

**Modernization, Structural Contradiction and Conflict :  
Sociological Study of the Rural Areas of Central Bihar**

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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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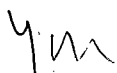


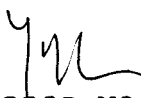
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A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE RURAL AREAS OF CENTRAL  
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For the contents of this dissertation, I am alone responsible but it would be unwise on my part if I do not acknowledge the help and support extended to me by certain people.

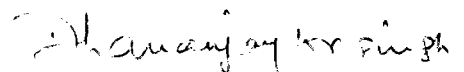
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(DHANANJAY KUMAR SINGH)

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## CHAPTER : I INTRODUCTION

Modernization is generally equated with various types of social and cultural changes such as : in social structure - differentiation of structure, specialisation of role, and higher order integration of both, institutions and roles (Parsons, 1960, 1964), in value pattern - universalism, specificism and achievement orientation (Parsons, 1951); secularity, rationality and social mobility (Lerner, 1958); rationality, social justice, individual freedom, economic prosperity etc. (Gunnar Myrdal as quoted in Sharma 1978:46) or nature and degree of adoption of modern technology (Levy, 1966).

Eisenstadt (1966) has made an attempt to summarize the basic characteristics of modernization. These are social mobilization and social differentiation, in the economic field development of a high level of technology and growing specialization of economic roles. In the political field growing extension of territorial scope, intensification of power, continual spread of potential power to wider groups, and democratization. In the cultural field growing differentiation of the major elements of the major cultural and value systems, expansion of the media of communication; as regards the organizational systems, three characteristics are noted: (I) larger number of functionally specific organization, (II) division of labour between functionally

specific and more culturally oriented association and (III) weakening of kingship and narrow territorial bases on the one hand and of the ascriptive solidary groups, like caste, on the other. In the status systems, with the emphasis of universalism and achievement the rigid hierarchical order of the status system seem to break down.

Yogendra Singh (1978) explained that growth in the process of modernization could be evaluated at two levels: (1) as a system of values or world view; and (2) in terms of the role-structures. In this view, modernization constitutes a process of role and status differentiation which, in course of time, lead to a basic re-structuration of society.

After reviewing these definitions of modernization we may say that modernization denotes the process of development in culture, personality and social structure in such a way that advancement in the realm of thought, that is, the development of scientific knowledge, brings about changes leading to universal, rational, humanistic, pragmatic and positivistic values, structure and role differentiation and creation of secular institutions, and development of scientific, secular attitude and modern personality.

### Contradictions

The word contradiction is often used but rarely defined. It is, in fact, a highly abstract concept and hence difficult

to comprehend and explain. Broadly speaking, by contradiction we mean discrepancy or inconsistency between two or more structures or substructures. But the term conveys a broader meaning than the discrepancy between structures. In addition to the absence of agreement between two or more structures or substructures, the term refers to the denial or negation of one by the other.

In Marxist terminology contradiction is basic to nature and human society. According to Mao-Tse-Tung (1967:315-46) each difference contains contradiction and that difference in itself is a contradiction. It is universal and absolute in the sense that "contradiction exists in the process of development of all things, and that in the process of development of each thing a movement of opposite exists from beginning to end." He further says that "the law of contradiction in things is the law of unity of opposites - a fundamental law of nature, society and hence also of thought".

Thus contradiction denotes the presence<sup>sence</sup> of negative or contradicting elements in a structure. Presence of contradiction in itself is not sufficient to generate conflict in the structure. But when the contradictions deepen, they may generate conflicts.

Notion of Conflict :

Notion of conflict assumes different conceptual orientations in the hands of different theorists. Marx considers conflict as a generic category ranging from subtle contradiction to open struggle (Turner, 1982). Since Marx's conflict theory is also praxis, the direct and manifest aspects are emphasized. Dahrendorf uses the concept of conflict for "contests, competitions, disputes, and tensions as well as for manifest clashes between social forces" (Ralf Dahrendorf, 1957:135). Lewis A. Coser argues that conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure or eliminate their rivals (L.A.Coser, 1956 : 8).

Modern sociologists use diverse array of terms to denote different aspects of conflict. These are hostilities, war, competition, antagonism, tension, quarrels, disagreements, violence, opposition and many other terms. Clinton Fink, after reviewing a large number of definitions, argues that conflict is "any social situation or process in which two or more entities are linked by at least one form of antagonistic psychological relation or at least one form of antagonistic interaction" (Clinton Fink, 1968: 456 cited in Turner, 1982: 177). The concept of antagonism, according to Fink, embraces such states as "incompatible goals", "mutually exclusive



interests", "emotional hostility", "dissent", "violent struggle", "regulated mutual interference", and the like (Turner, 1982). Thus, for Fink, conflict may be as peaceful as "competitive market" and as violent as a revolution.

Modern sociologists like Percy's Cohen (1968) and Robin Williams, Jr. (1970) highlight the 'direct' and pure nature of conflict which is struggle. Robin Williams Jr. (1970) defines, "conflict is that direct interactions in which one party intends to deprive, control, injure, or eliminate another, against the will of that other" (cited in Turner, 1982 : 178).

Thus we find that different sociologists have conceptualized conflict differently. In this study we take conflict as a broader process comprising various manifestations at various levels of social reality. All antagonistic behaviours and opposition of entities are conflict.

#### Modernization, Contradiction and Conflict : An Interrelationship

Generally, "the process of modernization is accretive, assimilative and adaptive... which selectively promotes structural replacements and differentiation in society" (Yogendra Singh, 1986: 77-8). However, it also sometimes causes 'breakdown' or conflict in the social system. This happens when there is grossly uneven nature of growth in the social structure, causing inequality among different social strata or when there is lack of equilibrium among the contradictory social forces released in society during the

process of modernization and their mis-management (Eisenstadt, 1964, 1966). According to Smelser (1963), the social disturbances (e.g. outbursts of violence, or the emergence of religious and political movements) results from discontinuities between differentiation and integration. Smelser analyses three main reasons for such disruptions: (A) creation of new activities; norms, rewards and sanction often come into conflict with old modes of social action; (B) structural change is above all uneven in periods of modernization. Differentiation always proceeds in a seesaw relationship with integration. The two forces continuously breed lags and bottlenecks. This unevenness creates anomie; (C) Dissatisfaction arising from conflict with traditional ways and those arising from anomie sometimes aggravate one another when they come into contact.

Hence there is a tug of war among the forces of tradition, the forces of differentiation and the new forces of integration.

In short, we may say that during the course of modernization changes within or between structures or substructures are not always compatible or consistent with each other. Contradictions and conflicts are as real parts of a system as consistency and consensus are. Modernization tends to resolve contradictions which a traditional structure inheres, and thereby alleviates tensions. But in the process of resolving contradictions it creates other types of contradictions, and thus promotes

new and/or reinforces old tensions in the system.

The contradictions in the modernization process of societies have got preeminent place in the Marxist theory. This theory explains serial change in terms of contradiction. "Contradictions in social and cultural life" says Y.Singh (1989:40-1) "emerge when human labour tends to get encapsulated at a certain moment of evolution of man-kind through the operation of narrow interests of groups and classes..... The encapsulation of human labour leads to its alienation and the alienation of man. Contradictions accumulate under these circumstances and, at a certain historical movement, they become unbearable for the system which collapses under its self-created weight of contradictions. This culminates in the process of revolutionary transformation of a society". Thus, in the Marxist framework, it is from within the old societal system and its cultural pattern that a new society and culture is born. However, "The same process repeats itself if the process of encapsulation of labour through interests narrower than that of mankind again intervenes. Contradictions only cease when society has reached a true stage of freedom, ... when human labour can not be encapsulated by narrower and selfish (exploitative) interests, when class cleavages cease to operate and exploit human beings, when all forms of encapsulation of free and spontaneous labour .... cease to exist" (Y. Singh, 1989 : 41). From a Marxist frame of reference when contradictions cease to exist, the society

the society becomes truly modern and "the process which contribute to the achievement of such a societal goal would be called the process of modernization" (Y. Singh, 1989 : 41).

Though the Marxist model helps social scientists explore the processes of structural changes and consequent contradictions resulting from modernization, it harbours some serious limitations. "Marxism's conception of modernity", says Yogendra Singh (1989: 41-2) "is truly ethical .... it does not accept the independences of categorical values. On the contrary, it refutes logical or substantive autonomy of values over social structure as such. It tries to resolve the contradictions of culture, ethical values and meanings through categories of structure. Herein lies its teleological paradox".

Indian example :

In India, the process of modernization has generated myriad contradictions in society which often take violent forms. This is because of increase in social differentiation without integration. The contradiction of modernization in India at the level of both of social structure and culture have been recognized in the numerous studies and planning documents. Cultural contradiction can be seen at the level of thinking and behaviour of the people. There is a wide gap between what is in mind and what is in existence. And it is not uncommon in a modernizing society. A modernizing

society incorporates elements of both modernism and traditionalism and it, therefore, inheres more contradiction. According to Srinivas (1970:14) "... it is likely that there is more contradiction in behaviour in developing countries because of the pace of social change and extent of the break with traditional culture. It is perhaps only a transient phenomenon, and the compulsion to be consistent might increase as the modernization process gathers momentum".

Structural contradictions can be seen of the level of social structure. The traditional Indian society was based on a relative evenness in the dimensions of social, economic and political status of people at an integrated, though lower level of social order. The process of modernization has upset this balance in society and has helped to "reinforce a structure of power that is more alienative and increasingly invisible as it consolidates a specific class character in society" (Yogendra Singh, 1986:79). Indeed, the impact of social, economic, political and educational measures, taken by the Government since Independence to modernize the traditional social structure, has been uneven creating contradictions in the process of modernization. Gunnar Myradal notes, "There is a paradox in the south Asian situation : although greater equality has been proclaimed as an immediate practical goal for planning and policy, marked inequality exists everywhere. The disparity is the more striking because, despite more or less successful

attempts at planning, economic inequalities have generally not decreased since independence; if anything, they have increased.... Many supposedly egalitarian measures actually favour middle and upper class groups and discriminate against the masses.... political participation in any meaningful sense is confined to small upper class groups" (Gunnar Myrdal, 1968 : 757). In other words, the modernizing forces have not reduced inequalities rather these modernizing forces have exacerbated relative deprivation and social and economic inequalities between rich and poor and generated myriad social contradictions. At the same time, political participation, mass media, education social mobility and increasing incidence of migration have sharpened the awareness of the unevenness of social and economic inequalities in society. Violence or conflict that has erupted in recent times symbolises the awareness of contradictions resulting from modernization or unevenness of opportunities available to various castes, communities and groups to benefit from the modernization process of India. Yogendra Singh (1989 : 42-3) observes, "structurally, the attempt to modernize society through organized sector of administration, justice, education, defence, industry and agriculture and numerous other institutions, has only enhanced the contradictions. The population below the poverty line and of the illiterates has been increasing; the level of inequality... has only increased; the poor have become poorer and a few rich richer still .....over the years, progressively, the verbalizations on socialism, equality and

social justice have become stronger but the structure of deprivations have only magnified; a dominant middle class... has emerged as a strong conservative force. It also exploits the poor more ruthlessly now than ever. Occasionally, the poor organize protests, but they seldom succeed. All legislation(s) leaves enough loopholes for the rich to evade their consequences .... It thus generates a systematic structure of violence in society."

### Conflict in India : A Review of Literature

The growing agrarian tension and violence in different parts of the country has received the attention of many social scientists. Andre Beteille (1972, 1974) argues that conflicts between classes or castes or strata follow, to a large extent, from the contradiction between the normative and the existential orders. In a 'Harmonic' society, these conflicts are likely to be limited and subdued as there is consistency between the existential order and normative order. In a 'disharmonic' society, however, conflicts are likely to be open and endemic as there is inconsistency between the normative order and the existential order. It has been suggested by Beteille that conflicts take their most acute form in course of the transition from a harmonic to a disharmonic one.

T.K. Oommen (1971a) has held the following factors responsible for agrarian conflict: (1) perception of prevalent disparities in income by the rural poor,

(2) a viable numerical strength of the agricultural labour force and their consciousness of their political bargaining power, (3) the existence of an adequate support structure provided by political parties, (4) the rising aspirations of the rural masses, and (5) the increasing lack of fit between the socio-political framework and the economic order. Developing his ideas further in another study, Oommen (1971b) has suggested that disparity is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for tension to erupt.

Rajendra Singh (1974), while studying the landgrab movement in Basti district of Uttar Pradesh launched in 1970, has come to the conclusion that even when necessary objective conditions to produce and sustain peasant revolts may not be present, a change in the subjective perception of injustice, exploitation and poverty may provide the basis of peasant mobilization for a partial revolt.

Nandu Ram (1977) has looked at social conflict in relation to social mobility. He has highlighted the relationship between social mobility of the scheduled castes and intercaste conflicts in some villages of western, central and Eastern Uttar Pradesh. He has examined the extent to which changes in the status of scheduled castes have led to hostile attitudes among caste Hindus and the cases of



atrocities on the Harijans. Such a situation is created mainly due to the scheduled castes refusal to follow the age-old customs such as doing traditional filthy jobs, paying respect to high caste people and non-utilization of public places. However, the economic issues like refusal of bonded labour on nominal wage, dispossession of land and houses of scheduled castes too led to atrocities and conflict between the scheduled and non-scheduled castes.

Sushila Mehta (1971) has shown that conflict has escalated with the operation of new economic forces and introduction of political democracy. In her opinion, the traditional mechanism for resolving group conflicts in the village has failed and the traditional social institutions like joint family, village panchayat and caste system have become dysfunctional. However, instead of withering away, these institutions have assumed new and distorted forms with the introduction of modern form of political democracy at the village level. All this results into development of "widespread stresses and leading to eruption of group conflicts" (Ibid; ix)

P.C. Joshi (1974) has attempted to show that the changes brought about by land reforms have been responsible for social tension and conflict. Summarizing the overall impact of these measures in India and Pakistan he notes : "..... agrarian policy has been one of the factors accelerating the disintegration of the traditional agrarian system in

these countries but without yet substituting anything stable and viable in its place. Agrarian reform itself has contributed both as ideology and as programme towards accentuating social tensions and disturbances in old security arrangements" (P.C. Joshi, 1974: 164-85).

Tomasson F. Jannuzi (1974) examines the growth of agrarian tension in Bihar in the context of land reforms. He examines the context of rural 'apathy' in the 1950s and gradual awakening of the Bihar peasants during the subsequent years. The study concentrates on the analysis of factors like government's failure to implement agrarian reforms and the changing social scene in rural areas on the one hand and agricultural production maximization and rapid population growth on the other.

Several other studies like that of Baljit Singh (1961), Doreen Warriner (1969), T.K. Oommen (1979a) etc. have also suggested that land reform measures have failed to remove the basic inequalities of our age-old agrarian structure. They further highlight the inherent character of our governmental measures which outwardly profess help to the rural poor but essentially go against them. So long as such a situation continues our rural areas will not be free from mounting tension.

Pradhan M. Prasad (1979) writing of Bihar argues that caste based conflicts have intensified because the rich peasantry has used casteism to foment violence in many villages. Those who are in conflict belong to opposing caste groups and each group has in common not only caste affinities but also economic interests. For him, it is this intermeshing of class and caste that has fostered antagonistic relationship in the rural areas. In another study Prasad (1987) argues that the struggle has intensified in recent years because the economic crisis had deepened. According to him, if the economic roots of the peasant movement are not tackled by massive investment in water management and land reform measures providing land to the tillers, the movement is bound to continue.

Several studies like that of Francine R. Frankel (1971), G. Parthsarathy (1971) etc. have highlighted the "destabilizing" impact of the Green Revolution. The green revolution in India not only disturbed the traditional agrarian relations but it accentuated economic disparities and accelerated the social aspirations of the rural people. Poor peasants, sharecroppers, and landless labourers have not been able to share profitably in the general prosperity which came in the wake of green revolution. T.K. Oommen (1975b:166) has come to the conclusion that "the Green revolution as such does not

lead to the welfare of the agrarian poor unless substantial alterations in the prevalent socio-economic and political structure are effected at the grass-roots."

In 1969 a report of home ministry, government of India, realized the socio-political implications of the new agricultural strategy (India, 1969 : Home Ministry, Research and Policy Division). The report proceeds with two major hypothesis - "these programmes, firstly, have rested by and large on an out-moded agrarian social structure", and secondly, "the new technology and strategy having been geared to goals of production, with secondary regard to social imperative, have brought about a situation in which elements of disparity, instability and unrest are becoming conspicuous with the possibility of increase in tensions" (P.36). With the help of enormous data on the nature of agrarian tension collected during 1966-69, the Report concluded, "as a result of the destabilizing impact of new programmes landless workers, poor peasants and others with insecure tenancies have effectively been organized by certain political parties" (P.38). It has thus officially been recognized that the new agriculture strategy has created "widening gap between the relatively affluent farmers and the large body of smallholders and agricultural workers" (P.38). Consequently, tension in the rural areas may increase in future and a bad agricultural season could even lead to an "explosive situation".

The above review of studies pertaining to conflicts gives us a general picture of the causes and nature of social conflicts and violence in some parts of India.

The Present Study: Objective

Today Bihar is characterized by widespread violence in rural areas. Newspapers have reported village caste wars in which women and children have been burnt in their huts and inhabited areas of specific castes or communities have been razed. It is argued that Naxalism has encouraged violent attacks on groups and members of communities leading to killings and Murders. Poor peasants and landless labourers, in the name of naxalites, have become special targets for counter-violence both by the state and the rich peasants and landlords (Sinha, 1977a, 1977c, Dhar & Mukherjee, 1978).

Even before violence became a focus of attention in Bihar, scholarly interest in peasant movements and rural unrest had led to analyses and descriptions of particular uprisings. Many of the studies have been "case histories", some are autobiographical accounts of participants in the movements; and a few are omnibus accounts of the major peasant movements (A.N. Das, 1982:5). The roles of individuals and organizations in spearheading peasant struggles have also been studied (A.N. Das 1983a; R. Gupta, 1982).

Thus, while numerous writings are available on the emergence of rural unrest, little systematic work has been done in analysing the context in which conflict is taking place. The purpose of this study is to fill this gap and to present an account of structural contradictions and conflicts resulting from modernization with reference to the rural areas of central Bihar comprising districts of Patna, Nalanda, Gaya, Aurangabad, Bhejpur, Jehanabad and Rohtas. The questions are:

- (I) What was the nature of social, economic and political relations in pre-independence era ?
- (II) What was the nature of modernization and conflict in pre-independence era?
- (III) Is modernization facilitating structural contradictions and conflicts in the rural areas after independence?
- (IV) What is the nature and bases of contradictions and conflicts across districts in the rural areas of central Bihar.

Method of study :

This dissertation is largely based on secondary sources and no field work has been undertaken. Hence, the present study is based mainly on the books, articles published in academic and general periodicals, the newspaper reports etc. Therefore, it has its limitations. Apart from the secondary materials, the census report the planning documents and the reports of the various committee and commissions

concerning the Backward classes and the scheduled castes are to be adequately utilized. Finally, we will try to remain objective throughout our study.

Plan of study :

This study is divided into five chapters. In the introductory chapter the problem to be studied has been formulated. In the second chapter, the nature of social, economic and political relations that prevailed in traditional rural Bihar has been studied. It is observed that in traditional Bihar the stratification system was, to a large extent, closed. The upper castes had complete dominance over the society as a whole. Inequality between different castes was institutionalised and was considered legitimate. The colonial modernization, through its various policies, reinforced the dominance of upper castes.

The third chapter deals with the process of modernization and the resulting contradictions in post-independent rural central Bihar. It is observed that the consequence of modernization and development is not even. Modernization is affecting different social groups in society differently. Be it economic development, political participation, educational and mass media expansion, there is marked unevenness in the distribution of the cumulative gains among the different social segments of the population. The gains

from some of the rural development schemes, e.g., land reform measures, irrigation and input facilities, in short the green-revolution, have gone to the upper and the middle caste peasantry. As a result, a very large number of the rural population has relatively remained deprived of the benefits of rural development schemes. However, the end result of the penetration of modernization into the rural areas has produced its own consequences. The rural hierarchical social structure in which different castes were ordained with well-defined values norms and roles has begun to be questioned. Thus, the rural scene in Bihar is basically a scene of conflict and violence. The nature of conflict has been discussed in the fourth chapter. In the final chapter concluding remarks have been given.



- 21 -

CHAPTER II : SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL  
RELATIONS IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE  
ERA : A SOCIO-HISTORICAL PROFILE.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to analyse the nature of social, economic and political relationship that existed in the rural areas of Bihar during pre-independence phase with reference to the complex relationship between caste, class and power. The analysis based exclusively on the existing literature also seek to analyse the structural configuration and historical circumstances in which the upper castes established an enduring dominance.

Traditional Bihar had been structured as other parts of India, in a large number of castes, and sub-castes hierarchically arranged one after another, on the basis of what Dumont calls the pollution/purity criteria (Dumont, 1970). The upper caste included the Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumiars and Kayasthas while the Kurmis, Yadavas, Koeris and numerous other castes had the status of middle caste. The lowest rank of the caste hierarchy was occupied by the untouchable castes such as 'Dom' and 'Dusadh'. Though the upper castes were numerically weak, they held sway over society due to their higher ritual status and their possession of economic and political power. Their dominance and higher ritual status in society was justified and legitimized by the Brahmanical ideology backed by the theory of 'Karma' and 'Dharma'. Besides, existing inequalities in terms of caste, class and power were consistent with the values of society. Thus, the



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traditional Bihar society like other parts of India provided a classic example of what Beteille says the 'Harmonic' social order where social inequality was considered as proper, right and legitimate (Andre Beteille, 1974 : 194-200). Moreover, conflicts over unequal distributions of material resources were limited and subdued. In brief, inequality was institutionalized, cumulative and structural compulsion due to the congenial value-system and low level of consciousness among the masses.

The colonial policies rigidified, to some extent, the socio-economic and political inequality. The Britishers introduced permanent settlement in 1793 which was very much exploitative and inequalitarian in its design as well as in its spirit. The permanent settlement created various kinds of landholdings. The whole system was hierarchically arranged. At the apex of the hierarchy there was the state. In the middle of the hierarchy there were zamindars, tenure-holders, and under-tenure holders. At the bottom of the hierarchy, there were the peasants who had got very limited rights on land. There were also landless labourers without any ownership of land (Tamasen Jannuzi : 1977 :212). The categories of middle hierarchy were the foundation stone of the whole system. Their main function was to extract shares of the produce from the land. This was done in order to meet the obligation of fixed revenue to the state and also to save a good deal of share for own consumption.

Even before the introduction of the permanent settlement there were Zamindars in Bihar. But they were, in no sense, owners of the land. Instead, they used to receive a share of the produce from a defined land-area on collection of revenue due to the Mughal authorities in the pre-British period (B. Chandhari : 1982 : 93 - 105). Moreover, Zamindars of pre-British days had close social ties with peasants. The religious and socio-economic practices prevailing in those days regarding the relationship between these two groups had a firm bond of their integration (Hetukar Jha : 1980 : 53-57 , Thomas R. Metcalf : 1979 : 126). But after introduction of the permanent settlement the old system of socio-economic relations undergone metamorphosis change. The Zamindars, by the permanent settlement, were given the right to collect rent from lands considered to be under their control and were expected to pay in fixed amount in cash to the company and later to the British Government in India. It is another thing that the Zamindars were given absolute authority to make their own terms with their tenants, the actual cultivators, the rights of land of such cultivators being entirely ignored by the settlement. Since the Britishers recognized the Zamindars "as both the political and social leaders of the people in their respected estates" (Tylor, 1856 : quoted in J.S. Jha, 1977 : 30), they were also entrusted with legal powers. The Zamindars could prosecute

a tenant in court to collect arrears of rent and/or seize his personal property. The Zamindars could also impose new payments or abwabs on the peasantry. In this fashion, the British perpetuated and further institutionalised a system of land tenure which was highly exploitative and inegalitarian. In Bihar, the actual cultivators were compelled to share their produce with an essentially parasitic class of non-cultivating intermediaries drawn from the upper castes.

The new unequal agrarian structure which came into being as a result of permanent settlement was well fitted into the old caste structure and "... the caste system contributed to the persistence of these inequalities by providing the values and norms which were appropriate to the agrarian hierarchy..." (Andre Beteille, 1972 : 25). A close examination of the caste hierarchy and agrarian hierarchy suggests a correspondence between them. The big Zamindars belonged to the upper castes. The tenants came from the Yadavas and the traditional cultivating castes of Kurmis and Koeris. Some Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris whose holdings were too small to provide subsistence also worked as agricultural labourers. Untouchable castes such as Chamars, mushars and dusadhs performed field labour for which they were paid in kind (Pradhan H. Prasad : 1979 : 481, Francive R. Frankel : 1989 : 55). The three class of Zamindars,

tenants and agricultural labourers as differentiated in terms of the ownership, control and use of land, broadly fit into Thorner's categorisation of 'Malik', 'Kisan' and 'Mazdoor' (Daniel Thorner : 1956).

The relationship between the class of Zamindars and the class of tenants and agricultural labourers was basically of exploitation, oppression and repression. Since the permanent settlement did not give fixity of rents to the tenants, they came under the Yoke of exploitation. The parasitic class of non-cultivating intermediaries, mostly composed of the upper castes, employed several mechanism to oppress and exploit the tenants and agricultural labourers, drawn generally from the middle and lower castes respectively. For instance, the tenants were bound to pay the fixed rent on the land to the landlords and in case of their failure they were forcibly deprived of the land through the Bakasht mechanism<sup>1</sup>. Added to this, the increase in land values and the increasing population pressure on land also motivated the Zamindars to evict tenants from their occupancy holdings on some pretext or other and settle these with other tenants at higher rents and Salamis (Nirmal Sengupta : 1982 : 19, Arbind N. Das : 1963a). Apart from this they had to pay Salam (consideration money to be paid to the landlord in the case of transfer of holding), Bhusavan (supplying husk

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1. This was one of the most oppressive mechanisms in the hands of landlords. Through this mechanism land was resumed by landlords from tenants for the latter's failure to pay rent.

Zamindar's cattle), Motoravan (for purchasing the Zamindar's car), Hathiavan (for purchasing the Zamindar's elephant), Bagavan (for planting the Zamindar's orchard), petpiravan (when the Zamindar's wife conceived), Janmavan (when the Zamindar was blessed with an offspring), Holiyavan (when the Zamindar celebrated the Holi festival), Pakavan (when the Zamindar got a bull), etc. (Arvind N. Das : 1983a : 42-45). There were numerous other pretexts such as marriage in the Zamindar's family, cost of son's education abroad etc. for the illegal extraction of agricultural produce of the tenants (Nirmal Sengupta : 1982 : 19).

The lower caste peasants were totally dependent on the land of their upper caste maliks (landowner master) for their residence and cultivation and on their wells, ponds, etc. for drinking water and irrigation of crops. For this they had to pay not only in cash but had generally to do the begar. Their forced condition was not better than that of semi-slave. This high dependence on the Zamindars became more oppressive for tenants and agricultural labourers with a passage of time. The new legal and judicial institutions were introduced by the British Government of India with the intention of maintaining law and order and distributing justice but in effect these helped in the reinforcement of influence of the landlords and

moneylanders. The loyalty of the upper stratum of society shown to the British Raj in post-revolt (1857) also helped the Zamindars and moneylanders in their repression of the tenants and labourers. That is why, Moore calls the post-revolt period as "Landlords paradise" (Barrington Moore Jr. : 1969 : 353).

The increasing exploitation of peasants by the upper caste Zamindars resulted into the breakdown of the traditional relationship between the landlords and their tenants. In this regard it has been observed that "previously the Zamindar-tenant economic relation was in accordance with the upper caste-backward caste social relations. But the age-old Zamindari system was already exhibiting more and more evils. By the end of the last century, once the tenancy Acts were passed recognizing the rights of tenants vis-a-vis the Zamindars, the latter turned more hostile to the cause of the tenants. A large number of Zamindars turned absentee and were interested only in the realisation of rents. Irrigation facilities in villages stopped functioning because of the lack of maintenance, sub-infeudation and rack-renting worsened the plight of the tenants. The Zamindars and their employees let loose an

orgy of repression. As a result, the tenants lost their respect for the Zamindars and this found its expression in the 'backward castes' losing their habitual respect for the upper castes' (Nirmal Sengupta : 1979 : 89). On addition to economic exploitation, the high-caste Zamindars perpetrated many types of extra-economic coercion also. For instance, they placed restrictions <sup>on</sup> ritual observances by lower-caste tenants which caused serious discontent among the latter. But while these were the long-standing causes of agrarian tension, movements were sparked off by incidents of increasing oppression and exploitation.

The exploitation of the tenants and agricultural labourers by charging the excessive rent and a number of extra-legal cesses resulted into consciousness from the below. The increasing consciousness got its expression in the form several peasant movements.

However, the agrarian movement of this period hardly took the issues of poor peasantry and the exploitation of the masses. For instance, the Champaran satyagraha, the first organised agrarian movement in the pre-independence period, had major concern for the rich rather than the poor peasantry and exploited masses. The leadership of the movement was also in the hands of rich peasantry and peasant elites. The oligarchy which provided the leadership was consisted mainly of the high caste peasants : Brahmins,



Rajputs, Bhumiards, Kayasthas, Muslim Sheikhs, etc. But none of them enjoyed full proprietary rights, owing to the peculiar land-holding structure of the district, which was almost entirely made up of three large Zamindars of Bettial, Ramnagar, and Madhuban (Jawues Peuchepadass : 1974 : 67 - 87).

The peasant leaders like Raj Kumar Shukla, sant Rawat, Khendar Rai etc. of the Champaran Satyagraha broke of myth of the middle peasant's initiative in agrarian unrest on the one hand and showed the inherent limitations of the movement on the other. The peasant elites were fighting with the planters not for the cause of the poor peasantry but for their own interests (Arvind N. Das; 1983a : 98-99). Besides the movement in its content, was an attempt to remove a number of hurdles in the way of profitable cultivation of food grains and sugarcane. The issues like forced cultivation of indigo, forced supply of labour and implements to factories, payments of abwabs (extra legal cesses), fines arbitrarily imposed by the European planters etc. were taken up but the underlying nature of the movement was its elite character. Moreover, the exploitative money lenders were also involved in the movement for their own benefits. Since they were not always an alien class of usurers but the members of the agrarian structure itself, a rustic money lender was

often identified as a successful cultivator (B.B. Chaudhary : 1975 : 129). They were operating in a very subtle manner in the rural areas. O'Malley observes, "The money-leader does not want to ruin the ryot outright and drive him away from the village but to keep him there as long as possible and make as much out of him as he can" (cited in Arvind N. Das : 1983a : 55). Thus, the whole objective reality was against the interests and causes of the poor peasantry and landless agricultural labourers as their interests did not get articulation in the agrarian movement.

Due to the inherent limitations of the agrarian movement, the discontents and resentments of the tenants and agricultural labourers were getting expression through caste associations and caste organizations, caste tension and caste conflicts.

#### History of Caste Associations

With the establishment of British rule many new opportunities were created such as recruitment to the field of politics, public services, professions etc. To corner these opportunities caste became the units of mobilization. The Government's mediation in distribution of patronage through caste categories helped in this process. For example, while

certain castes were declared as 'martial races' and for them jobs in the army were made easily available, some other castes were declared as 'criminal castes' and were barred from joining the police or the army. Moreover, the education policy of Bentick, that came in force from 1835, was based on the filtration theory of education. In accordance with this theory, the masses were denied the privilege of English education and only the upper sector of society was supposed to qualify for this (Hetukar Jha : 1985). This sector was the elite sector consisting of upper castes. Gate was thus opened for them to exploit new opportunities. Recruitment to the fields of politics, Government services, professions etc. was dependent on the acquisition of higher education. English education thus became one of the most desirable goals in the society. It was during this period that "the caste system was reestablished with renewed vigor with the consistent support Brahmanism received from the ruling authorities" (Ramkrishna Mukherjee : 1957 : 118). Caste consciousness had a phenomenal rise in the society and the upper caste men began to organize their caste associations, all of which aimed at spreading modern education among their respective caste men and thereby raising the status of their caste groups. In short, "Just as British agrarian policies were responsible for the consolidation of a large landlord class across the province,

the government's social actions spurred organization of cognate sub-castes across regions<sup>u</sup> (Francine R. Frankel : 1989 : 63).

Among the upper castes, the Kayasthas who took the lead in English education, were the first to form their caste association, named Bihar Kayastha Provincial Sabha, in 1889. The Bihar Kayastha Provincial Sabha aimed to promote literacy of women, permit widow remarriage and end sanctions against overseas travel. Socially well-established Kayastha's leader took active interests in encouraging the Youths in their own castes to take up English education. As a result, the Kayasthas started occupying top positions in the bureaucratic set-up in the state. This proved to be a challenge to the ritually superior castes like the Brahmins, Rajputs and Bhumiards. They too started organizing themselves into associations to combat the rising power of the Kayasthas. The Bhumiards took a lead in this direction by forming the Pradhan Bhumiar Brahman Sabha to 'improve moral, social and educational reforms of the community and to represent the wants of the community to the government', (Rakesh Gupta, 1982 : 79-80). The Sabha established many schools, colleges and hostels for the Bhumiar students, with the view to prepare them for competition with their Kayastha counterparts. Thus, the first case of inter-caste rivalry involved the Kayasthas and the Bhumiards.

The Brahmias and Rajputs also did not lag behind in this direction. A few educated Rajput landlords organized their castemen. Similarly, the Brahmias also formed an association under the leadership of Maharaja of Darbhanga by the year 1899. All these caste associations aimed at cornering the privilege of English education as much as possible for their respective caste men as English education was a passport to the position of authority.

Caste status became even more of a central preoccupation after Risley's attempt to classify caste groups by rank in society for the 1901 census. Risley placed Bhumias and Kayasthas in the Vaishya varna. This led to the widespread dischantment among them and the caste-feeling reached to its height. Both the castes challenged the government decision. Dr. Sachchidanand Sinha became the leader of the Kayasthas to carry on the struggle for higher social position in the caste hierarchy. Likewise, Sir, Ganesh Datta Sinha became the reformer of the Bhumias. But the most important movement in 1920s was of the Bhumias under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. The Swami opposed the government decision and with the help of Hindu scriptures and literary texts he proved Bhumias as pure Brahmia. Consequently, he urged the Bhumias to take up the priestly functions. This movement he called as Purohit Andolan (Sahajanand Saraswati, 1916). This movement towards higher

social ranking among the Bhumias resulted during 1931 census in the wholesale transference of the Bhumias to the Brahmin caste.

Rising consciousness among the Intermediary caste

Increase in the flow of information, expansion of internal markets and transportation networks, spread of education, introduction of modern technology, urbanisation, industrialization, introduction of democratic institutions and gradual extension of the franchise coupled with spread of universalistic, achievement oriented and functionally specific value orientations, albeit limited, helped to break the rigidity of the established caste and status structure. One effect of these tendencies was to make the non-privileged castes conscious of their low status and dissatisfied with the existing social order. From this consciousness sprang an urge to move up in the social hierarchy. For this purpose, many lower castes started organising themselves into associations, taking new names and imitating the behavioural patterns of the upper caste.

The Kurmis among the lower or backward castes were first to organise themselves. The spur, in this case, was the British policy of declaring Kurmis " 'criminal caste', thereby preventing their recruitment into the police and Army" (K.K. Verma, 1976). To counter this move of the government an All - India Kurmi Mahasabha was formed in 1894. The

Mahasabha was successful in arousing the consciousness of Kurmi masses. The members of the Mahasabha emphasized sanskritisation of social and ritual practices, established educational institutions and propagated a mythology of descent from the God Indra to claim kshatriya status (K.K. Verma : 1976). Later on, the Kurmis widened their group by including other cognate sub-castes across Bihar like the Mahates of Chotanagpur, Dhanuks of north Bihar with a view to get wider support for getting social and later political demands fulfilled. Dhar et al writes, "The Awadhias of Patna, the Dhanuks of North Bihar and the Mahates of Chotanagpur are distinct castes separated by geographical distances. Even today, in religions, marital and traditional social functions they maintain distinction. But in politics they regard themselves as a single caste named 'Kurmi', the unity being legitimized by sanctions given in the Kurmi Mahasabhas." (Hiranmay Dhar et al, 1982 : 105). Thus, the British policies provided condition for the horizontal consolidation of the Kurmis.

Similarly, educated leaders among the Yadavas founded in 1909, the Gopajatiya Sabha. The Sabha organized regional conferences to stimulate a social awakening among cognate castes in Bihar. The leaders of the movement advanced

claims to Kshatriya status by asserting descent from Lord Krishna. The Yadavas challenged the priestly monopoly of Brahmans, employed Arya priests, established their own temples, and donned the sacred thread. In addition to sanskritizing their social and ritual practices, they educated their sons at schools and colleges established by the Arya Samaj or their own Yadav associations. Similar trend was also operative among the lowest castes like Dusadh who tried to do away with their infamous 'criminal caste' introduction (O'Malley, 1932 : 101, cited in Dhar et al, 1982 : 103).

Thus, instead of class consciousness, caste consciousness took a deep root in the society of Bihar. Moreover, the British government in India granted some economic and political privileges on the basis of caste. This was the objective condition for the concretization of caste hierarchy and horizontal consolidation of the different castes. The census operation further aggravated the whole situation. The increasing caste consciousness and deteriorating zamindar-tenant relationship resulted into various caste based movements during the 1920s by the backward castes against the upper castes.

Through these movements the tenant farmers attempted to abolish the local authority and the economic tyranny of the landlords. But the most important movement in the



1920s was of the Yadavas against the Bhumiari landlords. The Yadavas attempt to adopt upper caste titles and wear the sacred thread, their refusal to do customary pranams to the upper castes, their demands for occupancy rights over their land, stoppage of menial services and payment of illegal exactions (abwabs), their refusal to render any unpaid labour (begar) and sell their products at prices below those prevailing on the market etc. led to violent reactions on the part of landlords mostly belonging to upper castes and resulted in caste riots. The landlords started a counter or anti-Golai (Yadava) movement and sought the cooperation of the other high castes on the plea that the Golai had taken to wearing the sacred thread. Though the pretext of the anti-Golai movement was violation of the Ahimsa of the existing ritual norm, the steps taken against them were to cripple them economically. As Jha mentions: "The reprisals against Golais by the landlords were (1) to deprive them of the khud kasti lands and to turn them out of their houses on the ground that the houses belonged to the landlords, (2) refusal to allow their cattle to use the ordinary grazing grounds and to take water at the ordinary drinking tanks, and (3) complete social boycott..." (Hetukar Jha : 1977 : 551; emphasis in original)

The opposition made the Golais more determined than ever. For instance, in Kail, when the Bhumiari landlords refused to

allow the Goalas to hold a meeting, riot broke out. Hetukar Jha notes : "The Babhans (Bhumiards) intended to break it up ostensibly because the Goalas were conspiring to adopt certain privileges peculiar to the higher castes as for instance the wearing of the sacred thread. This was the ostensible motive. The true motive is that there is a movement amongst the Goalas to resist certain exaction of their Zamindars" (Hetukar Jha : 1977 : 552, emphasis in original).

The movement for upward mobility of the backward castes, especially Goalas, through the adoption of upper caste practices and rituals, sanskritization movements as M.N. Srinivas termed it, and the violent attacks on it by the upper castes as 'cultural watchdogs' have been analysed by Srinivas in merely cultural terms (Srinivas : 1966) . But the solid kernel of anti-feudal economic movements (the refusal to do begar, to sell below the market price, to pay illegal exactions) is lost-sight of in this analysis. Hetukar Jha rightly notes that "sanskritization was attempted here as a means to get rid of economic and social oppression. Further, such attempts were resisted by zamindars and upper-caste men to protect their vested interests. The vested interests of zamindars and upper-caste men were clear.... The Yadavas and other lower caste men used to do begari and other duties for zamindars as they were placed lower in the social scale. Their efforts to jump up the social scale threatened the economic and social interests of the upper-caste men and

zamindars. It was for this reason that the latter became violent, and not to maintain the structural distance with lower castes in their capacity as cultural watchdogs" (Hetukar Jha : 1977 : 556).

Thus, the movement launched by the Yadavas against the upper castes in the early 20th century inevitably had both the economic and social contexts. Hence, these caste movements and resultant conflicts can not be simply dubbed as caste tension or caste conflict. However, since the economic and social exploitation and oppression were going on in the name of caste, the caste became the most easily identifiable category and, hence, economic issues got their expression as caste issues. This is quite natural in the pre-capitalist society since in such society "... class interests never achieve full (economic) articulation. Hence the structuring of society into castes and estates means that economic elements are inextricably joined to political and religious factors" (Lukacs, 1971 : 55). Therefore, protection from socio-economic oppression in pre capitalist Bihar got "inextricably" bound with the promotion of caste interest.

But at the same time, due to high level of economic differentiation based on land, the class formation was also taking a definite shape. In order to show the loyalty to colonial rule the zamindars exercised all types of oppression in the collection of unbearable rents and they always showed

arrogance to the tenants irrespective of caste consideration. Sanskrityayna observes that "sale of daughters became a major source of livelihood of tenants belonging even to the higher castes" (cited in Arvind N Das, 1983a : 69). So, the deplorable socio-economic condition of the poor peasantry became both the objective and subjective factors for the replacement of caste conflict into class conflict. In the 1930s, the economic issues got precedence over the social issues of 1920s.

By the 1930s, the condition of the cultivators of Bihar had deteriorated considerably. In north Bihar the Depression pushed down the prices of staple crops by 40 percent to 50 percent, while the cost of essential consumer items like kerosene and cotton did not decline (Stephen Henningham, 1982 : 140). Moreover, in the preceding two decades, the high prices of foodgrains had been associated with increases in cash rents. Consequently, many tenants survived only by incurring high debts, while some were deprived of their holdings through rent suits. In south Bihar, the situation of the tenantry was worse. Since the 1920s, in Patna and Gaya districts, tenants had succeeded in converting their produce rent to cash rent, but at very high amounts. The zamindars did not reduce rentals despite the slump. As the peasants fell into arrears they were dispossessed from their lands on

grounds of non-payment of rent. Many occupancy tenants were turned into sharecroppers. Apart from this the zamindars continued to exploit the tenants through the mechanisms of begari, Abwabs etc.

### Kisan Sabha Movement

The formation of Bihar provincial kishan sabha in 1929 was ~~was~~ a natural outcome of the poor socio-economic condition of the peasantry. The Kisan Sabha under the leadership of Sahajanand Saraswati became the common platform for the struggling peasantry belonging to both upper and lower castes against the exploitative zamindari system. Despite its upper castes leadership, the kisan sabha inculcated consciousness and confidence among the common peasants. In order to grow consciousness among the tenants about their exploitative position and to provide resistance to the oppressive zamindars, sahanand tirelessly addressed meetings in which he attacked the zamindars as a parasitic class that was a 'useless burden on the world' and urged the peasantry to overcome their caste divisions by arguing that 'only capitalists, zamindars and peasants are castes, not others' (Walter Hauser, 1961 : 97,98). He also urged the tenants to forge into action to resist the zamindari oppression and fight for their rights. The kisan sabha took the issues of Begari, Abwabs, Bakasht etc. and started movements in different parts of the state. As

a result, there were numerous demonstrations, rallies, satyagrahs and other struggles. The landlords and the Government tried to suppress these movements by brutal methods. There were several firings, countless lathi-charges, thousands of arrests and trials of the leaders like Rahul sankrityayana, Karyanand Sharma and others. However, the most legendary peasant struggle in Bihar under the leadership of the kisan sabha was the 'Bakasht struggles'. The Bakasht was very much oppressive mechanism in the hands of the zamindars. A chain reaction was involved in this (Bakasht) mechanism. The tenants were unable to pay in time the excessive increasing rent of lands and the resumption of land by the zamindars was a quick response (Rakesh Gupta, 1982). As a result, the depeasantisation of the tenants was bound to happen. The kisan sabha, thus, took the Bakasht issue and started movement in various parts of the state.

In north Bihar, during the late 1930s, the dispossessed tenants began to 'claim possession of the lands that had been held as Bakasht by landlords over a long period' (Stephen Henningham, 1982 : 153). The most important area of agitation was in the Padri circle of the Darbhanga Raj. Koeris and Goalas who had been 'kept under the iron wheel of Hindu societu' (cited in Stephen Henningham, 1982 : 156) struggled

against the Maithil Brahman dominance to regain occupancy rights on Bakasht lands. In the Pandaul area of Darbhanga, "sharecroppers and short-term tenants, many of them Yadav by jati, began to claim rights to long established Bakasht lands" (Stephen Henningham, 1982 : 158).

However, the most renowned Bakasht struggle was launched at Baraliya Tal in Monghyr district. Here, the original owners had been deprived of their lands through 'rent suits and by main force of physical strength', (Rakesh Gupta, 1982 : 182). The zamindars were mainly Bhumiards and Rajputs, while many of the tenants were Dhanuks of lower shudra status. Few tenants also belonged to Rajput and Bhumiar caste. Starting in 1936, the kisan sabha began to organise the tenants who had been reduced to sharecroppers and shifted from plot to plot. The tenants began to forcibly sow and harvest the crops on their lands. At the same time they refused to do begar. The zamindars retaliated by mobilizing their lathais to beat up the kisans. These tenant-landlord confrontations persisted over three years. Ultimately, the Congress Ministry offered a settlement giving one thousand bighas to the kisans. The peasants occupied the land, but they continued the struggle for a larger share.

The Bakasht movement in Barahiya Tal marked the first

victory of the kisan sabha in particular and the suffering tenants in general in the form of increasing consciousness and organized class action.

However, the kisan sabha could not resolve the contradiction within the peasantry. The movement could not draw the peasants belonging to the lower castes to its fold. Instead, it was led mainly by Brahmans and Bhumiards and its followers came mainly from among the larger occupancy tenants who were primarily Bhumiards and Rajputs. Hauser has mentioned that, "socially, the kisan sabha leadership was predominantly Bhumiard ..... Economically, the kisan sabha leaders were primarily from land-holding families" (Walter Hauser, 1961). The target of the kisan sabha movement was not all kinds of landlordism, but only the feudalism from above, the revenue collecting zamindari rights created by the permanent settlement. As such, the kisan sabha failed to reflect the full anti-feudal aspirations of the peasantry.

In 1944 Swami Sahajanand himself admitted that the middle and big cultivators were 'using the kisan sabha for their benefit and gain (Arvind N Das, 1983a : 137), and that his plans for awakening the petty cultivators and agricultural labourers had not taken hold. In particular, the kisan sabha failed to cross the pollution barrier in reacting down the



landless kisans and even set itself firmly against granting land rights to the agricultural labourers.

Nevertheless, kisan sabha succeeded in arousing consciousness among the suffering tenants and motivated them for organized class action. Most of the Bakasht struggles were fought on class lines with Bhumiahs and Rajput tenants fighting Bhumiahs landlords. The abolition of zamindari itself became a major concern of the kisan sabha in 1940s. So, in this sense the Bihar provincial kisan sabha led the people for class action (Rakesh Gupta, 1982).

#### Politics in Pre-independence Era

Politics in Bihar has been for long dominated by the upper castes, mainly the Kayasthas, Bhumiahs, Rajputs and Brahmins. Political activity in pre-independence phase was mainly articulated through caste associations.<sup>2</sup> In this context it is to be noted that though the caste associations functioned in the social realm for a social cause, they nevertheless prepared the background for transforming social identity into political identity.

The birth of politics in Bihar, in the proper sense of the term, is connected with the issue of separation of Bihar from

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2. We have discussed in detail the formation and the activities of various caste associations. In this connection it is noted that while the upper castes formed their respective caste associations to compete with each other to get the maximum benefit out of the available resources, the middle and the lower castes formed their associations to get ritual and other benefits. For detail, see page :10-15 .

Bengal. Bihar, till 1911, formed a part of the greater province of Bengal. The movement for a separate state of Bihar was launched by the western educated individuals against the dominance of the Bengalis in the government services. It may be pointed out that the western education created a new group of the Biharis who were not satisfied with their low positions in the government services. Most of the high positions were held by the Bengalis. Thus, the aspiration to get such posts became a bone of contention between the Biharis and the Bengalis.

The Kayasthas, being educationally better than the other upper castes, were in the forefront of the movement. The leadership was provided by four Kayasthas, namely, Sachchidanand Sinha, Mahesh Narain, Nand Kishore Lal and Rai Bahadur Krishna Sahay (J.S. Jha, 1977 : 15). The movement began to be bitterly criticised and the leaders like Sachchidanand Sinha were ridiculed by the Bengali Press ( V.C.P. Chaudhury, 1964 : 58). Hence, the participants felt the need of a newspaper to voice their opinion. Consequently, the 'Bihar Times' was started in 1894 by Mahesh Narain and Sachchidanand Sinha. Thus, began the renaissance' in Bihar (Dayadhar Jha, 1977 : 37-38). This newspaper did a great service in highlighting the problems of the Biharis and made an appeal to the then Lt. Governor of Bengal to separate Bihar from the

province of Bengal. The movement at this stage, could not gather sufficient momentum, as other upper and lower castes people kept themselves out of it. However, towards the concluding phase of the movement educated persons of certain other castes also joined hands with the Kayasthas. Ultimately, in 1911, the British Government accepted the demand of separation. The province of Bihar and Orissa was inaugurated in April, 1912.

The antagonism between the Kayasthas and other upper castes came to the surface when the race began for capturing the newly created posts in the new province. The Kayasthas, due to their educational advancement and administrative experience, were the top contenders for these posts and became the obvious beneficiaries when the fresh opportunities were offered in the government offices, judiciary, university and the legislature. Besides, the Kayasthas started dominating in the state politics, owing to their experience of the separation movement. In the nationalist movement of the congress also the Kayasthas assumed a commanding role as is evident from the fact that the Kayasthas provided the largest cadre in the non-cooperation campaign of 1920 (Francine R Frankel, 1989 : 73).

However, in succeeding decades the other "twice-born" castes entered the political arena. The Bhumiards were the first to challenge the dominance of Kayasthas. Rivalry between these two castes were generated for recruitment to the public offices

(Ramashray Roy, 1979 : 239-240). Subsequently, the Brahmins and the Rajputs also started receiving modern education and taking advantage of the available opportunities. These castes too started challenging the hegemony of the Kayasthas over the state politics.

With the emergence of the other "twice-born" castes on the political scene in the state the dominance of the Kayasthas started receding. They could not possibly prevent the emerging social groups from acquiring leadership positions in the state. Therefore, proportion of the Kayasthas in the leadership of Congress Party went on declining. For instance, in the executive committee of the Congress, their proportion was about 53.84 percent in 1934. But it declined to 20.00 percent in 1946 (Ramashray Roy, 1970 : 242-3). At the same time the proportion of Rajputs and Bhumiards in the executive committee of the Congress increased. From 7.70 percent in 1934 the Rajputs increased their proportion to 26.68 in 1946 while the Bhumiards increased their proportion from 15.38 in 1934 to 20.00 in 1946 (Ramashray Roy, 1970 : 242-3). In the civil Disobedience movement of 1930 and 1932 too, the participation of Kayasthas decreased while Bhumiards, Rajputs and Brahmans increased in numbers (Francine R Frankel, 1988 : 73). But inspite of inter-caste rivalry political power remained confined to the Kayasthas, Rajputs and Bhumiards.

The lower castes, on the other hand, remained outside the center of competitive politics. This is evident from the fact that between 1934 and 1946 (except in 1936 and 1937 when Congress contested provincial elections under the expanded franchise of 1935 constitution), not one person belonging to the lower castes was a member of the Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee (Ramashray Roy, 1970 : 242).

In this context it is to be noted that the lower castes had also organized their respective caste associations for organized political action. But the caste associations of Bihar, in contrast to Madras, where the provincial backward classes League was formed in 1934 to demand preferential treatment for Backward Hindus' in recruitment to educational institutions and the administrative services, (Galanter, 1984 : 158), were never able to coordinate their efforts on behalf of backward castes as a whole. The very caste ideology of the Yadavas and Kurmis prevented the political collaboration among them. Rather, in their competition for higher relative rank, the upper backward castes tended to dissociate their efforts from the other. However, in the 1930s a small educated elite tried to unite the Yadavas, Kurmis and Keeris politically under one umbrella. As a result, in 1934, the 'Triveni Sangh' symbolizing the unity of the Yadavas, Kurmis and Keeris was formed in Sahabad to compete with the high caste Congress. Its aim included "fostering solidarity among different sections of the caste community, participation

in democratic politics, opposing upper caste tyranny and social ostracism" (Mukherjee and Yadav, 1980 : 27-28). However the sangh was not very successful in its working. It lacked a popular base among its own caste groups as the franchise entailed a property holding requirement which few inside the backward caste could meet. At the same time, the other backward castes viewed it as an Ahir-Kurmi-Koeri syndicate. As a result, when it fought 1937 elections against the Congress in Patna and Sahabad district, it lost. In the 1940s the sangh got defunct and merged with the Congress. Certain upper castes politicians played vital role in bringing about disunity among the members of the sangh (Shashishekar Jha, 1972 : 79).

The formation of Khet Mazdoor Sabha , one of the first agricultural labour organizations in the country, which was led by late Babu Jagjivan Ram and was motivated to pose a challenge to the kisan sabha (Hiranmay Dhar, 1982 : 106) was backed by the Congress Party dominated by the upper castes in the state. As such it also could not challenge the domination of upper caste in the politics of Bihar. The election held in 1937 confirmed the hegemony of the upper castes over the politics of Bihar.

It is interesting to note that the Brahmins, the numerically strongest upper caste, acquired leadership position only after the elections held in 1937. Thus, they were quite late in

entering caste-based political structure in the state. So, their role was secondary in the state politics.

On the whole we may say that in pre-independent Bihar there was the phenomenon of gradually enlarging circle of political competition. In the initial stages the political scene was dominated by the Kayasthas. But soon the Bhumias, Rajputs and the Brahmins started competing among themselves and with the Kayasthas to achieve political dominance. This, in turn, led to defensive alliances and counter alliances. Through these alliances the upper caste groups continued to retain political dominance. The influence of the lower caste groups on the political structure of the state remained, by and large, negligible.

To sum up, it can be said that the upper caste groups, by virtue of their superior ritual and economic status, held sway over society. The various policies of the Britishers helped to consolidate their position. The permanent settlement of 1793 created a new class of intermediaries or zamindars which having acquired proprietary rights in soil, became identified as a party to the British rule. This paved the way for the consolidation of their status as elite in the society. The zamindars belonged to the upper caste of society. The upper caste groups, because of their control over economic and social resources, also took unproportionate advantage of the newly created opportunities such as educational facilities,

recruitment to the fields of politics, Government services, professions etc. and left far behind the underprivileged social sectors. The Biharī middle class, therefore, remained the preserve of the upper castes, while maintaining their links with the landed classes. Thus, the British impact, "In terms of role structure contributed to modernization but in the matter of stratification it further strengthened the power of the established traditional groups" (Yogendra Singh, 1978 : 32). In addition, the upper caste zamindars maintained close ties with the Government and their interests were well served by the Government. The Government took every possible step to reinforce the local dominance of upper caste landlords or zamindars, and to suppress peasant revolts against them which erupted from the mid-nineteenth century. In short, the close relationship between Government, the zamindars and the upper castes created an almost complete overlap between dominance at the level of society and power in the realm of the state.

The spread of education, introduction of modern technology and the impact of modern politics also activated the underprivileged caste groups, brought to them the realization of the deprivations they suffered, and spurred them on to organized action to mitigate these deprivations. As a result, the underprivileged caste groups launched several agrarian and caste based movements in the 1920s and 1930s. The privileged castes responded negatively to these movements. Consequently,



violent conflict took place among them. The struggle launched by backward castes as a subaltern group in the pre-independence period, changed its course in the post-independence era. In the post-independence era, it is these backward castes who, after becoming economically and politically powerful, are the main perpetrators of violence against the Harijans. However, this issue will be taken up in the next chapter.

### CHAPTER III : IMPLICATIONS OF MODERNIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT ; CONTINUITIES & CONTRADICTIONS

The situation that prevailed in pre-independence phase began to change after independence. As has been pointed out in the previous chapter the colonial modernization reinforced the power of the traditional group. However, the period after independence enlarged the social base of modernization and set in motion social, economic and political forces which influenced all segments of society. After independence the Government took upon itself the responsibility of conscious planning of social transformation. Its objectives were the creation of a society based on democratic political participation and social justice. Steps were taken to abolish institutions which traditionally perpetuated exploitation and inequality. The principles of inequality based on caste, birth, religion and sex were derecognized. The exploitative zamindari system was abolished and the panchayati Raj and community development schemes were introduced in the villages. All these coincided with an expanding role of communication and media participation which led to a new social and political awareness. The release of these modernizing forces weakened the social prestige, economic position and political strength of the upper castes on the one hand, and on the other accelerated the upward mobility of the middle castes. These also generated new contradictions in society. For the analysis of emerging patterns of agrarian structure and its bearing on contradictions and conflict we have to examine the interplay between caste, class and politics in rural areas of Bihar.

We have seen that in the pre-independence period there was congruence between caste hierarchy and agrarian hierarchy and there was almost complete monopoly of the upper castes on land. This is evident from the fact that as late as in 1951 about 80 percent of the lands was under the control of the three castes of Brahmins, Bhumiahs and Rajputs (Ramashray Roy : 1970 : 232). The rest was in the hands of Muslims and the middle and lower castes peasants. This high concentration of land has, to some extent, been broken now. The abolition of the zamindari system and various land reform measures are important in this regard.

#### Land Reform Measures

The post-independence land reforms programme has had three distinct goals : (i) The abolition of intermediaries who played no productive parts in agriculture; (ii) The imposition of limits on how much land any person or family can hold; and (iii) The provision of security and a preponderant share of the product of his land to a tenant. Achievement of these goals would have amounted to a fundamental change in the structure of agrarian relations. However, only the first goal has been achieved while the progress towards the other two has been slight. Accordingly, there has been a very limited redistribution of land and wealth. Jannuzi (1977) observes that though Bihar

was the first state to initiate the agrarian reform, through the enactment of legislation, and the abolition of the zamindari system, its efforts to implement these agrarian reforms were least successful. In fact, even after independence the radical language of land reform followed by the conservative action had hardly benefitted the toiling masses and landless labourers. The reasons for improper implementation of the land reform measures were mainly the lack of political will on the part of the politicians representing the interests of big landlords, inefficiency of the bureaucracy and loopholes in the land reform measures themselves. The different clauses of the land reform measures were misinterpreted and manipulated for the benefits of the landlord. For instance, the Land Reforms Act, 1950 abolished zamindari system on the one hand and, on the other permitted the zamindars to retain 'homestead' land (up to ten acres), and lands used for agricultural and horticultural purposes in khas possession without any upper limit.<sup>1</sup> The zamindars took advantage of such legal provisions and evicted the tenants and thereby extended their khas possession

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1. Khas possession included lands not only personally cultivated by the intermediary but cultivated under his supervision through a manager with hired labour, or through a share-cropper to whom he supplied the means of cultivation, such as bullocks.

In this manner the zamindars were able to "retain all the lands held prior to abolition excepting only those lands to which an occupancy raiyet had incontrovertible documentary evidence in support of his claim (Tomasson F. Jannuzi, 1974 : 330).

The land Ceiling Act, 1961 was also misutilized and manipulated. Lack of political will and the collusion with the bureaucracy enabled the landowners to arrange partitions of land among family members, transfer lands to fictitious persons (benami), prepare false documents of sale, instigate relatives to file false court claims against land acquired, to evade the law (P.S. Appu, 1973 ; M.P. Pandey, 1979: 35-43; Tomasson F. Jannuzi, 1977 : 221- 224; D. Thakur, 1989). Ojha's review of transfers during 1955-65 suggests that 400,000 to 500,000 acres of surplus land were hidden through fictitious transfers alone (G. Ojha, 1977 : 122). Even if some lands were collected through this Act, these were hardly distributed among the landless labourers. According to one estimate, only 1.26 percent of cultivated land in Bihar had been acquired as surplus under the ceiling Act till March, 1984 and out of this only 63.14 percent had been distributed. Thus, only about 0.80 percent of the cultivated land had been distributed till March, 1984 (Pradhan H. Prasad, 1986). Even in cases where the landless got title to land, they were forcibly evicted by the landowners. Thus, the land in one way or the

other remained in the possession of Maliks.

In this way the big landowners, including the Darbhanga Raj, the Hatwa Raj, the Dumraon Raj and Ramgarh Raj, by taking advantage of the loopholes of land reform measures and bureaucratic red-tapism managed to keep thousand of acres of land under their possession. At the same time the most vulnerable tenants sank to the status of bataidars or sharecroppers. Data from national sample surveys as well as local village studies collected in the 1960s and 1970s suggest that the practice of leasing out land to bataidars had become widespread. Anywhere from 15 percent to 25 percent or more of the area was cultivated by sharecroppers (Harry W. Blair, 1984 : 59, M.P. Pandey, 1979 : 55-64). Legislation regarding Tenancy Reform, which stipulated for safeguarding the right of bataidars, met with little success due to the practice of oral tenancy. In addition, the land owners, in order to defeat the goal of the Act, shifted tenants from one plot to another every three or four years to prevent a bataidar from claiming occupancy rights. They also demanded division of the crop on their own premises, where they took 50 percent of the produce, deducted payments for production and consumption loans, and in some cases, also extracted abwabs and demanded free labour (Mohsin, 1984 : 60). Tenants who objected to these practices and moved for his legal rights were forcibly evicted. Apart from this the upper

and the middle caste landowners also controlled and utilized the Gairwazara land. The consolidation of land holdings, part of the land reform measures, has also been misutilized by the landowners with the help of the political authority and bureaucracy.

The above analysis of land reforms represents the pessimistic picture. The old structure, although in modified form, continues to exist. After a survey of post land reforms Bihar, Daniel Therner (1956:35) remarked, "In short neither zamindari abolition nor Bhoodan persuasion has been able to transform rural Bihar. It remains a stronghold of large land holders and hierarchical property rights, leasing, sub-leasing and eviction are all common."

However, it does not mean that agrarian structure has not changed at all after the independence. The agrarian structure has undergone significant changes due to the abolition of zamindari system and the implementation of various land reform measures. With the abolition of the zamindari system a vast number of oppressive intermediaries and parasitic landlords were sacked down in the rural areas. The previous correspondence between caste and class hierarchy had been broken down to some extent. This becomes more evident when we analyse the caste base of different agrarian classes. Pradhan H Prasad (1979, 1989) has identified landlords and big peasants, the middle and

the poor middle peasantry and agricultural labourers as the main agrarian classes. The caste base of these classes are as follow: The landlords and big peasants generally come from upper castes. However, the upper layers of middle castes, namely, the Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris also belong to this class. The agricultural labourers are mainly from the scheduled castes and the lower middle castes. The poor middle peasantry and the middle peasantry are mainly from the middle castes. However, some upper caste households also belong to this category. It is to be noted that the greatest beneficiaries of 'land reforms' have been the middle peasantry who were earlier tenants under the zamindars. When the law related to zamindari abolition and ceiling were passed, the zamindars started selling their surplus land which was bought by these people because of their better and improved paying capacity. According to one estimate, about ten percent of the total cultivated area passed from the control of the largest landlords into the hands of middle peasantry (Pradhan H Prasad, 1979 : 483).

The agricultural census of 1970-71, shown in Table-1, confirms the strong position of medium size landholders, drawn mainly from the upper caste and the upper layers of backward castes, as an economic strata.



Table - 1

Size class in hectares (acres)	Number Percentage	Area Percentage
Marginal 0.5 to 1.0 (1.2 to 2.5)	64.33	16.09
Small 1.0 to 2.0 (2.5 to 5)	14.64	13.62
Semi medium 2.0 to 4.0 (5 to 10)	4.4	10.9
Medium 4.0 to 10.0 (10 to 25)	7.1	36.2
Large 10.0 to 20 (25 to 50)	1.38	12.12
Over 20.0	1.7	8.4

Source: Bihar Revenue Department (Agricultural census), Report on Agricultural census, 1970-71, Bihar, Patna, 1974.

It is evident from the Table-1 that the stratum of medium size landholders, roughly corresponding to Dhanagare's category of rich landowners (Dhanagare: 1983 :14), accounted for seven percent of households but 36 percent of the area. The large

landlords collectively made up three percent of households and operated 20 percent of the area. The majority of marginal cultivators, 64 percent of the total, subsisted on 16 percent of the land.

The emergence of upper layers of backward castes namely the Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris as a new force is one of the most important developments in post-independence period in Bihar. These castes, having derived maximum benefits from land reform measures, have achieved the status of dominant caste in many parts of Bihar.

Apart from this the zamindari abolition considerably eroded the social prestige of the upper castes. Jannuzi found that in a village of Darbhanga, where most intermediaries were Brahmins, the status value was greater than the economic value of their interests. The Brahmins made a direct connection between zamindari abolition and a decline in their previously unquestioned authority (Jannuzi, 1974 : 54). The same phenomenon was reported from other parts of the state. In Sahabad, "The aristocracy and the propertied zamindars (were) affected very badly. With the abolition of zamindari they had a great slump in what was considered a social prestige apart from the decline in financial resources" (Bihar District Gazetteers, Sahabad, 1960:200). Also in Gaya, "since the abolition of zamindari system, people of class one in the villages who were regarded

as kulin are practically becoming ordinary cultivators (Bihar District Gazetteers, Gaya, 1957:112). Some of the larger ex-zamindars left the rural areas and became businessmen or contractors.

In these changed circumstances, when the backward caste landowners enjoyed virtually the same rights to their holdings as ex-zamindars, the twice-born castes found it impossible to assert the subordination of economic standing to ritual status and thereby subjecting backward caste landowners to social abuse.

In short, the Zamindari abolition and various other land reform measures liberated the backward castes from age-old exploitation and led to their emergence as a new force in society. Simultaneously, "These new forces gave a death blow to the traditional social pyramid" (Bihar District Gazetteers, Patna, 1957 :102) as the Brahmanical ideology failed to justify hereditary inequality of caste, class and power" (Francine R. Frankel, 1989 : 49).

#### Green Revolution and Other Developmental Programmes

Besides land reform measures, some other efforts have also been made to reduce the gap between the poor and the rich in the rural areas. The Green Revolution movement is one of them. Concentration on supplying modern inputs to the

agricultural sector is an essential ingredient of the programme. By 1973-74, 22.7 percent of the total cropped area in Bihar was covered by the programme of using high yield varieties (HYV) of seeds; 20 percent of the villages had been electrified and 1,04,000 pumping sets had been energised by 1975 (Arvind N. Das, 1983b: 199). In addition, various developmental programmes such as Agricultural Extension and Community Development Schemes, Intensive Area Development Programme (IADP), Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA), Drought-Prone Area Programme (DPAP), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Programme (MFAL), Rural Works Programme (RWP), Crash Scheme for Rural Employment (CSRE), Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Project (PIREP), Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) etc. were also implemented.

As a result of all these schemes and programmes, the agricultural sector as a whole prospered. The agricultural income rose from Rs. 177.78 at current prices in 1965-66 to Rs. 297.56 in 1972-73 (Bihar, Bihar state Planning Board, selected Plan statistics, Patna, 1976:110). Food grain production had also gone up and per capita income had crawled forward. Between 1950-1 and 1980-1, food grains production increased by 230 percent at an annual growth rate of 1.5 percent (Bihar Draft seventh Five Year Plan, 1985 : 5) and per capita

income had risen from Rs. 210-40 at constant prices in 1964-65 to Rs. 435.24 at constant prices in 1978-79 (Bihar statistical Handbook, 1983).

However, it is to be noted that the benefits of development and planning did not percolate to the lower level rather had gone in favour of only the well-to-do classes to the detriment of poorer sections. Even funds meant for subsidized loans and employment for small and marginal farmers, and agricultural labourers were grabbed by the dominant sections of society. Consequently, the per capita income of the poor cultivators and agricultural labourers has lowered down (J.D. Sethi, 1988). According to NSS Data, the proportion of people living below the poverty line increased from 52 percent in 1969-70 to 57 percent in 1977-78 (Bihar Draft Sixth Five Year Plan, III ; Bihar Draft Seventh Five-Year Plan, II). Clearly, the developmental programmes characterised as being on the strong" (W.F. Wertheim, 1969) failed to dynamise and diversify Bihar's rural economy and allowed the stranglehold of well-to-do classes to continue. Blair's premise is correct that 'the purpose of such development programmes as were encompassed by the five-year plans was not to develop the rural economy, for that might bring change, but rather to develop patronage net-works among elites, linking caste alliances between villages and the state capital" (Blair, 1984:64). Outlays in all seven plans

support this assumption. The highest percentage allocations persistently went to water and power development of greater interest to the small class of rich landowners. In particular, during the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh plans, from 1969 to 1985-90, outlays under this head were 51 percent or higher.

Green Revolution too benefitted only relatively better-off peasants. The application of modern agricultural inputs and technology and commercialisation of agriculture helped these peasants to acquire the economic prosperity. But at the same time the above factors were also responsible for increase in number of wage labourers (Manoshi Mitra and T Vijayendra 1982). The poor peasants came under the influence of semi-market mechanisms which forced them to sale their lands to rich peasants and became agricultural labourers. The increasing pauperization and marginalization of poor peasantry emerges from census data which shows that the proportion of cultivators to workers declined from 53.8 percent in 1961 to 43.4 percent in 1981; during the same period, the percentage of agricultural labourers climbed from 22.9 percent to over 35 percent (Report on Agricultural census, 1970-1 : 35; census of India, Bihar, 1981 : 78-79).

Thus the impact of green revolution not only widened the gap between rich and poor but also posed the question of

distributive justice and raised the level of relative deprivation. Chester Bowles observed, as early as 1967 that "The dramatic increase in food output which are occurring - and which should continue to grow in the years ahead, may lead to sharp disparities in income which in turn may create an expanding sense of economic and social injustice" (Chester Bowles, 1969:83). Similarly, Jazzuzi during his field investigation in Bihar observed that even in those areas where impact of "new technology in agriculture" is felt, the wages for labour has remained static since 1957, and income of affluent farmer has gone up (Tomasson F. Jazzuzi, 1974:165). Persistence of serious social and economic inequalities and the widening gap between the relatively few affluent farmers and the large body of small landholders and agricultural labourers as a result of the process of development was soon realized by the Government. It was officially admitted that the "planned rural development (has) not transformed the agrarian structure.... the programmes are more favourable to the larger owner-farmer than the smaller tenant farmer. .. as for the sharecropper and the landless labourer, they have been more often than not left out in the cold .... with the result that disparities..... widened accentuating social tensions" (India, Home Ministry, Research and Policy Division, 1969 : 40).

On the whole, the benefits of agricultural modernization went to the small class of rich and middle landowners. At the same time the condition of poor peasants and agricultural labourers deteriorated sharply. Their declining social and economic states in relation to the upper stratum of agrarian sector and the resulting exploitation generated sharp contradiction in the agrarian structure.

Socially, the green revolution had been basically a contribution of the middle caste peasantry. In Bihar the Kurmis, Yadavas and Koeris, having acquired substantial land after zamindari abolition, had been the leaders of green revolution. The green revolution led to the consolidation of the status of these middle caste peasantry as a dominant class. The modern economic opportunities provided by industrialization, urbanization, and technological development further improved their position. Their newly gained strong position in the field of economy made them strong in the fields of politics, education, bureaucracy and administration also. This phenomenon was observed by a good number of students involved in the study of politics and society of Bihar (see Pradhan H Prasad, 1979, 1980; Blair, 1980, 1984; Nirmal Sengupta, 1979; Francine R Frankel, 1989, Pradip K Bose, 1985; Tomasson F Zannuzi, 1974, 1977). Hiranmay Dhar (1982:108), writing on this development, remarked "after the abolition of zamindari and the introduction of new technology



in agriculture the upper middle castes emerged as an important factor in the politics of Bihar. Koeris, Kurmis and Yadavas are efficient agricultural entrepreneurs. They generated the maximum surplus in agriculture and with their newly acquired economic power they started vying for political power". The increasing competition between the upper castes and the upper middle caste in the field of politics becomes more evident from the analysis of the relationship between caste and politics.

#### Political Participation

The post-independent developments in the political arena suggest that the traditional dominance of the upper castes over state politics is getting challenged by the trinity of the Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris. In this sense, we encounter with the phenomenon of gradually enlarging circle of political competition (Ramashray Ray, 1970:240) in Bihar. This has happened due to the introduction of the universal adult franchise, modern democratic politics, constitutional guarantees coupled with some sorts of socio-political consciousness.

The rising backward caste consciousness first manifested itself in panchayat elections in the 1950s and 1960s and quickly percolated upwards to elections for the state Assembly, particularly in areas where the backward castes held numerical dominance. In some constituencies, their numbers 'accounted

for 25 percent to 35 percent of the electorate; sufficient to determine the outcome of elections to the legislative Assembly' (Blair, 1979:15). This new source of power boosted both their social position and political standing. Simultaneously, this resulted into the breakdown of the monopoly of the upper castes in the political power and authority. By 1957 and 1962, upper backward castes accounted for about 22 percent of the members of the ruling Congress legislature party. They were, in addition, a growing minority of the Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee, constituting 20 percent of the membership in 1955 (Ramashray Roy, 1970:248).

Since independence there is a trend of gradual decline in the dominance of upper castes in the state politics. However, it does not mean that the upper castes have lost all types of control over the state politics. This becomes clear from the analysis of the caste composition of the MLAs at the time of different assembly elections in the state. During the elections of 1952, 1957 and 1962 upper caste dominated Congress won large majorities of seats. In 1957, more than 44 percent of Congress members in Bihar Legislative Assembly came from upper caste groups, and in 1962, their proportion was at over 43 percent (Chetkar Jha, 1967:583).

The different leaders that came into prominence from the backward castes during this period were the product of the upper caste's rivalry and were mostly identified with a particular faction of the upper castes (Hiranmay Dhar, 1982; Shashishekar Jha, 1972). However, in 1963, K.B. Sahay, a kayastha Chief Minister, provided the first opportunity for the backward caste leaders to break out of their client status. K B Sahay, in order to face the challenge from the other upper caste leaders, needed additional support to stay in power. So he turned towards the upper backward caste leaders. In order to gain their support he increased the share of upper backwards in his Ministry to 20 percent (from less than 10 percent). At the same time he reduced the proportion of 'twice-born' castes from 50 percent to 40 percent (Babulal Padia, 1984:59). He also elevated Ram Leakhan Singh Yadav to the rank of Minister who soon became one of the most influential leaders of Yadavas. During this period Yadavas leadership in Congress emerged as an important group in their own right.

The fourth General election in 1967 saw the defeat of the Congress. A coalition government headed by M.P.Sinha came into power. The overall caste composition of the ruling coalition was not much different than that of the 1962 Congress Legislature Party. The upper caste MLAs maintained

their dominant position at almost 47 percent and the upper backward castes improved their strength from 23.9 percent to 25.9 percent (Blair, 1980 : 68). There was, however, one striking difference. In 1967, Yadavas emerged as the second largest caste group after the Rajputs. This pattern was maintained in 1969 and 1972 elections. The caste breakdown of the general seats in the Bihar Legislative Assembly over the 1969-77 period shows that "54.8 percent of the MLAs from general seats were Forwards (i.e. upper castes) as against their 16.5 percent of the non-scheduled population" (Blair, 1980:67).

The election held in 1977 brought Janata Party into power. Late Karpoori Thakur, belonging to a numerically insignificant caste of Nai, became the Chief Minister of Bihar. He united the entire "backward caste" under his fold. In his tenure as a Chief Minister the backward caste for the first time gained the pre-eminent position in the cabinet. This is evident from the fact that 38 percent of Ministers came from the backward castes while only 29 percent of the Minister came from the upper castes (Blair, 1980:69). In terms of the number of MLAs, however, the upper castes still had dominant position. For example, the upper castes accounted for 29 percent of MLAs in the ruling Janata Party compared to 23.5 percent for the upper backwards (Blair, 1980 : 65). Karpoori Thakur also promulgated a plan whereby

20 percent of all state posts was reserved for the 128 backward castes. In so doing "he served notice on the forwards (i.e. upper castes) that a new order had come to power in Bihar, one in which the Backward castes would have the leading role" (Blair, 1984 : 66).

The reservation policy created a polarization between the backward castes and the forward castes throughout the state and ended such good relations as had existed previously between both sides. The upper caste people protested against the reservation policy and soon violence between upper and intermediate castes (belonging to the cluster of 128 castes) erupted. This violence racked almost the whole of Bihar and continued throughout 1977-78. In particular, the first elections to Block Panchayat Samities, in 1978, sparked a bloody battle between the Backward classes and the Forward castes. This bloody battle left more than one hundred persons dead.

Behind the widespread violence on reservation issue was "The perception by the Backwards that the Forwards were not prepared to give them 'justice' by conceding representation potentially equal to their share in the population" (Interview, Karpoori Thakur, Patna, 26 Oct 1979 cited in Francine R. Frankel, 1989:110). On their parts, the Forward, already experiencing an erosion of social prestige, economic influence, and political power at the villages, thought that that reservation of jobs for backward classes would destroy

their overall dominance in society and power at the state. Their reaction to the government move was, therefore, violent and very widespread (Hetukar Jha, 1984; Blair, 1980, 1984; Frankel, 1989).

Besides reacting violently against the reservation policy the forward castes also stepped up their efforts to destabilize Thakur's Ministry and within a few months toppled it. In the succeeding Janata government, headed by Ramsunder Das, a Harijan, the forwards regained their dominance in the Ministry. They received 50 percent of Ministerial posts, while the Backwards were pushed back to 20 percent (Blair, 1980:69). The election of 1980 and 1985, marked by widespread incidents of violence and booth capturing, did not shake the Forward hold but rather strengthened it. Karpoor Thakur failed to forge a Backward coalition that could capitalize on its demographic dominance to win and hold power. The upper castes benefitted from the division within the backward castes and reasserted their dominant position. This is evident from the fact that, in 1980, 43 percent of Ministers were drawn from the forward castes, while in 1985, 62 percent of Ministers were drawn from the Forward castes. The backward caste representation was only 18 percent in 1980 and 25 percent in 1985 (Francine R. Frankel, 1989:116-117).

On the whole, the introduction of universal adult

franchise brought about far-reaching changes in the political structure of Bihar. The hegemony of upper castes in the arena of politics came under threat as the upper backward castes constituting of the Yadavas, Kurmis and the Koeris started competing with the upper castes in the arena of politics. By the 1960s they became major rivals of the upper castes in the electoral politics. The emergence of backward castes as a powerful force and the implementation of reservation policy led the state, by the late 1970s, towards a politics of polarization. The state itself became the prize over which the rival caste groups were fighting. Each side came to believe that political power could be used to protect their respective interests. Under these circumstances, 'casteism' among politicians was converted into 'criminalization' of politics, as each side sought to make use of armed hoodlums for capturing polling booths at election time. As such the election held in 1980 and 1985 saw widespread violence in which several persons were killed. However, the upper castes are still in the dominant position in spite of their numerical inferiority. This is due to the fact that so far the backward castes have been unable to organize themselves into a unified front. Besides the upper castes have better contacts with the state machinery which sometimes functions as their ally and makes their position more strengthened.

Condition of Scheduled caste:

While the backward castes struggles against the upper castes were mostly confined to the electoral arena, legislative assembly etc., for the enforcement of certain policies beneficial to them, at the village level a more violent repression was perpetrated by them to suppress the discontents and grievances of the scheduled castes, a majority of whom were agricultural labourers. It is important to note that neither land reform measures nor developmental programmes brought any remarkable change in the condition of the scheduled castes. They are still economically, educationally, socially and politically backward and are considered as 'out-castes' by caste Hindus on account of certain polluting occupations. Most of them are landless agricultural labourers and live under the condition much below the poverty line. The following table gives details about the percentage of the scheduled caste cultivators and agricultural labourers in Bihar in 1971.

Table - 2

Occupation	% among total labourers	% among total scheduled caste workers
Cultivators	43.3	11.45
Agricultural Labourers	38.9	77.15
Total	82.2	88.60

Source: First report of the Backward classes commission concerning the scheduled castes, Government of Bihar, Patna, 1975, P. 39.



The above table speaks of the miserable condition of the scheduled castes in Bihar. Majority of them are forced to depend on the upper and middle level landed castes for earning their livelihood. The upper and the middle level landed castes are exploitative in their attitude, orientation and behaviour and the labourers are bound to remain in the sub-human conditions of work. They are not well paid for the services they render. Even the minimum wage fixed by the government first in 1948 and then revised twice in 1966-67 and 1974-75 is not paid to them. What is found in most of the villages in Bihar is that the landless Harijan labourers are given just one and a half kg of coarse food grains which is much below the rate fixed by the government (Arun Sinha, 1977e: 2037). The plots of land allotted to them by the government, in many cases, have been captured by the upper and middle caste landowners (L.P. Vidyarthi, 1977 : 125-26).

In addition to poor wages, agricultural labourers also suffers from under employment. R.P. Sinha (1990:41) observes, "Agricultural labourers are known to have paid-employment only for about 200 days in a year, most of them are casual workers without continuous employment, working irregularly, intermittently and seasonally". Lack of employment opportunities outside primary sector, under-employment and low wages in agriculture often forces the landless labourers to take loan from the moneylanders and the landowners who charge exorbitant

rates of interest. In some places it is as high as up to 80 percent (Sumanta Banerjee, 1980: 5). On failure/<sup>to</sup> repay the loan with interest, the labourers are forced to work as bonded labourers for generations. A recent survey by a team of researchers from ANS Institute of Social Studies, Patna, brings home the fact that even as late as 1981-82, there is existence of bonded labour, widespread practice of sharecropping and usurious exploitation in the plains of north and south Bihar (see, Pradhan H. Prasad, 1987:848).

Another form of exploitation varies from 'begar' or forced labour for the landowner's private chores to the imposition of levies on the tenants to make them bear the cost of ceremonies in their employer's house on special occasions. On the social front they suffer from social exploitation especially sexual molestation of Harijan women labourers by upper caste landowners. Even today they are socially discriminated as they are not allowed to draw water from the village wells, reserved for upper castes and are not allowed to enter the compounds of the 'pukka' houses of their employer.

The general picture that emerges from all this is one of nightmaris poverty, humiliation and oppression inflicted upon them by a minority of rich landowners belonging to the upper and the middle castes.

The universal adult franchise in their electoral participation has, nodoubt, energised them for a new scale of social participation and social mobilization. But in every real situation, politics is articulated by the upper strata of society as mentioned above. In most of the cases in remote villages in rural Bihar the universal adult-franchise has fitted to the old patron-client relationship where patrons manipulate votes for their own benefits. In most of the cases the members of the scheduled caste are not allowed to cast their votes. The government policy of the "protective discrimination" has hardly benefitted the scheduled castes masses and has led only to the elite formation among them (see, Sachchidananda, 1974, 1977). Moreover, those who constitute the elite group hardly identify themselves with the masses of their caste and on most of the occasions they join hands with the upper castes and the emergent dominant castes of Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris.

In short, the relationship of the scheduled castes with the upper castes and the new rich backward castes has basically been of superordinate and subordinate types. It has been already pointed out that the various land reform measures and the developmental programmes benefitted only the upper and the upper layers of middle caste peasantry. These modernizing forces have turned the middle caste peasantry into exploiters and oppressors. The new emerging middle caste peasantry

constituting of Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris, is more aggressive than that of the traditional landlords. The middle caste peasantry together with upper caste landowners, despite the emergence of a so-called modern democratic state, still enjoys and exercises the absolute feudal power in their respective areas. Sinha observes that "big landlords .... hold near-absolute economic, social and political power in their respective areas... the big landlord is virtually the raja of his area. He possesses one-fourth or more of the total land of his village. He lives like an aristocrat in a large brick house. He employs the largest number of both slave and free labourers for domestic and farm work. He maintains a small private army equipped with guns, spears, lathis and other weapons and himself owns a licensed gun ..... The big landlord-raja ....(belongs) to the caste of the dominant section of landlords in the village. To the social, economic and military power of the raja, 'democracy'... added political power. He has captured the instruments of local government. He now commands the panchayats and thus the various executive bodies at the block level. He has the services of an obsequious police force at the local thana" (Arun Sinha, 1977e: 2037).

This absolute feudal power of the dominant section of society was and even today is used in the exploitation and suppression of the poor peasantry and landless agricultural labourers. If the poor peasantry and the landless agricultural

labourers raise their voice for their genuine rights, they are suppressed through all mechanisms including the physical force and coercion. For instance, in a village in Patna district when a masonry worker requested for regular payment of wages, his hands were chopped off (Nirmal Sengupta, 1982: 31). This type of oppression and repression has become a reality in rural Bihar. But the ongoing exploitation and oppression at the same time coincides with the spread of modern values such as universalism, egalitarianism, humanism, secularism, distributive justice etc. These modern values on the one hand have weakened the legitimation of social and ritual hierarchy by Brahmanical ideology and on the other have made the lower castes and poor classes people conscious of their rights and deprivation. Awareness of rights and deprivation induces them to oppose their exploitation and oppression inflicted on them by the upper and the upper layer of middle castes and rich classes people. In recent years they have started resisting against their exploitation by organizing themselves which have resulted into the outbursts of violence at the different places in rural Bihar. However, this issue will be taken up in the next chapter.

#### CHAPTER IV    AGRARIAN UNREST AND CONFLICT                   IN BIHAR

In recent years tension, conflict and violence have become a common practice in Bihar. Although tension has manifested in the different forms since the very beginning of the colonial rule, its intensity has got a tremendous momentum in the recent past. In alarming intensity of the problem has tightened the nerves of the political elites, ruling authority and bureaucracy on the one hand, and has led the social scientists to construct new ideological framework, theorization and characterization of the problem on the other. The theoretical and ideological formulations available for the analysis of the problem are mainly of two types i.e. class analysis and caste analysis but these types of formulations fall in the reductionist perspective. In fact, both caste and class are inextricably interwoven in the society of Bihar. In other words, "society in Bihar is not articulated only in caste terms but also in terms of class" (Arvind N.Das, 1984 : 1616).

We have noted in the earlier chapter that the land reforms and other developmental programmes did not benefit all the segments of society. The consequences of land reform measures and other developmental programmes have been uneven resulting in pauperization and marginalization of many and embourgeoisement of a few farmers. The greatest beneficiaries of the land reform measures and the other developmental

programmes have been the middle caste peasantry. The condition of the landless and small tenants drawn mainly from the scheduled castes became further miserable, for, the land reforms led to their widespread eviction. The emerging middle caste peasantry consisting of Yadavas, Kurmis and the Koeris, having derived maximum benefit from the various developmental programmes, have become more aggressive than the traditional exploiters drawn from the upper castes. As a result, the increased social tensions have started exhibiting themselves in a number of sporadic agrarian movements, conflict and violence in different parts of the Bihar. The Sathi Farm struggle, the Jhaki Movement started by the East Champaran Kisan Sabha, the Land Grab Movement and the Naxalite Movement are testimonials of the same. These agrarian movements falsify the view of the peasant apathy.

The Sathi Farm Struggle was one of the first agrarian movements in the series in 1950s and 1960s after independence which was not directed against the zamindars as such but against the Congress regime. The peasants opposed the Congress policy to settle the lands to the rich. The left parties provided leadership and opposed the Congress move. The movement spread out from the Sathi Farm to other adjacent to champaran areas also. In 1960s although the movement of the Sathi Farm relegated to the background, it remained a symbol of unity of the peasantry in its movements in the later phase.

The Jhaki Movement of East Champaran during 1960s was more fundamental because it was a direct manifestation of the ongoing exploitation and social oppression by the landlords on the poor peasants and agricultural labourers. The issues like Begar (forced unpaid labour), sexual exploitation of the poor's women folk, abusing and beating up the labourers, non-payment of the prescribed minimum wages etc. were very much irritating for the rural poor. Under the dynamic leadership of Ramashray Singh, they got organized and started resisting the traditional feudal, and unquestioned authority and hegemony of the upper castes. This movement took up first the social issues like the refusal of referring the intracommunity disputes to the landlords, wearing shoes in their presence, continuing to sit on the cot etc. whenever they were approached by the landlords (Arvind N. Das, 1983a, 1983b). All these became the popular ways of registering the passive resistance to and defying the traditional authority of the upper castes landlords. Later on, the economic issues were also taken up and the passive resistance was transformed into an active resistance. This finally led to the victory of the landless agricultural labourers.

The aroused hunger for land among the poor peasants and landless labourers in the post-independence period manifested, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in the form of the Land Grab Movement led by the Communist Party of India. In the middle of 1960s the peasants were forcibly occupying the land. This movement was very much strong in Purnea, Muzaffarpur, and



Mowghyr districts. The government was determined to suppress the movement through adopting different repressive measures but, despite the repressive measures of the state, the peasant resistance could not be checked. The peasants kept on occupying more and more surplus lands available through ceiling on land, from which they had been evicted in the past. But after sometimes the movement got disorganized due to both the state suppression and the disorganizing role played by the left parties themselves (Arvind N. Das, 1983a : 212-15). But what is more alarming for the state on the one hand and the landlords and rich peasants on the other is the Naxalite Movements. The Naxalites have been operating more strongly in seven districts of Gaya, Zehanabad, Patna, Bhojpur, Aurangabad, Nalanda and Rohtas in the South central Bihar. The support-base of Naxalite movement is among the landless labourers, especially Harijans and the lower section of other backward castes.

The growth of Naxalism in Bihar is neither accidental nor transitory but a natural manifestation of the inherent contradictions in the society itself. Secondly, its growth can also be attributed to the failure of the state in managing the affairs of the poor peasantry and agricultural labourers through the normal political processes. This situation, thus, has created a ground for new forms of militant opposition to the existing order and as a result, the Naxalism, has come as a hope of radical politics and struggle for social justice.

The Naxalite movement provided a radical left ideological and programmatic framework and mobilised the masses for class action. Initially, the Naxalites themselves carried out armed attack on the most hated landlords. Subsequently, they formed guerrilla squads in which poor and landless peasants played an important leadership role.

In the beginning the resistance of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers belonging to the lower and the untouchable castes was against the 'social oppression', especially sexual molestation of Harijan women by the upper and the middle caste landowners. In addition, "Peasants (also) rebelled against age-old feudal traditions of not sitting on cots, not wearing good cloths, etc. The youth were the forerunners. Peasants struggle for their social rights spread to broader fields. For example, the struggle of Harijan poor and landless peasants for entering temples..." (Liberation, May 1981). Subsequently, the struggle turned to economic issues, particularly the demand for higher wages, homestead land, or redistribution of government held wasteland, occupancy rights of the poor peasantry and landless labourers on the land etc. In tackling these issues, they showed and used militancy.

In order to meet the challenges of the poor peasantry and landless labourers and counter the militancy of the Naxalites the landowners have organised their respective caste 'senas'

(Private armies). For instance, in Bhojpur - Rohtas region the Rajputs have formed the 'kurwar-sena'; the 'Yadavas of Gaya, Patna and Nalanda have formed the Loriksena'. But the most notorious sena is the 'Bhoomi sena' formed as the kisan suraksha samiti by the Kurmi landlords of Patna, Gaya and Nalanda districts in the early 1970s in Poonpooon. This sena was formed to suppress the militant peasant movement of the area. However, the caste complexion of these senas is not totally homogeneous and there is a certain mixture of castes, depending upon the caste composition of the landowning class.

With the coming up of these senas, violence in Bihar has now achieved the status of an organized sector activity, systematic, regulated, even regimented. These caste senas, "representing.... the organization of repression..(and) privatisation of the coercive functions of the state" (Arvind N. Das, 1986 : 15), are pitched against the rural poor. Equipped with large quantity of illegal explosive arms these senas perpetrate violence to suppress the genuine demands of the poor peasants and landless labourers. A study of newspaper reports reveals that more than 1000 agricultural labourers and poor peasants were killed during 1976-86 (D.K. Singh et al, 1988). The atrocities on scheduled castes have also been reported to be on increase in recent years. In the year 1972 only 98 cases of atrocities on Harijans were recorded by the police. The figure rose to 109 in 1973, 259 in 1974, 300 in 1975 and approximately 1200 in 1976 (Arun Sinha, 1977b). After

1977, there has been a marked rise in the number and intensity of such incidents. The following table gives the details of such cases.

Table - 3 : Atrocities committed on the Harijans  
during 1977 - 87

Year	Murder	Grievoushurt	Rape	Arson	Other offences
1977	48	128	76	146	719
1978	63	146	76	260	1366
1979	45	148	78	321	1455
1980	63	*	*	*	*
1981	*	*	*	*	*
1982	72	205	97	321	1378
1983	71	152	87	267	1232
1984	95	179	83	201	1287
1985	87	*	*	*	*
1986	88	*	81	*	*
1987	70	99	*	*	*

\* indicate not known

Source : Figures for 1977-80 are those calculated by Janak Singh, 'Plight of Harijans in Bihar' : victims of unbridled Repression", The Times of India, New Delhi, May 5, 1980 ; Figures for 1982-84 are based on official report, cited in K.S. Subramanian, 1987, Mainstream, July 25 ;

Figures for 1985-87 are those calculated by D.K. Singh et al., "caste conflict in Rural Bihar", unpublished paper, Dept. of Sociology, Patna University, 1988.

From the above table it is clear that the incident of atrocities on Harijans have kept on increasing over the period of time. Apart from this, large scale massacre of landless labourers and poor peasants belonging to the lower and the untouchable castes have also taken place in the various districts of South Central Bihar. Some of the places known for large scale massacres are : Belchi, Pipra, Madanpur in Patna district, Akodhi, Brahampura in Bhojpur district; Kargha, Parasbigha, Koila, Kansara in Zehanabad district; Gaini in Aurangabad district etc. (Nageshwar Prasad, 1985; Arun Sinha, 1977a, 1980). Counter violence by the landless labourers and poor peasants, labelled as Naxalites, are also in evidence. For example, only two days after the Pipra incident the Naxalites attacked Dohia village, the village of the landlords involved in the Pipra carnage and killed two landlords (Nageshwar Prasad, 1985).

The counter violence<sup>8</sup> by poor peasants escalated after 1977. The Harijans began to kill prominent persons in the villages, usually panchayat Mukhias and other leading landowners, as a matter of prestige. The result was open violence on both sides. Bihar government in its "notes on extremist activities - affected areas" reported that as many as 47 out of a total of 587 blocks spread over 14 districts were affected by the communist

extremist' movement by May 1982 (Arvind N. Das, 1987 : 7). Pradhan H. Prasad, on the basis of the government's "notes", estimates that 10.28 per cent of the villages, 8.23 percent of the population, 7.24 percent of the area, 9.46 percent of the net sown area and 11.28 percent of the gross sown area had been affected by 'communist extremist' movement by May 1982 (Pradhan H. Prasad, 1987 : 851).

As regards the role of state, it is to be noted that wherever the violence erupts or conflict takes place between the landlords and the poor peasants and landless labourers, the state manifestly or latently supports the landlords and their senas in the name of suppressing the Naxalities. For instance, in Bhojpur the police supported the upper caste landlords and their armed 'syndicates' in their struggle against the armed agricultural labourers, primarily Harijans and some Ahirs. The landlords supported by the state government machinery went on assaulting the rural poor, killing them and destroying their property (Kalyan Mukherjee and Rajendra Yadav, 1982). In fact, the government can not tolerate the Naxalite movement. In 1985, the government mounted a massive counter insurgency operation known as "operation Task-force" to swell the tide of peasant unrest. The specially trained armed forces were deployed in the six districts of central Bihar where the peasant organisations were active. Here, the state appear as an agent and institution representing the interests of the landlords

and rich peasantry instead of protecting the poor peasantry and landless agricultural labourers. The Arwal Massacre by the police force is an attestation of this fact. It exposes that "The state government was no longer willing to tolerate the struggle of the landless and the poor peasants for their democratic rights (e. g. minimum wages for agricultural labourers) and was keen to perpetuate the landlord's rule in the region" (Report of the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR), Calcutta, EPW, May 31, 1986 : 949). Actually, the Arwal Massacre "was an act to terrorise and suppress the legal and democratic movement of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers in order to protect the landlords from their onslaught" (APDR, EPW, 1986 : 949). So, the state government and the landlords become aligned to each other and try to suppress the growing demands of the poor sections of the society.

But despite the repressive tendencies of the state the Naxalite movement in these areas in particular and other parts of the state in general has succeeded in exercising pressure on the landlords and rich peasants to raise wages substantially. Now, the landlords avoid unnecessary violence. This situation has developed due to the peasants militancy operating under the different radical left organizations. There are three important Naxalite groups : first is the CPI (ML) Binod Mishra

group which sponsors The Indian People's Front (IPF); The second is the Party Unity Group which works through The Mazdoor Kisan Sangarsh Samiti (MKSS) led by Vinayan; and the third is The Maoist-communist Center (MCC). Though their military has built up a substantial pressure on the landlords and rich peasants in recent years as mentioned above, there is a dangerous tendency of fission among them on the one hand and their shifting loyalty (class to caste) on the other. Now, the Naxalites are getting divided on caste lines and this is a severe threat of diluting the class war into caste war. The killings of Rajputs in Baghaura and Dalelchak villages in Aurangabad districts in May 1987 by the MCC on behalf of Yadavas show the negative tendency of their diverting from the real issues. This situation prompted Umadhar Singh, a veteran Naxalite leader belonging to the communist organisation of India (Marxist - Leninist) led by Kaun Sanyal, to observe that "There is no class consciousness left among the Naxalites in Bihar. The infection of caste virus in them has reached alarming proportions" (A Report "Naxalite enmeshed in caste Politics", The Indian Express, Jan. 5, 1988). It is, however, important to note that the caste line of the movement may not be always intended. Though the corresponding social and economic hierarchy creates confusion about the caste question, the underlying current may be around the economic issue or feudal exploitation. Therefore it would be wrong to assume that all the Naxalites groups operating for the economic and social justice in South-



central Bihar are essentially caste based organizations. Instead they still have class content.

The ongoing struggle between the haves and the have-nots poses immense difficulties of characterisation. The frequent outbursts of violence at different places get manifested as 'caste tension', 'caste conflict' and 'caste violence' but their analysis reveals the different fact. The caste conflicts between the upper and the lower (scheduled) castes or between the middle (Yadavas, Kurmis, Koeris etc.) and the lower castes are basically 'class conflict' both in orientation and action (Arun Sinha, 1977e, 1978a, 1978b). Even conflicts between the upper castes and the middle castes are not essentially caste conflicts. They also have economic and political interests which fall in the category of class. The emergence of the new rich peasantry constituting of the Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris has not only provided a potential threat to the hegemonic positions of the upper castes but it has also replaced them in the different sectors. Since upper castes do not want to lose their hegemonic positions, their sense of insecurity and resultant arrogance have led them to take offensive steps with the help of their caste senas.

The conflicts between the upper and middle castes have also resulted from their clash of interests regarding the agricultural labourers. Both the upper and the middle castes try to control

and monopolize the agricultural labour-force. This has led manifestly or latently, to caste conflicts. So far as the lowest rung of peasantry especially the scheduled castes are concerned, both the upper and the middle castes are equally repressive for them. For the purpose, they often collaborate with each other in a very subtle manner. Generally, the violence against the poor peasantry is perpetrated in a particular region by the economically dominant sections of the society and they are invariably the Brahmins, Rajputs, Blumians, Yadavas and Kurmis. However, the economic content of the caste conflicts becomes clearer when we analyse the pattern of conflicts and violence that have taken place in the recent years.

Table - 4

CASTE VIOLENCE IN BIHAR

Year	Name		Organised violence		Issues
	District	Place	Perpetuators caste (class)	Victims' caste (class)	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1977	Patna	Belchi	Upper backward (Landlord)	Scheduled Caste (Agricultural Labourers)	demand for wage and poss- ession over land and social oppression
1977	Jehanabad	Kargha	Upper caste (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	- Do -

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1977	Jehanabad	Gopalpur	Upper caste (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Demand for wage increase
1977	Bhojpur	Brahampura	Upper caste (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Share croppers)	Demand for wage increa- se and share croppers rights.
1978	Jehanabad	Koila	Upper back- ward (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Demand for wage increa- se and poss- ession over land
1979	Rohtas	Samharta	Upper caste (Landlord)	Schedule caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Demand for wage increase and land dispute.
1979	Bhojpur	Bajitpur	Upper backward (Landlord)	Schedule caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Sharecropper right over land
1979	Bhojpur	Raghun- athpur	Upper back- ward (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	DO
1979	Bhojpur	Barhampur	Upper back- ward (Landlord)	Schedule caste (Agricultural Labourers and sharecropper)	Demand for wage increa- se, share- cropping rights & social oppression
1980	Patna	Pipra	Upper back- ward (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Demand for wage increase
1980	Jehanabad	Parasbigha	Upper Caste (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers & sharecropper)	Sharecropp- er's right

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1980	Gaya	Dohia	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Upper caste (Landlord)	Retaliation
1982	Rohtas	Gaini	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Upper caste (Landlord)	Retaliation
1984	Rohtas	Gaganbigha	Upper caste (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Wage increase
1984	Aurangabad	Ambari	Upper caste (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Wage increase & land dispute
1985	Munger	Laxmi-pur	Upper backward (Middle-peasant)	Lower backward (Agricultural Labourers share-croppers)	Wage increase share-cropper's rights and land dispute)
1986	Aurangabad	Gaini	Upper caste (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers, share-croppers)	Wage increase, share-cropper's right and social oppression
1986	Rohtas	Bharat-pur	Upper backward (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Wage increase
1986	Rohtas	Jeena-pur	Upper backward (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Wage increase

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1986	Patna	Pali-ganj	Upper backward (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Land dispute, sharecropping right
1986	Jehanabad	Kansara	Upper caste (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Wage increase, land dispute, sharecropping right
1986	Rohtas	Paras-dila	Upper caste (Landlord)	Upper backward (Middle Peasant)	Land dispute
1986	Aurangabad	Darmi-an	Upper backward (Middle Peasant)	Upper caste (Landlord)	Land dispute, social oppression
1987	Aurangabad	Chotki chech-ain	Upper caste (Landlord)	Upper backward (Middle Peasant)	Land dispute
1987	Aurangabad	Dalel-chak-Bagh-aura	Upper backward (Middle Peasant)	Upper caste (Middle Peasant)	Retaliation
1987	Patna	Madan-pur	Upper backward (Middle Peasant)	Upper caste (Landlord)	Land dispute
1988	Jehana-bad	Nonhi-Nagwan	Upper caste and upper backward (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (Agricultural Labourers)	Wage increase, sharecropping right
1988	Jehana-bad	Demuha-khagri	Upper backward (Landlord)	Scheduled caste (sharecroppers)	sharecropping rights.

Source: Figures for (1), (2), (3), (4) and (5) are taken from Pradhan H. Prasad, "Poor-Peasant Movement in central Bihar" Journal of social and economic studies, 1988. Figures for (6) are mine.

Table - 4 reveals the patterns of caste conflicts or caste violence. It is evident from the table that the scheduled castes who are generally agricultural labourers have remained the victims in most of the cases and the perpetrator of violence have invariably been landlords drawn from the upper and the upper middle castes. Almost all the cases of violence and conflicts have occurred on the issues of wage, sharecropping, land disputes etc. Only three major cases have taken place on the issue of retaliation and the victims have been from the upper castes. In Dohiya and Gaini the scheduled castes retaliated against the upper caste. In Dalelchak - Baghaura the Yadavas retaliated against the Rajputs who had been responsible for the chotki-chhechani massacre of the Yadavas. The retaliation is not confined to the middle caste poor peasants only but the scheduled castes and other agricultural labourers have also developed audacity to retaliate against their unquestioned master's feudal authority as stated earlier.

To sum up, it can be said that the incidents of conflict and violence are structurally related to the process of development and the sharpening of contradictions

therein. The relationship between the process of development and the incident of violence and conflicts becomes more evident when we categorise the districts of Bihar in terms of high violence districts and the low violence districts. The high violence districts are Patna, Gaya, Jehanabad, Aurangabad, Rohtas, Nalanda and Bhojpur while the other districts are low violence district. High violence districts are characterised by greater penetration of new agricultural technology and by greater inequality in the distribution of landholdings. They have higher average cropping intensities with more abundant irrigation facilities that allow land to be used for more than one crop. The high violence districts are also the primary centres of investment on private tube-wells required for the adoption of the high-yielding seed and fertilizer technology that became available after 1966. By 1979-80, a modest 20 percent of the main rice crop was cultivated under the high yielding seeds (Bihar Statistical Handbook, 1980 : 46). The increasing use of mechanical technology in agricultural production has displaced labour and have thus increased the pressure on unemployment. The consumption of fertilizer also differs between the two groups of districts and the high violence districts have a higher proportion of electrified villages. Use of electricity is a characteristic of development and a requirement for further growth. The low violence districts

have fewer tractors per 1000 hectares of net area sown (Kuldeep Mathur, 1988 : 167). Thus, the two groups of districts differ in several characteristics of development. The high violence districts are more developed. The high violence districts also have greater proportions of scheduled castes in their populations, a situation that may threaten the upper castes. Finally, there is inequality in the distribution of landholdings. The average size of holdings, the proportion of the number of holdings below one hectare, and the proportion of area in plots under one hectare highlight significant differences between the two groups (Kuldeep Mathur, 1988 : 167).

Secondly, the process of modernization and development has not broken down feudal traditions completely. The green revolution has been superimposed on economic relationships which are not entirely commercialized. Persistence of feudal economic relations accentuate violence. Further, as green revolution has thrown out the attached labourers and small tenants from the land, the clear cut polarisation has taken place in the countryside. In short, the process of development has accentuated income disparities and thus has added 'fuel to the fire' in the strife-torn society.



Thirdly, the patterns of tension, conflict and violence in the post-independent Bihar have some continuity with those in the pre-independence period. In both the phases some extra economic issues such as caste factors, are common (Arun Sinha, 1977 d). The traditional exploitative caste system has taken an organizational form for the aggregation and articulation of interests and exploitation of the modern opportunities. At the same time the caste has become a common platform for mobilizing the masses to protest the ongoing exploitation and oppression. However, the basic point of difference between the two phases is that in the late 1960s and 1970s the participants in the agrarian movements came mainly from the lower orders of the peasantry. These were poor peasants, agricultural labourers, share-croppers etc. who generally belonged to the scheduled castes. They have been fighting not against the absentee landlordism as it was during the Zamindari period but against the new rich peasantry (Arun Sinha, 1977). Secondly, the aspiration for higher caste status is not a major issue of the sporadic or organized movement as the lower castes hardly bother about their caste status. Thirdly, the lowest rung of the peasantry consisting of the scheduled castes has become more assertive to its economic, political and social rights. There is sharp growth of consciousness among them which has developed from

the below due to the spread of modern institutions and the value systems. They have become more organized and resistant to the exploitative conditions.

Fourthly, the issues of conflict have remained both economic and social. At a particular period of time, social issues have precedence over economic issues and in other times, the economic issues have appeared as the determining factors of the conflict and violence in different parts of the state. And the incidents of conflict and violence have appeared both as caste conflict and class conflict. Fifthly, over the time, the nature and issues of conflict have kept on changing. In different villages of Bhojpur district, for instance, the conflict occurred between the scheduled and the upper castes in 1970s was mainly on the economic issues but now the fight is directed against the social oppression. The poor in this region have developed self-dignity and social respect and they characterise the ongoing struggle as a "Ijjat Ki Larai" (struggle for dignity). Their self-respect gets manifested as "If I do not get ijat, what is point of living" (Arvind N. Das, 1983 b : 226).

But it does not mean that the economic issues have altogether been replaced by the social issues. The ever time exploitation of the landless labourers and the spread

of modernizing forces have resulted into the consciousness from the below which is providing unity among them on the one hand and calling for class action on the other. In this situation, they are prepared even to sacrifice their life for the genuine cause. It is evident from the murder of Gambhira, a leader of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers who accepted the incident as the natural outcome in the process of establishing a Garib Raj (rule of the poor). The natural reaction of his young wife and the old mother was, "He died for the Garib Raj" (Arun Sinha, 1977 c).

CHAPTER : V

Modernization, structural contradiction and  
emerging conflict : Discussion and Conclusion

Bihar, like most of the Indian states, has been a typical example of the closed system of stratification. It has been so because before 1947, and especially till the abolition of zamindari system different dimensions of social inequality such as caste, class and power coincided. The upper caste groups, by virtue of their superior ritual and economic status, held sway over society. The existing inequalities in terms of caste, class and power got legitimacy by the value system of society.

Modernization in India started with the British contact. But the colonial modernization reinforced the existing inequalities. As discussed in chapter II, the most exploitative agrarian structure resulted from the permanent settlement Act of 1793. This Act created a vast inequality in the society and provided opportunities to the zamindars and landlords to exploit the masses. The traditional caste structure was fitted into the new agrarian structure and there existed a correspondence between the agrarian and social hierarchies. These people who constituted the higher position in the caste hierarchy also owned major material resources. Hence caste and class appeared as converging categories. The upper caste groups, because of

their control over economic and social resources, also took unproportionate advantage of the newly created opportunities such as educational facilities, recruitment to the fields of politics, Government services, professions etc. and left far behind the underprivileged social sectors. At the same time, the spread of education, introduction of modern technology and the impact of modern politics coupled with the spread of universalistic, achievement oriented and functionally specific value orientations, albeit limited, also activated the underprivileged caste groups, brought to them the realisation of the deprivations they suffered, and spurred them on to organized action to mitigate these deprivations. As a result, the underprivileged caste groups launched several agrarian and caste based movements in the 1920s and 1930s. The privileged castes responded negatively to these movements. Consequently, violent conflict took place among them.

The period after independence enlarged the social base of modernization and set in motion social, economic and political forces which had far reaching consequences for all segments of society. A number of measures like introduction of land reforms, initiation of community development projects, extension of irrigation facilities, power supply etc. were adopted to modernizing rural economy so as to eradicate rural poverty, raise income and standard of living of the people and reduce the gap between the rich and the poor in villages. It is beyond doubt that these measures yielded

positive results leading to increase in production, average capita income and overall development of the villages. Despite the fact, the rural poverty and inequality have increased rather than lessened. In 1969-70, 52 per cent of the population was below poverty line, but after 8 years (1977-78) it went up to 57 per cent. This shows that during eight years 5% of the total population was pushed back to poverty. The economic inequality in Bihar is such that 10% people from the below get only 1.8% of the total income, while only 1% at the top grab 9% of the total income. In other words, 60% of population is getting only 20.8% of the income, whereas 20% of the upper class people get 53% of the national income.

Our analysis in chapter-3 reveals that the most significant contradiction the rural structure inherits is the social and economic inequality and poverty. In political life we acquire equality while in social and economic life we sustain inequality. Though, the traditional institutions of exploitation, the zamindari system, the bonded labour etc., have been abolished yet deprivation and exploitation of poor continue. The changes brought about by land reform measures, Green revolution and other developmental programmes have affected different groups differently. In fact, the benefit of the modernisation has gone into the hands of privileged few, with increase in the level of modernization the landlords have grown more and more capitalist in nature. They are day by day accumulating wealth. At the same time the condition of poor peasants and agricultural labourers

has deteriorated sharply. Their declining social and economic states in relation to the upper stratum of society and the resulting exploitation have generated sharp contradiction in the agrarian structure.

The rising poverty and widening income gap are the major contradictions in the rural society. They largely breed political violence and instability. People by now have become conscious, educated and aware of their rights. They can no more be held together by birth either in the name of varna dharm or through preaching the principles of karma and punarjanna. Various legal and developmental measures adopted by the Government with a view to enhance the social status of the weaker sections have eroded the Brahmanical ideology which legitimised the socio-economic inequality. Consequently, the underprivileged sections of the society are no longer ready to live under conditions of extreme poverty and inequality. The rising poverty and deepening income gaps are, thus, the major reasons for the growing discontent and tension in villages.

There has emerged a new powerful class in the rural social structure. It is known as middle class. This class is constituted mainly of the peasants from different castes. However, it is the big and the medium peasants of the upper middle castes who held dominance over this class. They have achieved economic power as the land from the higher

and the lower castes is passing to them especially since Independence. This new class after accumulating significant power and strength tends to gain some kind of domination over the lower class and exploit their services for which the latter is not prepared. The lower class mainly comprises lower castes people who until recently have been doing the services of the higher castes. The upper class is consisted of a few capitalist and feudal landlords coming mostly from the upper castes. It refrains admission of the affluent peasants especially from the middle and the lower castes.

The emergence of the oppressive kulaks from amongst the middle castes like Yadavas and Kurmis has added a new dimension to the whole situation of tension and unrest in the agrarian social structure. On the one hand, it is under conflict with the upper class-castes in its attempt to be equal to or surpass the latter in political and economic power. On the other hand, the middle caste peasantry by denying equal treatment to the lower class-castes and in an attempt to exploit their services has invited frequent clashes with them.

The three classes compete for political power to attain social, economic and educational progress. In the course of modernisation the sources of inherited inequalities whether of a social, political or economic order are under erosion and access to opportunities have become possible.



for all the people on the basis of their specialised knowledge and individual merit. Moreover, the government's policy of protective discrimination helps people of the scheduled castes to occupy higher positions in social structure. This policy together with adult franchise have energised the scheduled castes for a new scale of social participation and social mobilization. It has also generated conflict between the upper castes and the scheduled castes.

Despite the operation of modernizing forces, caste still provides a major social matrix around which the different aspects of rural life revolve. It has taken an organizational and associational form which is utilised as an effective mechanism for the interest aggregation and interest articulation. Today, it is a base for the democratic political processes. Caste being an institution of masses help the elite secure a sound political base. Those who are economically better off revitalize and reinforce caste sentiment and caste consciousness for advancing their class interest. Thus, we see that the elements like power of number reinforce caste as a basic tool for the mobilization of the masses in the present political process. In addition, the policy of protective discrimination which recognizes caste as the unit for preferential treatment, serves as major source of contradiction in the political modernization of people.

Modernization leads to greater social and political awareness. People who are even at the bottom of the system have become aspirant. But there is a wide gap between the level of aspiration and the level of achievement of the people. The gap is more pronounced in the case of lower caste-class people. The lower class people aspire for equality and dignity but gets degradation, inequality and indigence. The accumulated feelings of continued deprivation and helplessness on the part of a large number of have nots crystallize the contradiction between the political equality at the one end and economic indigence, social degradation at the other. In other words, the lower caste-class people feel that their status has arisen at least political but in the social sphere, they still remain the same Harijan whose touch pollutes and who are expected to do all sorts of menial services for the upper strata. Thus there seems to be inconsistency between the political and social status.

The political and social crises in recent past in Bihar reflect the uprising of the middle castes and their confrontation with the lower and the upper castes. A major reason behind these disturbances is the non-inclusion of the affluent elites from the lower and the middle castes into the upper class dominated by the upper castes people. Even the poor and low educated people of the upper castes

discriminate against the lower and the middle castes elite and assign them an inferior position for the latter occupy a low place in ritual status as compared to the former. The denial of the place a man deserves, by virtue of his merit on the secular matters, in the social structure and for which constitution also makes a guarantee, is the most seeming contradiction throughout rural Bihar. Thus, it is the mobile elites who, when not given passage to the next higher class, exploit caste sentiments to give rise to caste-cum-class struggle in society.

The rising middle caste peasantry is very oppressive in its treatment with the scheduled caste people. But the scheduled caste people also have started asserting for their identity and exercising their rights which have been given to them by the government. That is to say modernization has aroused consciousness among them. They are struggling for the enforcement of economic and social justice and are also fighting against the new rich exploitative and oppressive peasantry by organizing themselves.

The Naxalite movement in different parts of the south central Bihar is a natural outcome and manifestation of the situation. The issues like minimum wages, occupancy rights on land, social oppression etc. have organized the poor in the rural areas. A potential militancy, provided by the Naxalite movement has led the upper and middle

caste landlords to form their respective caste senas as mentioned in the previous chapter. With the coming up of these senas, violence in Bihar has now achieved the status of an organized sector activity. The perpetrators of violence in almost all cases have hailed from the upper and middle castes landlords and the victims are the lower castes agricultural labourers.

A close nexus between the landlords, police and the state Government gets exposed in a number of cases of violence and conflict. The police and the state government seem to be determined to suppress any democratic and genuine movement of the agricultural labourers and appear to be protecting the interests of the landlords. But the growing consciousness among the lower castes agricultural labourers has resulted into frequent outbursts of violence and conflict in different places in the state. Now, they are organizing to fight against their ongoing exploitation and social oppression and this has resulted into horizontal solidarity of castes among them. However, the lines of mobilization to fight the economic issue is still caste. That is why, the clash of economic interests mixed with the feudal ethos of caste sometimes takes the character of caste conflict. It is mainly because in Bihar, like other Indian states, the castes and other ritual elements dominate over the class consciousness. The caste system impedes

polarisation of masses into two distinct and mutually antagonistic classes as it hinders entrance of lower and middle castes elite to join the upper castes elite to give rise to a single upper class. Likewise, it also prevents the middle and the small peasants from the upper and the middle castes who are almost reduced to pauper to unite with the labourers of the low castes to fight against inequality and exploitation. It is because of the complex interplay of the social and economic factors that give rise to a peculiar combination of social and economic contradictions', with the result conflicts more frequently occur on caste lines instead of class lines.

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