	10

	Aiyara	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Sigori	Gaya	Police	MCC	6
	Rampur-Aiyara	Jehanabad	PU cadres	Upper caste/landlords	7
	Mahadevbigha	Gaya	Police	MCC cadres	4
1999	Shankarbigha	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	23
	Narayanpur	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	11
	Usri Bazar	Jehanabad	Liberation cadres	Upper caste/landlords	7
	Bheempura	Jehanabad	PW cadres	Upper caste/landlords	4
	Senari	Jehanabad	MCC cadres	Upper caste/landlords	35
	Sujathpur	Buxar	Police	Liberation cadres	16
	Sendani	Gaya	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste & SC	12
2000	Lakhisarai <sup>a</sup>	Lakhisarai	Backward caste/Contractors	SC/Sand workers	11
	Rajebigha <sup>b</sup>	Nawada	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste/Middle farmers	5
	Afsar <sup>c</sup>	Nawada	Backward caste/Middle farmers	Upper caste landlords	12
	Mianpur <sup>d</sup>	Aurangabad	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste and SC	35
	Dumariyan <sup>e</sup>	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste and SC	6
2001	Chironichi bigha	Gaya	MCC cadres	Police	6
	Kariambura	Jehanabad	Police	PW cadres	5

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

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

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

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

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

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

Source: Louis, (2002:242-246).

Appendix IV: Ranveer Sena and its 'killing the demon in the womb' Campaign

AMITABH KUMAR DAS  
IPS  
COMMANDANT, BMP-11, JAMUI



अमिताभ कुमार दास  
भारतीय पुलिस सेवा  
कमंडेंट, बिहार सैन्य पुलिस-11, जमुई

Date .....

प्रेषित: श्रीमती मंजू प्रकाश  
अध्यक्षा  
राज्य महिला आयोग  
1, साउथ बेली रोड  
पटना ।

विषय: रणवीर सेना द्वारा दलित महिलाओं का बलात्कार एवं कत्लेआम ।

महोदय,

अरवल एस.पी. के रूप में वर्ष 2003 में ही मैंने राज्य महिला आयोग को सूचित किया था कि प्रतिबंधित रणवीर सेना द्वारा महिलाओं की सुनियोजित तरीके से कत्लेआम किया जात है। रणवीर सेना के आतंकवादी यह कहकर दलित महिलाओं को मौत के घाट उतार देते हैं कि अहो महिलाएँ उन्नतियों को पैदा करती हैं।

सिर्फ लक्ष्मणपुर बाथे नरसंहार में ही रणवीर सेना के आतंकवादियों ने दर्जनों महिलाओं की हत्या दी थी। इन महिलाओं की सूची इस प्रकार है। साथ में उनकी उम्र (वर्ष में) दी गई है।

- (1) छकिया देवी, उम्र-60 (2) समुद्री देवी, उम्र-35 (3) जमूरत देवी, उम्र-50
- (4) मानी देवी, उम्र-25 (5) प्रभा देवी, उम्र-20 (6) राजरानी देवी, उम्र-50 (7) रीता देवी, उम्र-15 (8) कबूतरी कुमारी उम्र-12 (9) धनरजिया देवी, उम्र-30 (10) शानिचरी देवी, उम्र-55 (11) सोना देवी, उम्र-30 (12) सविता कुमारी, उम्र-5 (13) अनिता कुमारी, उम्र-3 (14) रजमनिया देवी, उम्र-60 (15) राजकुमारी देवी, उम्र-40 (16) फूलकुमारी देवी, उम्र-35 (17) सरोज कुमारी, उम्र-11 (18) चांदी कुमारी, उम्र-10 (19) एतवरिया देवी, उम्र-60 (20) रूपकली देवी, उम्र-60 (21) डोमनी देवी, उम्र-28 (22) भूनि देवी, उम्र-70 (23) मोना देवी, उम्र-30 (24) सीता कुमारी, उम्र-15 (25) सुमिता कुमारी, उम्र-1½ (26) मानमती देवी, उम्र-18 ।

ऊपर की सूची एक उदाहरण मात्र है। ऐसी सैकड़ों असहाय महिलाएँ रणवीर सेना

कृपु-उ ....

AMITABH KUMAR DAS  
IPS  
COMMANDANT, BMP-11, JAMUI



अगिताभ कुमार दास  
भारतीय पुलिस सेवा  
कमांडेंट, बिहार सी-व पुलिस-11, जमुई

: 2 :

के कारण मौत की नौद सुलाई जा चुकी है। ऊपर की सूची में 70 वर्ष की बूढ़ी अंगन में लेकर  
उस वृद्ध की मासूम बच्ची शामिल है।

इतना ही नहीं, रणवीर सेना के सामंती गुंडों द्वारा बिहार में संकटों दलित  
महिलाओं के साथ बलात्कार किया गया है। रणवीर सेना के दहशत में इनमें से ज्यादातर  
सामंती दर्ज भी नहीं होते।

मेरा राज्य महिला आयोग से विनम्र निवेदन है कि वह एक जांच समिति का गठन  
कर रणवीर सेना द्वारा दलित महिलाओं के कालेआम एवं बलात्कार की गहराई से जांच कराए।  
आयोग कृपया इस बात की भी जांच करें कि कौन से सफेदपंश लोग इस अतिक्रमों संगठन  
को संरक्षण देते हैं। मैं ऐसे किसी भी जांच कार्य में हर संभव सहयोग देने का तयार हूँ।

आपका

प्रतिलिपि:- डॉ० गिरिजा व्यास, अध्यक्ष, राष्ट्रीय महिला आयोग, 4 दीनदयाल उपाध्याय  
मार्ग, नई दिल्ली को सूचनाय एवं आवश्यक क्रियार्थक।

Appendix V: Songs of Resistance

1) ना बाटे देर साथी ना बाटे देर  
ना बाटे देर भईया ना बाटे देर  
हमनी के चमके अंगनवा न हो  
भईया ना बाटे देर  
खूनवा से जेतना धोवाइल जमीनिया  
अंसुबा से जेतना लिखाइल कहिनयां  
पनपे में साथी के सपनवा न हो  
साथी ना बाटे देर । ना बाटे देर

Fear not, my friend  
Fear not, brother  
A bright future will be ours, too.  
Our blood has smeared this land  
Our tears have woven many a tale  
Our dream too will come true one day  
Friend, do not lose heart.<sup>1</sup>

Kanthi, Nari Mukti Sangharsh Samiti, Masaurhi, Patna District

2) सहब अब ना तोहार जुल्मी शोषनवा  
भूमिहीन गरीब मध्यम जगले किसनवा  
होल अधिकार हक सबके समानवा  
खान पेनन एक होला हरेक के मकानवा  
पढ़ी लिखी देश में ना रहबो बेकामवा

Enough of this oppression  
The landless and the peasant have risen  
Now all have equal rights  
Enough to eat  
And a roof overhead  
In a literate land no one will be worthless.

Akhari CPI(ML) Liberation, Bhojpur

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<sup>1</sup> For the poems 1 to 5, Source: Louis (2002).

3) अब हथियार उठावा लेवे के अधिकार बा  
ई जानत सरकार बा ना  
रणवीर सेना या गंगा, गुण्डा चोर लंपट लंगा  
ई हत्यारा जद भाजपा के यार बा  
सामान्त गुण्डा पुलिस गठ जोड़, भईया लड़के दे द तोड़  
वीर एह लोग पर करे के विचार बा

Take to arms  
The rulers are slumbering.  
Ranvir Sena, Ganga Sena, thugs and felons  
Are all cronies of the rulers.  
Smash the coterie of  
Overlord, crook and the police  
Declare a war on them.

Simran, CPI(ML) Liberation, Patna

4) भईया हो भईया मजदूर भईया  
भईया हो भईया किसान भईया  
हथवा में लेले तीर कमान  
कि चल आपन राज बनावे हो  
जाग हे मजदूर बहिना जाग ए किसनवा  
ए सुन सुन छात्र साथी सुन नौजवानवा  
हथवा में लेले हथियार कि चल आपन  
राज बनावे हो

Arise, labourer  
Arise, peasant  
Arm yourself  
To wield power.  
Arise mazdur sister  
Arise, peasant  
Listen student  
Listen, youth  
Take arms  
To wield power.

Umesh Prasad, Cultural Activist, MKSP, Jehanabad



5) दुनियां के नक्शे पर चमका है नया सितारा  
आधी जमीन हमारी आधा आसमां हमारा  
सदियों से सबने सजाया है  
अपना हो या पराया  
देवी या दासी कह के भोग की  
वस्तु ही बनायें  
एक नयीं परिवर्तन की चल पड़ी है धारा  
आधी जमीन हमारी आधा आसमां हमारा

A new star has risen on the horizon  
Ours is half the land  
Ours half the sky  
For aeons we have been ornaments  
Traded for pleasure  
As goddesses or as slaves  
A change is now about  
Ours is half the land  
Ours half the sky

Nari Mukti Sangh, Gaya

### कैथर कला की औरतें<sup>2</sup>

तीज-व्रत रखती धान-पिसान करती थीं  
गरीब की बीवी  
गाँव भर कर भाभी होती थीं  
कैथर कला की औरतें

गाली-मार खून पी कर सहती थी  
काला अच्छर भैंस बराबर समझती थीं  
लाल पगड़ी देख कर घर में छिप जाती थीं  
चूरियाँ पहनती थीं  
ओठ सी कर रहती थीं  
कैथर कला की औरतें

जुल्म बढ़ रहा था  
गरीब-गुरबा एकजुट हो रहे थे  
बगावत की लहर आ गयी थी

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<sup>2</sup> Pandey, (1990:92-93).

इसी बीच एक दिन  
नक्सलियों की घर-पकड़ करने आयी  
पुलिस से भिड़ गयीं  
कैथर कला की औरतें

अरें, क्या हुआ? क्या हुआ?  
इतनी सीधी थीं गऊ जैसी  
इस कदर अबला थीं  
कैसे बन्दुकेँ छीन लीं  
पुलिस को भगा दिया कैसे?  
क्या से क्या हो गयीं  
कैथर कला की औरतें?

यह तो बगावत है  
राम-राम, घोर कलियुग आ गया  
औरतें और लड़ाई?  
उसी देश में जहाँ भरी सभा में  
द्रोपदी का चीर खीच लिया गया  
सारे महारथी चुप रहे  
उसी देश में  
मर्द की शान के खिलाफ यह जुर्रत?

खैर, यह जो अभी-अभी  
कैथर कला में छोटा- सा महाभारत  
लड़ा गया और जिसमें  
गरीब मर्दों के साथ कन्धे से कन्धा  
मिला कर  
लड़ी थी कैथर कला की औरतें  
इसे याद रखे वे जो इतिहास को बदलना चाहते हैं  
और वे भी जो इसे पीछे मोड़ना चाहते हैं

इसे याद रखें  
क्योंकि आने वाले समय में  
जब किसी पर जोर-जबरदस्ती नहीं की जा सकेगी  
और जब सब लोग आजाद होंगे और खुशहाल  
तब सम्मानित किया जायेगा जिन्हें  
स्वतन्त्रता की ओर से  
उनकी पहली कतार में होगी  
कैथर कला कर औरतें।

“The Blood-Coloured Red Flag” by Amar Sheikh<sup>3</sup>

There is no grain in the sifter,  
My child is starving in the house,  
My husband is toiling in the woods,  
My memories are of starvation ---  
The red flag, the blood-coloured red flag.

My Raghu goes to school,  
He has no shirt for his body,  
His body gets baked like a popcorn in the sun,  
Giving the call comes the flag, the blood-coloured red flag.

The rich have all the power,  
Their ways are alien to the rest of the world,  
They grind up the common man to death,  
The red flag will overthrow such power, the blood-coloured red flag.

Rise, woman, the dawn has come,  
The cock has just crowed,  
The sun with its pink rose also says  
Take in your hand the red flag, the blood-coloured red flag.

The daughters of peasants have risen,  
They have gone to Bombay  
And died toiling in the mills  
Untill to survive they take in their hands  
The red flag, the blood-coloured red flag.

The rich and the government  
Together have decided to beat up the poor,  
So peasant woman, take in your hand the red flag, the blood-coloured red flag.

Now we will no longer tolerate injustice,  
Why should we be starving?  
Why should we listen to abuse?  
The red flag teaches us to be like the tigress, the blood-coloured red flag.

Whatever remains will also go,  
So why do you worry now?  
If you join hands in unity  
The red flag will accompany you to battle,  
the blood-coloured red flag.

Throw away the false hopes in your mind,  
Take the gun of unity in your hand,  
Bear up the tyrannical rich,  
Take in procession the red flag, the blood-coloured red flag.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Omvedt, (1977:248-249).

“Questions of a Woman Agricultural Labourer” by Bhaskar Jadhav<sup>4</sup>

*Chorus:* All our life is on fire, all the prices rising,  
Give us an answer, O rulers of the country!

A handful of American wheat, a kilo of milo mixed with chaff,  
Doesn't our country grow crops  
Or do we have only mud-mixed grain?  
Give us an answer...

We have forgotten the colour of milk,  
Coconuts and dried fruits have gone underground,  
Our children have only jaggery tea for nourishment.  
Give us an answer...

Sweet oil for cooking is the price of gold,  
Coconut oil for our hair is not to be found,  
Without rock oil for lamps we have grown familiar with darkness.

We burn in the summer, we are drenched in the rains,  
We bear the rigour of winter without any clothes,  
Why don't we yet have any shelter?  
Give us an answer...

We toil day and night and sleep half-starved  
While the parasites fill their bellies with butter,  
Why does the thief gets nourishment while the owner is cheated?

There are pastures for the cattle of the rich,  
For forest development land is preserved,  
Why is there no land to support living men?  
Give us an answer...

Tall buildings rise before our eyes,  
The roads cannot contain these motorcycles and cars,  
On whose labour has such development been built?  
Give us an answer...

We filled the jails for independence,  
We hurled bombs into the cars of the white men,  
Did we do it to fatten the sacred cow?  
Give us an answer...

When we ask for a rise in wages, for work for the unemployed,  
When we demand land for cultivation,

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Omvedt, (1977:254-255).

Why are we met with jail, beatings and bullets?  
Give us an answer...

Now you have taken a new disguise  
And appear in the colours of socialism,  
But we no longer want for today the promises of tomorrow!  
Give us an answer...

Now we will stand on our own feet  
We will throw caste and religious differences to the winds,  
We call for the brotherhood and sisterhood of all toilers!

We vow today to fight with our lives,  
We will bury capitalism in the grave  
And sound the drums of our state!