

**DECENTRALISATION AND HEALTH:
A CASE STUDY OF HUSSEPUR PANCHAYAT,
BIHAR**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Award of the Degree*

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**Master of Philosophy
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CERTIFICATE

This dissertation entitled “**Decentralisation & Health: A Case Study of Hussepur Panchayat, Bihar**” is submitted by Nitu Singh in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy in Social Sciences in Health** of this university. This work is original and has not been submitted so far, in part or full, for any degree or diploma of this university or any other university.

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

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Chapter I

Introduction

Chapter I

Introduction

Recent literature on development strategies is dominated by discussions on decentralization and participation that was going on in the development debate since 1970's. Much of the literature on decentralization experiences in India and elsewhere suggests that even appropriate institutions designed for implementation of decentralization policy couldn't work independently, against, contradictory forces like social and political structures within which they are embedded. Thus it is argued by many scholars that decentralization carries an unrealistic dream of changing societies dominated by authoritarian and patronage politics. It is in this context, present study intends to understand the experience of decentralization, while looking into the evolution and implementation of 73rd constitutional amendment in the state of Bihar. Further it looks into the whole process of decentralization in relation to public health issues. Implementation of decentralization policy with focus on people's participation seems to be significant in the context of Bihar, as it is having extreme socio economic inequalities, which can generate oppression, desperation and conflicts, which makes the situation more difficult for liberal institutions to function. The study is exploratory in nature to understand the process of decentralization as well as health outcomes of the process. It is assumed that the decentralization process will definitely have an impact on health of the population; it needs to be understood from a people's perspective.

Research questions

The major questions that I would like to address in this study are how is 73rd constitutional amendment implemented in Bihar? To examine the alterations made in the amendment so as to address the state specific issues? What are the social and developmental barriers of Bihar and scope of intervention for panchayati Raj institutions? How far the system ensures peoples participation especially of the Dalits and women through Gram Sabhas or through any other means? Does the panchayat election ensure democracy or what are the efforts made by the government to ensure

democratic elections? Similarly how far the new amendment ensures women and dalit empowerment and what are the strategies developed to ensure their participation? How far major public health issues are addressed through Panchayati raj institutions? Keeping the above research questions in mind the major objectives of the present study is as follows:

1. To examine the socio-economic status of people in relation to caste.
2. To explore the local level health problems and various means to address those from a public health perspective.
3. To examine the local level electoral politics in the context of existing caste and class power relations.
4. To analyze people's participation especially of women and schedule castes and their perception on panchayat's functioning.
5. To explain the role of panchayat in promoting development programmes including health of the people.
6. To examine the power equations in the functioning of gram panchayat as to describe the problems of weaker and downtrodden section.

Rationale of the study

As India is an agricultural country with millions of population living in rural areas, it is necessary to understand how health of the rural population is affected by it. The rural population is considered to be the marginalized and underdeveloped population in comparison to the urban population as they are the last to get the direct benefit of any economic or development policy. The 73rd constitutional amendment act that has given constitutional status to the PRIs is considered to be a major breakthrough by some scholars that directly affects the rural population and gives them a share in the control of their development in their hand. Though Bhore Committee (1946) and Shrivastava Committee (1975) points out the importance of community participation and about giving people's health in people's hand in their study report, but due to various socio-political reason this has never been done. But this constitutional provision seems to enable people to have a say in their development and in improvement of their quality of

life. The rural population has been given power through participation in Gram Sabha and through directly electing the representatives in all the three tiers. The new PRI had been given financial and executive powers to ensure peoples participation and their health. The PRI have been made as the nodal agency for rural development wherein all the various rural development departments and health service system would co-ordinate with PRIs for the development of the rural population. All the developmental programs of centre and state are to be implemented through the PRIs that are by the consent and direction of the elected representatives of PRIs. Even the monitoring and supervision of the decentralized health system is to be done by the panchayat. As health forms one of the vital areas of the panchayat in the XIth schedule of the constitution, panchayats are responsible for improving public health and are supposed to work in coordination with the health and family welfare departments. Their involvement will facilitate in implementation of the preventive, curative and rehabilitative measures related to communicable diseases, which have a high prevalence in the rural areas. The national health programs viz a viz these diseases have been suffering from plethora of drawbacks. Out of this, shortage of the health personnel and lack of people's participation and support to the programs have been a few of the major draw back. Involvement of PRIs helps to forgo this to a great extent.

Similarly by ensuring participation of the marginalized sections an effort is made to empower them to put forward their problems and make themselves heard. But the question is still the same. How would such provisions ensure development given the caste, class politics in the rural areas? Will decentralization be implemented in line with the constitutional provisions? In such a context how health of the population is defined? Decentralization is a political term used and implemented by various groups to serve their interest. So how the poor and marginalized population –Dalits and women particularly are able to get their share of benefits from it? The act ensures reservation for them but at the ground level how far does it ensure their participation?

The present study will help to analyze as to what are the various factors that still hinders the smooth implementation of the constitutionally mandated decentralized policy in a state like Bihar. From public health point of view this will add on to the gamut of knowledge as to how a well intended and constitutionally mandated decentralized

policy which promises to improve the health of the people is handicapped or facilitated by regional factors/ situations and instabilities. The understanding developed may be used further in policy formulation and implementation.

Methodology

Exploratory Study: As limited study has been conducted on the issue and in the area of study hence an exploratory research design is undertaken for the study. An in-depth study is done to understand the socio-economic and political forces shaping the health and life of people and impact of decentralization process on it. An attempt was made to analyze how people understand and interpret their reality and this gives a much clearer picture of how the decentralization process takes place in a particular setting and how it impacts on the health of the people. The assessment from the people's perspective is vital because it is they who are being affected by any developmental initiative and it is they who decide whether they are happy or sad or satisfied with it. Their assessment may be based on their 1) cultural norms and values which they have, 2) the education, knowledge and information they have about their village and external world- other villages, urban cities, states and nations. Their assessment decides what they feel about their life and what they need in order to adjust in the existing condition.

Survey method or other quantitative method could not have provided such understanding. To serve the purpose of study a qualitative case study employing ethnographic tools for data collection was undertaken. It is worth mentioning that names of a few of the respondents and people have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

The study is intended to be carried in Bihar because it is observed that a large proportion of research has concentrated on a few key states- Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. Very less attention is paid to Bihar even in the field of research. It is significant to conduct a study in Bihar to understand and analyse how the decentralization process is being conceived and implemented in context of deeply entrenched caste and class nexus and illiteracy prevailing over the state.

The state is known for its political instability (Ghosh and Kumar 2003)¹, extreme castism (Biswas 1998)², corruption etc. that has impacted on the smooth functioning of the PRIs. According to the popular perception of the people “caste, cash and criminal” dominates the election process. The amended PRI has an experience of almost three and a half years of implementation in the state since 2001. It is still in the process of devolution of powers and responsibilities and under modification. Even though the decentralization process had begun long ago in 1949 but the panchayats never had a status of its own (Kumar 1999).³ Hence it becomes very important as to see how the implementation process begins so that the old saga of its failures is not repeated.

Selection of gram panchayat

The scope for people’s participations in gram panchayats is greatest due to their physical proximity to the people and also because people are given real powers through participation in the gram sabha. According to the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, (1993) the gram sabha has the power to identify beneficiary and seek clarification from the Mukhia (president of gram panchayat) and members of gram panchayat about any particular activity, scheme, income and expenditure of the panchayat. 50% of funds of almost all development programs are allocated to the gram panchayats.⁴ To understand the process of decentralization and people’s participation in it this was the best unit to study in depth.

Hussepur panchayat in Amnour block of Saran district in Bihar was purposively selected for the researcher’s convenience. The reason for purposive sampling was that for an in-depth analysis the beforehand knowledge of local dialect and culture was essential to form rapport and collect data within a short period of time.

¹Ghosh, Budhadeb, Kumar, Girish (2003), *State Politics and Panchayat in India*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi.

² Biswas, A.K. (1998), *Understanding Bihar*, Blumoon Books, New Delhi

³ Kumar, Vijay (1999), “*Panchayati Raj in Bihar: A Critical Survey*”, in Ghosh, Ratna and Pramanik, Alok Kumar (Eds), *Panchayat System in India - Historical, Constitutional and Financial Analysis*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 50-66.

⁴ As told by government employee of DRDA in Bihar.

Sources of data

Primary source: people residing in the gram panchayat who were considered to have key information regarding the study were the primary source of data. The researcher identified the key informants during the process of data collection simultaneously with the gaining of information regarding the functions of panchayat, about the people living in the villages and their relationship with various groups in the village. Apart from these various government functionaries related to the rural development, primary health centres, members of Zilla Parishad and panchayat samiti were also interviewed. A few NGO people were also interviewed. Census of 2001 related to the district and the panchayat was also analysed.

Secondary source: Literature review from journals, government documents, newspapers, etc. were the secondary sources of data.

Tools for Data Collection

Tools like informal group discussion, semi-participant observation, unstructured interview guide and casual interaction were used for data collection.

Informal group discussion with various groups of people residing in various wards in the panchayat and belonging to various castes was carried on regarding the functioning of panchayat, their perception on health and their problems. No care was taken to make the group homogenous. The group discussion was more of informal type. This was done purposively to observe the sociometry of the people and their interaction patterns to understand what they meant by whatever they were saying.

The researcher did a semi-participant observation by staying as a member of the main village of the panchayat i.e. Hussepur. As a result of this her kinship with the various key informants of the panchayat was pre-established which not only assisted in the process of rapport formation and data collection but at times it hindered the process also. With semi-participant observation the researcher could not only observe the various dynamics related to the functioning of the panchayat but she could also feel the caste and gender discrimination that influence the life of people. Since the researcher was educated so she was not expected by the villagers to follow the cultural practices,

which are followed by the women of the village, but she had to take care that she doesn't hurt the sentiments of the people.

Informal unstructured interview was administered with the government servants, PHC staff, NGO personnel, school teachers, labourers working in the field, shopkeepers, private health practitioners of the panchayat, panchayat representatives, ANM etc. Depending on the type of information required the respondents were purposefully selected.

Casual interaction was used to observe and understand the socio-economic condition of the people, their food habits, dressing style, cultural practices followed in marriages, caste and gender norms practiced, problems faced in agriculture, wages of agricultural labourers, health problems, where do people seek medical assistance and the reason for the same in the village, etc.

Process of data collection

Before going to the village the researcher went to the Directorate of Census to collect 2001 census data and directorate of Panchayat in Patna to collect some state wise information on the functioning of the panchayat and some other relevant information regarding the decentralization process initiated by the state. The researcher interviewed a few key persons in NGOs working with panchayat to know what kind of work they are involved in with the panchayats and what is the general status of the panchayats in Bihar according to them. One NGO Cencord in Patna, which is working basically in Muzaffarpur district, and three NGOs in Chapra who are working in various blocks of Saran District will be visited. The selection of NGOs in Chapra is based on the knowledge given by Cencord as to who are better working NGOs in Saran District and it also depends on their easy accessibility. Cencord is the only organization working in the capital of the state i.e. patna working exclusively with the panchayats in various districts of the state. It is working in collaboration with 'Priya' in Delhi and has assisted the state government in organizing workshops and creating some of the informational database for them regarding the panchayats. Informal discussions with these people were done. A few Zilla Parishad members of Saran district including female members were interviewed in order to understand their functioning. The information was also

collected from Saran district's Zilla Parishad officials and DRDA employees. All this helped to understand as, how the NGOs are involved in working with the panchayats, how Zilla Parishad is functioning and what are the government schemes, etc. Then the researcher went to stay in the Hussepur village to study the Hussepur gram panchayat. In the panchayat data regarding election process, people's participation in the gram panchayat, how much of their voice is heard and how much control they have over its functioning, Who are in control of the decision making process and who are left out, Whose voices are represented in the gram sabha, How do females and dalits participate in the whole process, health problems and facilities, education, etc were collected.

Sources of Biases

As the researcher has to do a semi-participant observation hence two sources of biases could be anticipated. One from the researcher's side that could arise out her knowledge, socialization, caste and power position of her relatives in the village. Second, from the respondent's side that could arise out of their position relationship in the village in comparison to her relatives, their perception of researcher as an outsider. The biases were minimized by forming good rapport with the people and constant self-reflection. The use of sociometric skills or the knowledge of the social cliché in the village, the local dialect, and cultural practices facilitated the researcher to guide her interaction process consciously and minimize the biases further.

Problems faced

Due to the continuous strike for about a month of the government employees to raise their salary and fulfill other demands in the state the researcher couldn't collect the data fully in the first visit and she had to make a second visit to the field. Due to malpractices followed by the Mukhia and Gram Sevak, they were not co-operative in showing the documents regarding the work done by the panchayat. Some of the key respondents were absent during the field visit as they had migrated out to work so the researcher had to manage by asking the family members and the neighbours. In other way this problem can be taken as positively as it provided a good reflection of the functioning of panchayats and people's attitude towards it.

Limitations of the study

The study is limited to only one-gram panchayat hence the generalization of the study should be done with care.

Outline of the study

The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter I give an introduction to the study. Chapter II contains theoretical concepts, debates and reviews on decentralization. Chapter III discusses the reasons for socio-economic backwardness of Bihar, the public health issues and performance of the state on human development indicator. The evolution of panchayati raj in Bihar and its present status. Chapter IV analyses and discusses the data related to socio-economic status, caste oppression, and public health issues and problems of the people of the Hussepur Panchayat. Chapter V contains the analysis of the election process, people's participation in the panchayat, work done by the panchayat and the corruptions involved in their work. Chapter VI contains the concluding observation and discussion.

Chapter II

*Decentralization: A Review of Debates, Policies
and Experiences*

Chapter II

Decentralization:

A Review of Debates, Policies and Experiences

Introduction

This chapter discusses about various concepts of decentralization and the debates regarding the very concept of decentralization, which is in practice in various developing countries as a strategy for development introduced by the national and state governments. In the later section it gives a brief review of literature on the evolution of panchayati Raj act in India as well as decentralization experiences of various countries and states in India. It also discusses about decentralization and its impact on health sector.

Concept of Decentralization

Decentralization processes in developing country's health sectors are generally aimed at improving the efficiency, equity, accessibility, quality of health service delivery, responsiveness to local needs, and ultimately the health of a country's population. Depending upon the type of institution to which responsibilities are transferred the nature of the functions that are decentralized and the level of control over those functions by local governments, decentralization can take many forms.

There are different forms of decentralization discussed in the development literature. They are **deconcentration** (Involves redistribution of administrative responsibilities within the central government, i.e. to decentralized units of central government. It improves the efficiency within the managerial process), **delegation** (involves transfer of administrative responsibilities to Semi-Autonomous or Parastatal Organizations. These organizations are outside the central government structure and are not directly controlled by the government), **devolution** (this is considered to be the ideal form of

decentralization and involves transfer of power to autonomous and independent local governments with corporate status, i.e. transfer of administrative and political power. These local governments have the right to generate their own revenue and are also granted financial aid from the centre for developmental programs. It is also ensured of legal powers and geographical boundaries) and **Privatization** (this involves transfer of functions from government to non-government institutions i.e. voluntary organizations or private profit making enterprises) (Westergaard 1983, Collins and Green 1994).¹

Decentralization within government means a transfer of power away from a central authority to lower levels in a territorial hierarchy. It can take two form i.e. deconcentration and devolution, each of which has a different logic. In deconcentration central government is not giving up any authority but simply relocating its offices at different levels or points in the national territory whereas devolution has the opposite effect; since it cedes control of such agencies' resources to political actors and institutions at lower levels. It is a form of power sharing between central government and sub national authorities (Woole & Manor 1998).²

Decentralization Debate

Decentralization is a process wherein the state distributes its administrative and political power at various levels and enables the local people to have control and access to their resources and needs. It makes the local authorities more responsive and accountable to the people at grass-root level. Hence unlike centralized planning people have scope to intervene in the development programs in accordance to their needs, objectives, strategies and resources. There are two different schools of thought who argue that decentralization is a necessity to achieve growth with equity and poverty alleviation i.e. liberal interventionist school and radical populist school.

¹ Westergaard, Kirsten (1983), *Introduction to the Debate on Decentralization and Participation*, Centre for Development Research, Copenhagen, and Collins, C and Green (1994), "Decentralization and Primary Health Care: Some Negative Implications in Developing Countries", *International Journal of Health Services*, Vol. 24, No.3, pp.459-75.

² Woole, Richard C E & Manor, James (1998), *Democracy and Decentralization in South Asia and West Africa, Participation, Accountability and performance*, Cambridge university press, Cambridge.

The liberal interventionist school looks at development strategies from the center and argues for decentralization as a means to improve government performance and thus the implementation of development programmes. For them popular empowerment is desired but not main concern. Further this school sees participation, which is a recurrent concept in decentralization debate, as an input into the development project. On the other hand radical populist school looks at development from below, focusing on the people, and they are primarily concerned with political decentralization. They stresses on mass empowerment. Further they link participation to structural causes and see participation as a process whereby poor people seek to have some influence and to gain access to the resources which would help them to sustain and improve their living standards.³ Though there are lots of debates on whether we should have centralized or decentralized form of government, various country experiences of decentralization shows that centralization and decentralization are opposite poles of a same continuum. Fesler argues, "Total decentralization would require withering away of state whereas total centralization would imperil the states capacity to perform its functions"(Fesler 1968: 371). He concludes that successful balancing of the two, with partial indulgence of decentralization, to build consent for centralization is often the essence of nation building. He says that neither centralization nor decentralization is value neutral. Rather each is freighted with value connotations. States role is important for nation building; hence decentralization has to occur within the control of state (Fesler 1968).⁴

³ From these we can see two participatory strategies .One is a public management strategy where the concept is used in an instrumentalist sense, i.e. as a means for development and secondly it is used as a political strategy, where the concept is used in a normative sense i.e. as an ideal model or a development goal. This is Soren Lund's classification .For more details refer, Westergard, Kristen (1983), *Introduction to the Debate on Decentralization and Participation*, Center for Development Research, Copenhagen.

⁴ Fesler, James W (1968), "*Centralization and Decentralization*" in Sills, David L. (Ed), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences - Vol. 2*, Macmillan, U.S.A, p. 373.

It is argued that decentralization becomes more meaningful if it devolves⁵ concentrated power from the center to the grass roots level, to democratize it, which stresses on mass empowerment. Popular empowerment may be seen as generally desirable and perhaps a likely consequence of successful decentralization (Samoff 1990).⁶ Further implementation of decentralization strategies is expected to empower citizens especially disadvantaged groups in their relationship to a large, hierarchical, bureaucratic and distant government. In the third world, decentralization must be understood, as an effort to specify who is to rule, which includes a determination of who is to have access to decision making. It is argued that decentralization was a strategy for extending central authority by depoliticising the local populace, by controlling the actions of local government institutions, and by socializing a 'collaborative political leadership' (Samoff 1990).⁷ Accordingly for decentralization to be empowering, it must be linked to the broader goals element of planning (Samoff 1990).⁸ Thus from the perspective of political decentralization, empowerment is central. If the institutional reforms do not empower under represented and disadvantaged groups, then there has been no decentralization. Though many scholars proposed decentralization as an efficient way of meeting local needs, by cutting red tapism, making government/ administration more flexible, accountable and responsive by bringing government close to the people, thus neutral in nature, Collins and Green argue that decentralization is a "...political issue that involves not only the distribution of political power within the state system, but also

⁵ Devolution requires that local governments be given autonomy and independence, and be clearly perceived of as a separate level over which central authorities exercise little or no direct control. For more details refer Dennis A Rondinelli, James S, McCullough and Johnson, Ronald W (1989), *Analyzing decentralization policies in developing countries: A political economy Frame work*, *Development and Change*, Sage Publications, London, Vol. 20, pp.57-87.

⁶ Samoff, Joel (1990), *Decentralization: The politics of Interventionism*, *Development and change*, Sage publications, London, Vol. 21, pp. 513-30.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

the access of social and political groups to the political decision-making process and the allocation of public resources” (Collins and Green 1994).⁹

World Bank and Decentralization measures

India and other developing countries are under strong pressure to cut back their provision of social services. “The combination of widening fiscal deficits, international economic recession during the 1970s and 1980s, and a high burden of international debt has forced governments to renegotiate debt repayments with industrialized countries and the International Monetary Fund. The terms of the resulting agreements, often euphemistically styled ‘structural adjustment policies’,” (Collins and Green 1994)¹⁰ have adversely affected the health of the population. The world banks strategy of decentralization in the form of privatization, user fee implementation, cuts in social sectors has led to complete neglect of epidemiological basis of health. As argued by the World Bank, “in countries where managerial resources are scarce, communication is difficult, transportation is slow and many people are isolated, decentralization of the government service system should be considered as one possible way to improve efficiency” (World Bank 1987).¹¹

Its emphasis on development of tertiary and secondary level of care has provided benefits to the upper crusts of the society. The rural poor have been denied of such privileges. The donor agencies like World Bank and USAID are investing in family planning services to increase the service delivery of the clinical contraceptives which is eroding the health infrastructure and personnel of the developing countries. Akhtar argues that the donor agencies divide health and population and take them as separate entities and concentrate on population control. She says that the Health and

⁹Collins, C and Green (1994), “Decentralization and Primary Health Care: Some Negative Implications in Developing Countries”, *International Journal of Health Services*, Vol. 24, No.3, pp.459-75.

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ World Bank. (1987), *Financing Health Services in Developing Countries: An Agenda for Reform*, Washington, D.C.

Population Sector Planning (HPAP) proposed by World Bank in Bangladesh proposes decentralization of health services which involves NGOs and other private agencies in the form of public-private partnership. The problem with this kind of decentralization is that for private sector profit become more vital than service, which adversely affects the health of the people (Akhtar 2004).¹²

Over the last few decades, the World Bank has been supporting a number of projects in the family planning, nutrition and health sector in India. However a number of problems relating to planning and implementation aspects in various projects have arisen, in the course of the implementation of these projects. Researchers like Gupta and Gumber argue that these problems seem to have arisen because of the fact that most of the projects were planned adopting the top down approach with little involvement of the local beneficiary population. Recently the Bank has modified its approach to overcome these problems, and has started advocating for more of a participatory and client-based approach in project formulation. It has also been emphasizing greater involvement of both private sectors and the NGOs. Gupta and Gumber further underscore that, in spite of such changes there is little evidence of the local population being involved into need assessment. There is little co-ordination between the district societies and the health department in regard to case detection and surveillance.¹³

Here the question that arises is why is state then introducing World Banks prescription of decentralization? Renaud argues that when state intervenes in to improve the health of the people, it is bound to further commodify 'health' owing to structural constraints offered by the capitalist societies, without ameliorating the

¹² Akhtar, Farida (2004), "*Decentralization and Integration of Health and Family Planning Services in Bangladesh*", *Development*, Vol. 47, No. 2, June, pp.140-144.

¹³ Gupta, Devendra B and Gumber Anil (1999), "*Decentralisation: Some Initiatives in Health Sector*", *EPW*, February 6, pp. 356-62

health status of the population. According to the author “State is not a neutral mechanism. It is not an arbiter between social classes, but an element in the class system itself” (Renaud 1975).¹⁴ The welfare nature of state camouflages the societal nature of creation and appropriation of wealth. “It merely invests a certain proportion of the national surplus into welfare to harness its political legitimacy. At the same time its welfare sector, is also part of the same processes of appropriation which steadily transform it into a sector for profit generation” (Qadeer 1994: 27).¹⁵ “In brief, the state cannot reorganize the economy and correlated life-styles so as to really provide solutions to health needs” (Renaud 1975).¹⁶

Experiences of Decentralization: A review of country case studies

This section reviews the experience of various nation states while implementing decentralization policies in order to understand the politics of the process of decentralization. It is argued that the outcomes of decentralization policy will depend not just on the relative weights of devolution and deconcentration in the institutional and fiscal structures, but also on their combination with two other important elements i.e. the kind of legitimization and accountability adopted (e.g. participatory, electoral, religious, monarchical) and the principles according to which the area (and hence size and character) of a decentralized authority are determined (Woole & Manor 1998).¹⁷

There has been myriad of forms and degrees to which decentralization is implemented in developing countries. The extent and form of decentralization, varies in different countries depending upon the powers that has been devolved, the functions that has

¹⁴ Renaud, Marc (1975), “On the Structural Constraints to State Intervention in Health”, *International Journal of Health Services*, Vol.5, No.4.

¹⁵ Qadeer, Imrana (1994), “The World Development Report 1993: The Brave New World of Primary Health Care”, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 22, Nos. 9-12, pp. 27-39.

¹⁶ Renaud, Marc (1975), “On the Structural Constraints to State Intervention in Health”, *International Journal of Health Services*, Vol.5, No.4.

¹⁷ op.cit. notes 2

been delegated, the level to which power is transferred, to whom the power is transferred etc.

China's move to a market economy has led to decentralization with more of market orientation (Nayar 2001).¹⁸ Greater degree of devolution occurred within the health sector, and township governments are now responsible for planning and implementing local health care plans (Hutchinson and LaFond 2004).¹⁹ The health facility managers have the power to generate revenue and invest the surplus in buying new equipments and pay bonuses to employees. This is more of a privatization form of decentralization.

Argentina appears to have made great progress on decentralization. The successful fiscal decentralization is such that only 14 percent of public sector health spending is at the national level, while 70 percent occurs at the provincial level and 16 percent at the municipal level (Hutchinson and LaFond 2004).²⁰

In sub-Saharan Africa, numerous countries have also pursued decentralization policies to various degrees in recent years. The most notable examples include Ghana, Zambia, Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa. According to a study in the four developing countries of Ghana, Zambia, Uganda and the Phillipines, Phillipines has devolved widest range of functions to local government units. The least choice was transferred to an autonomous health service in Ghana through delegation. Uganda and Zambia displayed variations between these extremes (Bossert and Beauvais 2002).²¹ Xavier Furtado in his study on Philippines concludes that decentralization of key social services have been detrimental to the delivery of health

¹⁸Nayar, K R (2001), "*Politics Of Decentralization: Lessons From Kerela*" in Qadeer, Imrana, Sen, Kasturi and Nayar, K R (Eds), *Public Health And The Poverty Of Reform, The South Asian Predicament*, Sage Publication, New Delhi.

¹⁹ Hutchinson, Paul L. and LaFond, Anne K. (2004), *Monitoring and Evaluation of Decentralization Reforms in Developing Country Health Sectors*, Partners for Health Reformplus, Maryland.

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ Bossert, Thomas J and Beauvais, J (2002), "*Decentralization of health systems in Ghana, Zambia, Uganda and the Phillipines: a comparative analysis of decision space*", *Health Policy And Planning*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 14-31

care in three moderately very poor municipalities. The formation of Local Government Units led to reduction in the financial resources and other resources, which increased the cost of health care. The elected representative chooses to promote those areas, which will help him get re-elected. They lacked extensive network and staff for effective program delivery. The municipalities and provinces at times may not co-operate and co-ordinate. The Philippines case shows that while decentralization offers government officials and citizens the opportunity to shape and deliver social program in a way that is more responsive to local needs, it is also fraught with risks (Furtado 2001).²²

According to a study done in Nepal, India and Bangladesh it is observed that plans are prepared at the central level. In Bangladesh and Nepal the plans prepared by the local units are overlooked by the centre. Planning at the local level is incremental rather than need based in these two countries. In India, case study of Kerala was done and it was found that 35-40 % of the total budget of the state government is allocated to the local bodies. The local bodies make plans entirely based on locally identified needs. However as far as planning for the vertical health programmes are concerned, the local units have a minimal or almost not role to play in all the three target countries (Pokharel 2000).²³ While assessing the performance and participation of each country, it is argued that the decentralization experience in Bangladesh reveals high levels of corruption though people at the grass root level were reasonably satisfied with quality of most projects (Woole & Manor 1998).²⁴

The decentralization experiences in various countries shows that the very objectives for which they are implemented are not being fulfilled. However, it is also observed that this is largely due to the influence of the form of decentralization being implemented, the political will of the leaders, and the social realm in which they are being carried out.

²² Furtado, Xavier (2001), "*Decentralization and Public Health in the Philippines*", *Development*, Vol. 44, No. 1, March, pp.108-06.

²³ Pokharel, Bhojraj (2000), *Decentralization Of Health Services*, WHO, New Delhi.

²⁴ *op.cit notes 17*

73rd Amendment in India

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1992, demanded setting up of a mandatory three tier set-up of Panchayati Raj; legal status to gram sabha; regular elections; reservations for the weaker sections and women; an independent Finance Commission; and an independent Election Commission. Thus the amendment intended to lay a strong foundation for 'democratic decentralization' and there by paving way for activating the planning process from below; a concept that has eluded the people ever since the beginning of the era of planned development. Though panchayats²⁵ in India existed from before independence, but the real status and power was given to them after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. The 73rd Amendment Act introduced in Part IX (consisting Article 243-G) of the Constitution contains provision regarding the structure, composition, election and scope of the powers of the panchayats at the district, intermediate and village levels. Now, the legislative and executive action of the State Legislature and Government as regards panchayats will have to be in accordance with the provision of Part IX of the Constitution.

The main features of Part IX of the constitution are:

1. Seats in panchayats at all the three levels will be filled by direct election. In addition, chairpersons of village panchayats are made members of the panchayats at intermediate level and chairpersons of panchayats at intermediate level are members of panchayats at the district level.
2. One-third of the total number of seats will be reserved for women; 1/3rd for S.C.s and S.T.s and 1/3rd of SC/ST seats will also be reserved for women. One-third offices of chairpersons of panchayats at all levels will also be reserved for women.
3. The panchayats will receive adequate funds for carrying out their functions. Grants from state governments will constitute an important source for funding

²⁵ Panchayats are equivalent term used in India for administrative decentralization.

but state governments are also expected to assign the revenue of certain taxes to the panchayat. In some cases, the panchayat will also be permitted to collect and retain the revenue it raises.

4. Every panchayat shall have a uniform five-year term and elections to constitute new bodies shall be completed before the expiry of the term. State Election Commission, shall be responsible for preparation of electoral rolls and holding of elections to panchayats.

Specific responsibilities are entrusted to panchayats to prepare and implement plans for economic development and social justice in respect to 29 subjects listed in schedule XI. Even the monitoring and supervision of the decentralized health system is to be done by the panchayat. Thus the Panchayati Raj now provides the possibility for the people to demand the resource to operate a health service in which the people themselves will play the dominant role and of which they will be the chief beneficiaries. This new system is expected to involve the entire community in identifying their health problems. The people can be mobilized to improve not only the curative care but also even more so in health education as well as in the provision and control of the diseases that originate in the environment.

The provision of one-third reservation for women, as well as proportionate reservation for Scheduled Castes and Tribes provides an opportunity to them to participate in the planning and implementing processes paving the way for a more equitable social order. By ensuring participation of the marginalized sections, an effort is made to empower them, to put forward their problems and make themselves heard. But how would such provisions ensure development given the caste, class politics in the rural areas? Will decentralization be implemented in line with the constitutional provisions? In such a context how health of the population is addressed? The act ensures reservation for them but at the ground level how far does it ensure their participation? Though the act ensures constitutional status to the panchayats but the question is whether the provisions will be followed in as recommended?

State's Experience with Decentralization in India:

Mathew argues that past history of panchayat in states like Karnataka, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa shows that panchayats were given due importance even before the 73rd constitutional amendment during the left government rule in these states. The moment the government would topple, the importance and power given to the panchayats would also decline. The reason for panchayats not getting the recognition it deserved was that the urban and the rural elite, its representatives in politics and a bureaucracy conditioned by its class character, had disdain for the system and they feared losing their power and influence on the masses (Mathew 1994).²⁶ Mathew further argues that, "The Panchayati Raj Act (1983) of Karnataka had attracted nationwide attention because of its radical provisions relating to the devolution of power to the districts and the villages." However the Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act (1993) is a severe blow to the ideal of transforming panchayats into units of self-government as visualized in the 73rd Amendment Act, which was brought about by the Congress (I) government with Bangarappa spearheading it (Mathew 1994).²⁷ Thus Mathew rightly argues that political will is necessary for implementation of decentralization.

It is argued by him that democratic decentralization in Karnataka achieved considerable success. The author attributes it to reasonably lively and civil society. Further it is stated that the resilience of caste and other social institutions meant that society was not dependent upon or structured group's access to the state, as is true in parts of South Africa. Decades of organized interests, experience with democracy and lobbying skills are necessary to make decentralized politics work effectively (Woole & Manor 1998).²⁸

²⁶ Mathew, George (1994), *Panchayati Raj, From Legislation to Movement*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company.

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ *op.cit* notes 2.



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Kerala is an epitome of how panchayats were affected by the party politics (Mathew 1994).²⁹ In an assembly of panchayat members on 5th March, 1993, the women³⁰ panchayat members in Orissa complained of the bureaucracy not being responsive to them because of which they are not able to work (Mathew 1994).³¹ The then chief minister Biju Patnaik also said, “If the panchayat system fails, it will be because of corrupt administration...” (Mathew 1994).³² A study of assessment of performance of primary health centers under decentralized government in Kerala argues that the panchayats allocated a lower proportion of resources to health than that allocated by the state government prior to decentralization. “Decentralization brought no significant change to the health sector. Active panchayat support to PHCs existed in only a few places, but wherever it was present the result was positive” (Varatharajan *et al.* 2004).³³ Another study argues that three basic problems of decentralizing the health care sector, namely spill over effect, role and relevance of a pre existing body (Hospital Development Committee or HDC), and the level of minimum health care service to be provided by the health care institutions, have not been adequately addressed. There is improper co-ordination with the line departments and the local self-government (Narayana and Harikurup 2000).³⁴

One of the necessary conditions for the transformation of panchayats into local governments is capacity building among the elected representatives. While analyzing the functioning of the elected representatives in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala; Narayana observes that in Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu the representatives show poor awareness of their powers and responsibilities whereas in Kerala it is different. In the former two states the panchayats are perceived as agents

²⁹ *op.cit.* notes 26.

³⁰ Orissa is acclaimed for being the first state to implement 33% of reservation of seats for women in municipalities and panchayats.

³¹ *op.cit.* notes 26

³² *ibid*

³³ Varatharajan, D *et al* (2004), “Assessing the performance of primary health centres under decentralizaed government in Kerala, India”, Health Policy And Planning, Vol.19, No.1, pp. 41-51.

³⁴ Narayana, D and Harikurup, K. K. (2000), “Decentralisation Of The Health Care Sector In Kerala: Some Issues”, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, January, Seminar presented on 3 December 1999, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Wp.298.

of state whereas in Kerala they are taken as local government of the people. However in all the three states planning is a far cry as little efforts have been made for capacity building and devolution of power and resources (Narayana 2005).³⁵

West Bengal is known for its continued existence of panchayati raj in the last fourteen years as a unit of local self-government. This is because of the continuous CPI (M) rule in the state. Moitree Bhattacharya while studying about the effective implementation of decentralization in West Bengal specially in terms of peoples participation (in decision making, power and authority) says that though the panchayat's rôle in the realm of rural development have been quite substantial but it has not been able to ensure people's participation. The involvement of party politics in the PRIs and the popularity of CPI (M), which is ideologically governed by democratic centralism, have tarnished the democratic decentralization process in terms of people's participation (Bhattacharya 2002).³⁶ Kothari emphasizes that the nature of the state needs to be changed if the problem of poverty has to be dealt with effectively. Mere emphasis on technology is no solution to the deep seated social maladies (Kothari 1993).³⁷

It is understood that effective administrative decentralization along with political decentralization is essential for the social upliftment of the entire society which includes eradicating poverty³⁸ and so on. It is accepted that deprivation of health is an aspect of underdevelopment. Just as for the individual, not having medical

³⁵ Narayana, D (2005), "Local Governance Without Capacity Building Ten Years Of Panchayati Raj", *EPW*, Vol. 40, No. 26, June, pp. 2822-2832

³⁶ Bhattacharya, Moitree (2002): "Panchayati Raj in West Bengal, Democratic Decentralisation Or Democratic Centralism", Manak Publications, New Delhi

³⁷ Kothari, Rajni (1993), "Perspective on Decentralization", in N. H. Antia and Kavita Bhatia (Eds) *People's Health In People's Hands (Indian Experiences in Decentralized Health Care: a Model for Health in Panchayati Raj)*, The Foundation for Research in Community Health, Bombay, pp 263-273

³⁸ According to Amartya sen if we consider poverty as basic deprivation of the quality of life and of elementary problems, then ill health is an aspect of poverty. Bad health is constitutive of poverty. Premature mortality, escapable mortality, undernourishment are all manifestations of poverty. Thus health deprivation is really the most central aspect of poverty. Institute of social sciences, Amartya sen on Kerala, National Conference on Education in Kerala's development: Towards a New agenda, Trivandrum, 26-28, December 2000.

treatment for curable ailments constitute poverty, similarly for a country, not having adequate health arrangements is representative of a state of underdevelopment. While analyzing the process of decentralization in the state of Bihar, the present study looks into the prospects of public health measures and general underdevelopment of the society.

Conclusions

From the above literature survey regarding theoretical discussions as well as experiences of various nation states it can be summarized that the outcomes of decentralization policies is determined to a great extent by the socio-political and economic situation, political commitment of particular political parties who are in power, the way in which various provisions of 73rd amendment is implemented and supporting structures created for the implementation and pre-eminence of peoples participation which is the core of democratic decentralization. It is observed that most of the success stories are prior or independent rather than dependent variables in relation to democratization and decentralization reforms. Now let us look into the social and developmental issues of the state of Bihar that has always been acting as detrimental towards the underdevelopment of the state and scope for decentralization polices. The amended PRI has an experience of almost three and a half years of implementation in the state since 2001. It is still in the process of devolution of powers and responsibilities and under modification. Even though the decentralization process had begun long ago in 1949 but the panchayats never had a status of its own (Kumar 1999).³⁹ Hence it becomes very important as to see how the implementation process begins so that the old saga of its failures is not repeated.

³⁹ Kumar, Vijay (1999), "Panchayati Raj in Bihar: A Critical Survey", in Ghosh, Ratna and Pramanik, Alok Kumar (Eds), *Panchayat System in India - Historical, Constitutional and Financial Analysis*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 50-66.

Chapter III

An Inquiry into the Underdevelopment of Bihar

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An Inquiry into the Underdevelopment of Bihar

Introduction

The state of Bihar comprises 3 per cent of the geographical area of India and about 8 per cent of its population i.e. 8.29 crores according to 2001 census.¹ It is the third most populous state of India after Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. In the 1991 Census when Jharkhand was a part of Bihar, it ranked as the second most populous state in India (Census of India- Series- II, *Bihar* 2001).² In 2000 the state was dissected and the mineral rich southern plateau was formed as Jharkhand state and the vast stretch of the plains with sick sugar and jute industry were left to Bihar. In fact Bihar has a history of union and division. During the Mughal period Bihar was privileged to enjoy the status of a Province. During British colonial rule it was a part of Bengal Presidency which consisted of present West Bengal, Bangladesh, Orissa, Jharkhand and Bihar. When separated from the Bengal Presidency in 1912, Bihar and Orissa comprised a single province. Later, under the Government of India Act of 1935, Bihar and Orissa became a separate province of British India. Then at the dawn of independence in 1947 it became a state with the same geographic boundary, until 1956. In 1956, under “the Bihar and West Bengal (Transfer of Territories) Act, 1956, an area of 2407 sq miles of the erstwhile Manbhum district and 732.88 sq. miles of the Purnia district were transferred to West Bengal”(Dayal 2002).³

Physiographic Divisions:

Bihar can be physiographically divided into two parts – North Bihar- regions lying to north of river Ganga, and south Bihar- regions lying to south of river

¹ Office of Registrar General (2001), Census of India 2001, *Population Profiles (India, States and Union Territories)*, New Delhi.

² Directorate of Census Operation (2001), Census of India 2001, Series- II, *Bihar, Provisional Population totals, Paper- 1 of 2001, Bihar*.

³ Dayal, P *et al* (Ed) (2002), *Bihar Resources and Planning*, Janaki Prakashan, Patna.

Ganga, on the basis of soil pattern, irrigation structures, availability of material resources, cropping pattern, etc.

North Bihar constitutes vast stretch of fertile alluvial plains formed by perennial rivers flowing from the Himalayas such as Gandak, Kosi, Ghaghra, Kamla, Bagmati etc. Not only do these rivers bring fertile silts to these plains but also provide extensive irrigation potential for the plain. In the last few decades where these river waters do not reach diesel pump sets and tube-well are being used as an important source of irrigation. This region is a 'rice-wheat-maize belt'. Jute in the east and sugarcane in the west are other major cash crops of the region. A few industrial manufacturing units particularly of sugar and jute are there but they are now more or less sick. Therefore in the total main workers only 15% are employed in non-agricultural activities and the rest are employed in agricultural activities according to 1991 Census. Some of the major irrigation projects like Gandak Kamla and Kosi are the important sources of irrigation for the whole of north Bihar plain (Jha 1997).⁴ River Kosi is known as the 'Sorrow of Bihar', as it brings perennial floods in the eastern part of the north Bihar plains causing immense loss of life and property each year.

The north and south Bihar plains are divided by the river Ganga which flows across the state from west to east. The plains of south Bihar also consist of fertile alluvial soils and their fertility varies from medium to high. This region has better irrigation management than the north Bihar plains and Son Canal Project is one of major irrigation project immensely benefiting the region. The region is a rice-wheat-gram belt. This region is slightly well developed than its north Bihar counterpart in terms of non-agricultural sector and also in terms of urbanization and commerce. North Bihar is more densely populated than south Bihar. However the inequity in ownership of land and landlessness is acute in both north and south Bihar (Jha 1997).⁵

Due to Ganga and other rivers flowing through north and south Bihar flood is a recurrent phenomenon here. In fact the flood prone area in Bihar "has

⁴ Jha, Praveen K. (1997), *Agricultural Labour in India*, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, p. 112.

⁵ *ibid*

increased from 25 lakh hectares in 1954 to 65 lakh hectares in 1986”(Jha 1997: 112).⁶ Paradoxically flood control and irrigation projects are responsible for the increase in the flood prone areas. In fact according to Jha, north Bihar has been most severely affected by the flood control measures especially by the Kosi Project (Jha 1997).⁷

According to Dhar *et al* (2002):

“The study of the hydrology of major floods that occurred in the state from 1969 to 1984 has shown that in India, Bihar is the only state which has experienced the highest number of floods during these 16years. During the nineteen years period from 1953 to 1971, the average annual direct loss to the state was to the amount of Rs 25 crores. In the year 1972 alone, the value of total damage to crops, property etc. in Bihar was Rs 217 crores that was around 36 per cent of the total damage of Rs 569 crores in the whole of the country. Average area affected during these years was 1.23 million hectares, which involved a population of 4.8 million. In the single year of 1971, the total area affected in Bihar was 4.3 million hectares involving a population of 21 millions”(Dhar 1985 cited in Dayal 2002).⁸

Socio-Economic Background

Bihar is basically an agricultural state with 86.9% of population (according to 1991 census) living in the rural areas. The urban population in the State constitutes only 10 per cent (Sharma 2005).⁹ Very high proportion of its total geographical area is given for cultivation. The potential net sown area is approximately 61 per cent of the total geographical area whereas for India it is 4 per cent of the total geographical area.

Bihar the ancient land of Lord Buddha and Mahavira, which has witnessed golden period of Indian history, is now characterized as the ‘most backward

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Dhar, O.N., Mandal, B.N and Mulye, S.S. (2002), “*Rainfall and flood: A study of Bihar State*”, in the Seminar “*Flood and Drought control in Bihar*”, in Dayal, P *et al* (Ed), *Bihar Resources and Planning*, Janaki Prakashan, Patna.

⁹ Sharma, Alakh N (2005), “*Agrarian Relations and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar*”, *EPW*, Vol. 40, No.10, pp. 960-72.

state of India' (Sharma 2005).¹⁰ In spite of being crowned as the world's first seat of higher learning, for having Nalanda University that, was established during the Gupta period, Bihar now has the lowest literacy rate. According to 2001 census 47% of the total population is literate, and only 33.1% of females are literate. In 2001 it is only in case of Bihar that literacy rate is less than 50% in comparison to all India data.

Though it is richly endowed with natural resources like fertile soil and irrigation potential, it is economically among the most backward in the country (Jha 1997).¹¹ The economy of Bihar has grown at a much slower pace in comparison to most other states. The, per capita State Domestic Product (SDP) of Bihar in 1950-51 was about 60 percent of the per capita national income but it had fallen to less than 50 percent of the same, by 1989-90, ranking the state last in terms of per capita SDP across states (Jha 1997).¹² Bihar has continued to depend on agriculture to a much greater extent than any other states. From "1950-51 to 1988-89, agriculture's share in India's Net Domestic Product fell from around two-third to a third; for Bihar, on the other hand, agriculture's share in its state Domestic Product over the same period fell from 63.34 to 49.65". Thus in a slow growing agrarian economy of Bihar the material condition of the huge reservoir of labour force is very poor with very little possibilities in the non-agricultural sector (Jha 1997).¹³ Jha states that "... in spite of 90 percent of cultivated area being under food grains (as of 1989-90), Bihar continues to remain a major food deficit state, and per capita food production in 1989-90 was well below 1969-70 level" (Jha 1997:112)¹⁴.

Bihar on Human Development Indicators

The human development indicators of Bihar are dismal. The Gini Ratio showing the inequality in consumption expenditure has been on the lower side

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ *op cit.* notes 4

¹² *ibid*

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ *ibid*

in case of Bihar. At the national level, the 'share of expenditure on food'¹⁵ declined from 65.6 per cent in 1983 to 59.4 percent in 1999-2000. However in Bihar, Assam, and Orissa the share of food items in total expenditure continued to be over 65 per cent of the total expenditure even in 1999-2000. The level of employment, its composition and the growth in employment opportunities is a critical indicator of the process of development in any economy. It also shows the level of well being of individuals. Bihar, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu had more than 50% of their population below the poverty line in 1983. By 1999-2000, while Tamil Nadu and West Bengal had reduced their poverty ratios by nearly half, Orissa and Bihar continued to be the two poorest states with poverty ratio of 47% and 43% respectively. Rural Orissa and rural Bihar continued to be the poorest among the rural areas both in 1983 as well as in 1999-2000 (GOI 2002).¹⁶

Apart from the availability of safe drinking water, lack of sanitation particularly sewage and disposal of solid waste including 'night soil' has been observed as among the main reasons for prevailing ill health and morbidity levels in the country. In Kerala 51% of the households had access to toilet facilities and at the other end it was less than 10% in Orissa. In Bihar, below 20% of the households had access to toilet facilities. In case of economically less well-off States and geographically larger States, the coverage of electricity among the households was low. In case of Bihar, only one-eighth of the households have access to electricity in 1991. The road connectivity is very poor and has declined during 1981 to 1997 period (GOI 2002).¹⁷

The GDP growth rate in the state had been very low during 1991-92 to 1997-98, which is merely 2.69 per cent in comparison to 6 per cent of GDP growth

¹⁵ Distribution of consumption expenditure between food and non-food item also reflects the economic well being of the population. In general, poor households spend substantially more on food items as against the non-food. The proportion of expenditure on food is expected to decline with development and economic prosperity

¹⁶ Government of India (2002), Planning Commission, *National Human Development Report-2001*, New Delhi.

¹⁷ *ibid*

rate for all the major states of the country (Sharma 2005)¹⁸. The per capita income in the undivided Bihar “which was about 60 percent of the Indian average during early 1960s, declined to about 40 per cent in 1993-94 and further to 34 per cent in 1997-98” (Sharma 2005).¹⁹

The sex ratio for the state has been favorable till 1961, except in 1931. After 1961 the sex ratio always remained unfavorable to females and shows a decreasing trend which is a matter of great concern. Though in 2001 the sex ratio has increased to 921 as compared to 1991 when it was 907 but it is still far below the national averages which were 933 in 2001 and 927 in 1991 respectively (Census of India- Series- II, *Bihar* 2001).²⁰

The population growth rate has shot up from 23.4 per cent during 1980s to 28.4 percent during the 1990s while for India it has declined from 23.9 per cent during 1980s to 21.3 percent during the 1990s. As a result, the density of population in the State is as high as 880 persons/ Sq.km (Sharma 2005).²¹

Public Health Issues in Bihar:

According to the NSSO survey 55the round 58.8% of rural Bihar live below poverty line. According to 1991 census only 58.08 per cent of people in Bihar have access to safe drinking water. The rural areas suffer from acute problem of safe drinking water. In rural areas only 56.55 per cent have access to safe water whereas in urban areas 73.39 per cent have the access (Indian Economic Survey 2002-03).²² The poor socio-economic status of the people has a heavy toll on their health.

According to the NFHS data for the year 1992-3, it is revealed that, for India, the occurrence of both severe and mild under nutrition is strikingly high, as 20.6 and 53.4 % respectively. For Bihar and the states like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and surprisingly Maharashtra, the incidence of severe under-nutrition is acute. Almost the same states except Orissa, along with

¹⁸ *op.cit. notes 9*

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ *op.cit notes 2*

²¹ *op.cit. notes 9*

²² *Indian Economic Survey 2002-2003*, Akalank publications, Delhi.

West Bengal and Karnataka record a high level of mild under-nutrition. But Bihar has a dubious distinction of having the highest levels of both severe and mild under-nutrition. Stunting and Wasting (both mild and severe) are more pronounced in the state of Bihar (UNFPA 1997).²³

Communicable diseases the quintessential diseases of poverty and malnutrition, unequivocally, have a high prevalence in the state. Kala-Azar which initially showed a declining trend has reverted back and from 1974 onwards there was a rise in Kala-Azar disease, especially in north of Ganga districts. At present more than half of the population of Bihar is vulnerable to the problem of Kala-Azar (Kumar 1990).²⁴ Kala-Azar is now endemic in 33 districts of Bihar. Its incidence is highest in Bihar in comparison to other Indian states (GOI 2004).²⁵ In case of leprosy among 11 endemic states contributing to 90% of the country's leprosy case load, Bihar and Maharashtra ranks second. About 13% of the population in Bihar is affected by leprosy (GOI 2004).²⁶ Tuberculosis and malaria are other communicable diseases that have a high prevalence here. Bihar along the states of Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Gujrat, and Andhra Pradesh has a substantially higher prevalence of complete Blindness (UNFPA 1997).²⁷

This adverse health status is compounded by the lack of medical facilities, health resources and personnel in the state. Only one-third of the villages are provided with medical facility of one kind or the other at national level. States like Andhra Pradesh, Gujrat, Kerela etc. have provisions of medical facilities of more than national average of 33 %. On the contrary, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur Meghalaya, Orissa Rajasthan and West Bengal do not have medical facilities

²³ UNFPA for United Nations Systems in India (1997), *India, Towards Population and Development Goals*, Oxford University Press, London.

²⁴ Kumar, Kishore (1990), *Re-Emergence of Kala-Azar: People's Responses and Political and Administrative Actions in Bihar- (A Case Study of a Severely Affected Village in Vaishali District of Bihar)*, M.Phil Dissertation, CSMCH, JNU, New Delhi (unpublished).

²⁵ Government of India (2004), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, *Annual Report (2003-04)*, New Delhi.

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ *op.cit.* notes23

even in one-third of the villages (Singh 2002).²⁸ “The bed-population ratio in 1991 was as low as 2.7 in Madhya Pradesh, 3.4 in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and 4.7 in Rajasthan. In the rural areas of the states mentioned above the ratios were 1.2, 0.2, 0.4 and 0.3 respectively, suggesting a virtual absence of hospital care facilities (UNFPA 1997)”.²⁹ On top of the scarce medical resources and facilities the per capita medical and public health care expenditure in Bihar is very less (UNFPA 1997).³⁰

According to India Human Development report (1999), in Bihar, 41.3 per cent of children aged 0-4 years are second degree malnourished. Another 21.7 per cent children are classified as moderately undernourished. In rural India, corresponding figures are 37 per cent and 21 per cent respectively. About 29 per cent of children in the 5-12 years age group are found to be stunted. Inter-state differentials are large. In Bihar, it is about 32.5 per cent. Stunting is relatively insensitive to differentials in income, landholding, occupation and social group.

The health indices are not encouraging. The infant mortality rate in Bihar had declined from 94 per cent in 1961 to 75 percent in 1981 and further to 67 per cent in 2001. Though it has shown a declining trend and is lesser than the national average of 71 per cent and states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan but in comparison to Kerala having lowest of 16 per cent of IMR, Bihar’s performance is dismally poor (Indian Economic Survey 2002-03)³¹. There are high rates of female infant mortality which is due to low status of females in the state. According to ICPD 1994 poverty, malnutrition, a decline in breast-feeding and inadequacy or lack of sanitation and health facilities are the reasons for high infant and child mortality (UNFPA 1997).³² NFHS-2 Bihar (1998-99) shows that rural mortality rates are considerably higher than urban mortality rates. During the five years preceding the survey, infant mortality is 40 percent higher in rural areas and child mortality is 131

²⁸ For details see Singh, J P (2002), “*Health for All In Rural India: Problems and Prospects*”, *Man and Development*, September 2002, pp. 49-64.

²⁹ *op.cit.* notes 23

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ *op.cit.* notes 22

³² *op.cit.* notes 23

per cent higher in rural areas. Under-five mortality is 59 per cent higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

On analyzing the nutritional status of women, it can be understood that about 39 per cent of women in Bihar have a BMI below 18.5, indicating a high prevalence of nutritional deficiency. Nutritional problems are particularly serious for rural women in the Jharkhand region, illiterate women, women employed by someone else or working on a family farm or in a family business, and women from scheduled castes or scheduled tribes. About 63.4 per cent of women in Bihar have iron-deficiency anaemia. In rural areas, it is 63.9 per cent and in urban areas, it is about 59.6 per cent.

The immunization level is also low. "Bihar (10.7%), Assam (19.4%), Uttar Pradesh (19.8%), Rajasthan (21.1%) and Madhya Pradesh (29.2%) stand out as having significantly lower percentages of children fully immunized than the national average of 35.4% (UNFPA 1997)".³³

The life expectancy at birth for Bihar is 65 years for males and 64 years for females approximately. For males it is better than the national average of 63 years but for females it is much lesser than the national average of 66 years. Bihar's status in terms of life expectancy at birth is better than the states like Assam, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan but it is very low in comparison to Kerala, which has life expectancy of 71 for males and 75 for females (Indian Economic Survey 2002-03).³⁴ The Birth rate in 2000 is 3.1 per cent, which is much above the replacement level of 2 per cent (Indian Economic Survey 2002-03).³⁵

The death rate in 2000 is 8.8 per 1000 population whereas the national average is 8.5 per 1000 population. This is much better than states like Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa but worse than states like Kerala,

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ *op cit.* notes 22

³⁵ *ibid*

Karnataka and Tamil Nadu (Indian Economic Survey 2002-03).³⁶ The rural mortality rates are significantly higher than the urban areas (UNFPA 1997).³⁷

There is no dearth of public health issues in Bihar but there is lag in action. With its characteristic features of high population growth rate, low performance on the human development indicator, and sluggish economic growth on one hand and lack of political and bureaucratic concern and commitment and annihilating existing caste-class structure on the contrary, raise high alert alarm for its future prospects and development.

Reason for Socio-economic backwardness of Bihar:

It is observed that Bihar's performance on Human development indicators has been dismal. Being an agrarian state and in spite of having full potential and resources for agricultural growth its economic growth has been abysmally slow. About 73 per cent of the work force is languishing in the agricultural sector, with very little scope of employment in the non-agricultural sector. A substantial proportion of population living in abject poverty is subject to socio-economic exploitation by the dominant upper caste.

On being aware of this entire scenario one cannot restrain from asking: what is the reason for the socio-economic backwardness of Bihar? Why has Bihar's development been profoundly slow in comparison to other developed states of India?

There are constellations of reasons given by different scholars. According to Jha, the reasons for the underdevelopment of agriculture in Bihar can be technically given as- the poor irrigation base of the state and low levels of input use particularly fertilizer compared to the relatively developed states. Another reason can be attributed to government's failure to consolidate land holdings, provide institutional credit and extension services particularly to the marginal and small farmers. Inadequate power and transport facilities are some of the infrastructural constraints that explain Bihar's backwardness (Jha

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ *op cit.* notes 23

1997).³⁸ Authors like Das explicate that the advent of the British plunged Bihar into continuing backwardness. Bihar received “very little of the mitigating benefits that were available to the nodal points of contact with imperialism (Das 1983: 295)”.³⁹ Researchers like Sharma and Gupta believe that multifarious social factors like illiteracy, lack of scientific temper, poor health and medical facilities etc. act as a major hurdle in the economic progress of the State (Jha 1997).⁴⁰ Alice Thorner provides a concise discussion that semi-feudal agrarian relation acts as a critical factor in explaining the backwardness of Bihar (Jha 1997).⁴¹ Some analysts consider unequal Centre-State relations as the reason for the backwardness of the state (Jha 1997).⁴² Sharma observes that:

*“The post-independence era has witnessed a dismal failure of the state government in ushering in the necessary changes needed to accelerate economic development as well as bringing about a fair and equitable social structure. This can be traced to the very nature of the power structure in Bihar. Ownership of land and other assets, caste dominance, political power structure, and the oligarchies that control the state apparatus and their resources all overlap in a way which is by no means unique to Bihar, but which takes a particularly entrenched form here... Observers have contrasted the tapering off of agricultural growth on the one hand with the immense opportunities availed by those with access to state power and patronage on the other...” (Sharma 2005).*⁴³

³⁸ *op.cit.* notes 4

³⁹ Das, Arvind N (1983), *Agrarian Unrest and Socio-Economic Change In Bihar, 1900-1980*, Manohar Publications, Delhi, p. 295.

⁴⁰ *op. cit* notes 4

⁴¹ Thorner, Alice (1982), “*semi-feudalism or Capitalism?*”, *EPW*, Vol. 17, Nos. 49- 51. Cited in Jha, Praveen K. (1997), *Agricultural Labour in India*, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, taken from Thorner, Alice (1982), “*semi-feudalism or Capitalism?*”, *EPW*, Vol. 17, Nos. 49- 51.

⁴² *Op. cit* notes 4

⁴³ *op.cit.* notes 9

Agrarian structure based on caste and class:

The division of society based on caste (Ghosh & Kumar 2003)⁴⁴ is in no way unique to Bihar but it is in a more entrenched form here. In the pre-independence period the agrarian structure based on the relationship of people to land the principle means of production was intricately stratified. The oppressive permanent settlement system was started in 1793. The state was the supreme landlord followed by the Zamindars and tenure holders who were an intermediary of the state for collection of rents. The tenants like the occupancy raiyat who had occupancy of the land held by him, the non-occupancy raiyat who did not have the right of occupancy of the land held by him temporarily, the under-raiyat who had temporary possession of land under a raiyat were third in the order below the zamindars and the tenure holders. The lowest in the strata were the agricultural wage labourer who had no rights in land and who were the most depressed and disadvantaged section of the agrarian society (Sharma 2005).⁴⁵ This hierarchy in land tenure reinforced the caste hierarchy, which proved inimical to agricultural revolution. The upper castes i.e. bhumihar, brahmin, rajput and kayastha were the ones who owned large landholding. The zamindars belonging to these castes had established a complete political and economic control in the countryside. The zamindars and tenure holders who constitute the upper class of the society were exclusively drawn from the upper castes. Apart from this a large number of the upper caste households were also tenants and peasants. The upper middle castes like yadavs, kurmis, koeris were largely peasants, non-occupancy raiyats and to a lesser extent traders and agricultural labourers. The lower

⁴⁴ "It is estimated that 13 percent of the population belongs to the upper castes. Within this are included Brahmins, Rajputs and Bhumihars, followed by Kayastha. Around 51 per cent of the population comes in the category of backward castes, but all backward castes are not equal. The yadav, Kurmi and Koeri castes along with the Bania are grouped in the category of, 'upper backward', because of their higher social and economic position. They together contribute around one-fifth of the total population and a little over a third of backward castes. Others in the backward category belong to various types of Shudra castes. The SCs, who are also Shudras, constitute 14 per cent. Besides there are Muslims and ST people constituting 12.5 per cent and 4.1 per cent of the total population respectively." Taken from Ghosh, Budhadeb and Kumar, Girish (2003), *State Politics and Panchayat in India*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi.

⁴⁵op.cit notes 9

middle castes were “essentially agricultural labourers and to a lesser extent artisans and peasants. The schedule castes were mainly agricultural labourers.” Thus the caste and class stratification were almost identical in Bihar. This agrarian structure was inherently exploitative in nature and detrimental to agricultural development (Sharma 2005).⁴⁶

The intensity of exploitation in Bihar was much more severe than Bengal as the numbers of absentee zamindars were much less in Bihar. There was lower level of awareness on the part of Bihar peasantry of their rights which made the system even worse. Land was much valuable asset in Bihar than in Bengal (Das 1983).⁴⁷ The agrarian system which possessed the worst elements of permanent settlement did not contain any of the redeeming features like leadership and education, which were present throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Bengal proper (Das 1983).⁴⁸

The zamindars taxed exorbitant land rent as well as other forms of rents like labour rent, produce rent, homage etc. The system of produce rent was mainly prevalent in Bihar. It was the most vicious forms of exaction of rent from the largest group of peasants i.e. the sharecroppers. To compound all this exploitation was also in the form of physical maltreatment and oppression of agricultural labourers for exaction of labour rent through the unpaid forced labour called beggar (Sharma 2005).⁴⁹ Biswas argues that the British used ‘caste’ to divide and rule in India (Biswas 1998).⁵⁰ “There was almost complete stagnation in agricultural production in Bihar during British period...There was little investment by the government on infrastructure such as irrigation.” The sharecroppers or the Bataidars had no rights on land and these forms of tenants formed distinctive feature of Bihar’s agrarian system. As they had no security of tenure the landlord could easily evict him. Thus zamindari system produced an extremely exploitative agrarian structure in the

⁴⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁷ *ibid*

⁴⁸ Das, Arvind N (1983), *Agrarian Unrest and Socio-economic Changes in Bihar. 1900-1980*, Manohar Publications, Delhi.

⁴⁹ *op.cit* notes 9

⁵⁰ Biswas, A.K. (1998), *Understanding Bihar*, Blumoon Books, New Delhi

countryside of Bihar which continued till 1950. This had led to large-scale eviction of peasants from their lands (Sharma 2005).⁵¹

In the post independence period efforts were made to change the agrarian structure through land reforms but the caste and class hierarchy remained the same. Scholars like Chakravarti underscore that in agrarian Bihar caste is embedded in class and the nexus between the class power and the state aggravates the continuing oppression (Chakravarti 2001)⁵² of the underclass.⁵³ In 1950 the zamindari system extremely exploitative in nature was abolished which encouraged some of the rich peasants to buy the land released in the process. But it did not reduce the wide gulf of social inequality that existed; instead the trend was on the rise. Thus, as Sharma points out, only rich tenants could retain land and smaller peasants lost access to land and “became either tenants-at-will or landless agricultural workers.” Thus in the first phase of land reform there was increase in number of agricultural workers. Though the zamindari system was abolished but the former zamindars still possessed homestead and private lands. The zamindari abolition was complemented by land ceiling act in 1962. Owing to this act several lakhs of sharecroppers were evicted illegally from the land in their possession. Several legislative measures were taken by the government to safeguard the interests of the tenants and to ensure that lands were restored to those unlawfully ejected. However the laws were implemented very poorly especially the Land Ceiling Act and Bihar Tenancy Act. The implementation of the minimum wages act in rural Bihar was also extremely tardy (Sharma 2005).⁵⁴ “Due to the government’s apathy and lack of any serious effort in implementing the ceiling act, the landlords reacted by evicting a large number of tenants during the 1960s (Sharma 2005)”.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *op.cit.* notes 9

⁵² Chakravarti, Anand (2001), “Caste and Agrarian Class, A View from Bihar”, *EPW*, Vol. 36, No. 17, pp. 1449-62.

⁵³ ‘Underclass’ according to the author means the lower class people belonging to schedule caste, schedule tribe and other backward castes.

⁵⁴ *op.cit.* notes 9

⁵⁵ *ibid*

Prasad characterizes the post independence agrarian structure as 'semi-feudal (Prasad 1975).'⁵⁶ He states that the vast majority of poor peasant-households were forced to take consumption loans from the land owning class which they were never able to return in the long run due to heavy debt burden. Consequent upon this they were forced to remain obliged to the land owning class who exploited them in numerous ways. The exploitations were in the form of cheap labour, acquiring poor peasant lands almost for nothing, leasing out land to households which were economically weak who could not maximize their output and hence remained under the mercy of the landlords etc. The semi-feudal agrarian structure was not only exploitative but was also inimical to growth and development of agriculture as it thwarted the interest of the dominant class (Sharma 2005).⁵⁷

However the land reform movement did benefit the middle castes like Yadavs, Koeris, Kurmis. According to a survey done in 1981-82 the backward caste I was largely agricultural labourer and artisan group. Yadavs and Koeris were mainly poor-middle and middle peasants. Kurmis about two-thirds were big peasants and landlords and the 'other backward II' were widely distributed with a relatively high proportion in the non-agriculture sector. It was found that the middle castes "had significantly improved their economic position and had cornered a large portion of the institutional credit". The big peasants and landlords had mostly lost their lands to the middle castes (Sharma 2005).⁵⁸

A resurvey done in 1999-2000 in the same area showed "that the trends exhibited by the first survey have intensified over the years more in form than substance". Though the caste and class configurations remain more or less the same i.e. the forward castes are still mostly big peasants and landlords, while scheduled castes are mainly agricultural labourers but the upward mobility of the middle castes, particularly of the dominant ones, towards higher classes is clearly evident. "The lower middle castes (backward I) have also consolidated their position over the years and a good number of them have risen to the rank

⁵⁶ Prasad, Pradhan h (1975), "*Agrarian Unrest and Economic Change in Rural Bihar: the Three Case Studies*", *EPW*, June 14.

⁵⁷ *op.cit.* notes 9

⁵⁸ *ibid*

of middle peasants (Sharma 2005)".⁵⁹ Though there were certain positive socio-economic change in rural Bihar with the abolition of the permanent settlement and land reforms but the dilemma of the poor peasantry and agricultural labourer remained the same.

The land reform movement has brought about a new consciousness among the peasantry of Bihar in 1960s (Sharma 2005).⁶⁰ Thus there has been significant change in the agrarian class structure but this has not been able to bring about any change in the exploitation of the poor peasants and agricultural laborers who were mostly from the scheduled and lower backward castes (Sharma 2005).⁶¹ The middle and lower castes too joined hands with the upper castes in the exploitation and repression of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers. "Whether Bhumihars, or Yadavs and Kurmis, they are landlords, who were determined to preserve their land, some part of which are often ill-gotten... Their victims were Musahar, Chamars, Dusadh, Yadavs and even Brahmins (as in Belchi). They cut across castes (Dhar 1982: 110)".⁶²

The long term suppression and exploitation prepared fertile ground for militant movements. Das highlights that the peasant movements in Bihar were sporadic, lacked co-ordination, uniformity and organization and thus were not able to bring about spectacular change in the agrarian structure except that of abolition of permanent settlement. According to him "The inherent division and lack of unity within the peasantry led it in its movements, at most times, to ignore the basic question of redistribution of land and take up other subsidiary issues instead." Many of the time the upper caste participating in it had vested interest (Das 1983).⁶³ According to Sharma though socio-economic change in Bihar was very much a result of the peasant movements but they were not much successful. Some of the middle cast had also transcended to higher class. The politics was organized on the basis of caste and economy on the basis of class. Sharma is precisely right in saying that emergent dichotomy

⁵⁹ *ibid*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ *ibid*

⁶² Dhar, Hiranmay *et al* (1982), *Caste and Polity in Bihar*, in Gail, Omvedt (Ed), *Land Caste and Politics in Indian States*, Authors Guild Publications, Delhi, p.110.

⁶³ *op cit.* notes 39

between caste and class in contemporary Bihar should be taken into account by the leading organizations of the labouring poor if the movements have to be successful (Sharma 2005).⁶⁴

Certain authors like Sharma believe that migration was one of the striking reasons for change in rural Bihar. According to him migration has not only helped in meeting the consumption need of the migrants and their families but it has also increased agricultural wage by outsourcing surplus labour. Unequivocally the author is right in his own plane of argument but the implication of migration on socio-economic change seems to be negligible. Scholars like Jha and Chakravarti argue that migration does not help the labourers to escape the poverty trap. The illiterate and unskilled agricultural labourers of Bihar are out competed by those who belong to economically superior classes, in finding livelihood options in the non-agricultural sectors (Jha 1997).⁶⁵ They generally get low paying menial jobs. Out of their meager income they have to save for their family in the village thus making their survival difficult. As a matter of fact “there are no signs of any decrease in the share of agricultural labourers in the total work force in Bihar” even after migration of the labourers in non-agricultural activities (Jha 1997).⁶⁶ Migration, which is essentially a male phenomenon, increases the work burden of females left behind in the villages (Sharma 2005).⁶⁷ A study done by Jha in a few districts of northern Bihar delineates a profound melancholic strain of the life of these lower caste poor women whose husbands are forced to migrate due to abject poverty (Jha 2004).⁶⁸ According to an Action Aid study on Health issues of dalit and Muslim women in rural areas of north Bihar, 61 per cent of women are forced continue to work in the rural areas in

⁶⁴ *ibid*

⁶⁵ For details see Jha, Praveen K. (1997), *Agricultural Labour in India*, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi.
and Chakravarti, Anand (2001), “Caste and Agrarian Class, A View from Bihar”, *EPW*, Vol. 36, No. 17, pp 1449-62.

⁶⁶ *op cit.* notes 4

⁶⁷ *op cit.* notes 9

⁶⁸ Jha, Dharendra K. (2004), “Grass Widows of Bihar”, in Rao, Mohan (Ed), *The Unheard Scream, Reproductive Health and Women’s Lives in India*, Zubaan and Panos Institute, India, pp. 67-86.

spite of their ill health (Jha 2004).⁶⁹ In short agrarian structure in Bihar continues to be detrimental to growth and exploitative in nature.

Political instability in the state and nexus between state and dominant caste- class

The unique political history of Bihar is based on strict caste classification. "Casteism is still the dominant factor in the determination of the course of assembly politics in Bihar (Dhar 1982:110)".⁷⁰ It has a highly unstable government. After the first chief minister Mr. S K Sinha no other chief minister could complete his five-year term. The period from 1967-72 has witnessed change of nine chief ministers and three president's rule. It is only after 1990 that the former chief minister Laloo Prasad Yadav with his charisma was able to form government for three consecutive terms under his leadership i.e. for the period of fifteen years (Ghosh & Kumar 2003).⁷¹ Chakravarti argues that the continued oppression of underclass in Bihar is a consequence of nexus between the dominant caste-class and the state (Chakravarti 2001).⁷² Even the state and the police back the landlord. Work is done even faster if the landlords, the bureaucracy and the police have same caste alignments and in such case the help is more assured to them (Dhar 1982).⁷³

Poor land reforms

The irony of land reform movement in Bihar is that state was instrumental in its enunciation and was also the chief instrument of its subversion (Chakravarti 2001).⁷⁴ Land reforms failed to provide succor to the actual cultivators. The beneficiaries were mainly intermediaries of zamindar, their occupancy tenants and the middle castes. The lacunae in the land reform laws were advantageously made use of to retain the land by landholders

⁶⁹ *ibid*

⁷⁰ *op cit.* notes 62

⁷¹ Ghosh, Budhadeb and Kumar, Girish (2003), *State Politics and Panchayat in India*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi.

⁷² *op cit.* notes 52

⁷³ *op cit.* notes 62

⁷⁴ *op cit.* notes 52

(Chakravarti 2001).⁷⁵ It led to the eviction of the former tenants of land who actually used to cultivate those lands since time immemorial (Ekka 1984).⁷⁶ The lack of political will was clearly demonstrated by large gaps between policy and legislation and between law and its implementation. Those who implemented land reform laws honestly were transferred (Ekka 1984).⁷⁷ A scathing observation made by Dhar is that the ex-zamindars of Bihar succeeded in protecting their class interest through various unscrupulous methods such as fictitious transfer of land (benamdari), collusion with revenue officials and politicians etc (Chakravarti 2001).⁷⁸ Corollary to this the huge gap between the rich and the poor couldn't be bridged.

Wide spread illiteracy

Education brings about awareness and consciousness among people about their rights and about right and wrong happening around them. It liberates man. Education at times turns a timid into a valiant and fearless crusader. Unfortunately education has been kept at bay from the masses in Bihar and as stated above it ranks lowest in the literacy rate in India. Biswas states "The privilege of its use has remained the monopoly of a few to the exclusion and detriment of the overwhelming majority." In his historical analysis of caste he shows how caste has become the most audacious obstacle to the spread of education, especially in Bihar (Biswas 1998).⁷⁹ Chakravarti points out that the lack of access to formal education is a problem afflicting a substantial proportion of the general population in Bihar. The situation of the dalits is even worse. Poverty and poor material circumstances of the dalits makes it practically impossible for them to avail of formal education (Chakravarti 2001).⁸⁰ This perpetuates their low economic condition as they are forced to work as unskilled drudge labour both in organized or unorganized sector. The

⁷⁵ *ibid*

⁷⁶ Ekka, Beni Alphonse (1984), *Politics of land reforms in Bihar*, Dissertation, CPS, JNU (unpublished).

⁷⁷ *ibid*

⁷⁸ *op.cit.* 52

⁷⁹ *op cit.* notes 50

⁸⁰ *op cit.* notes 52

wide spread illiteracy is a great hurdle in the social, economic and political progress of Bihar.

In the light of above discussion providing a backdrop of socio-economic and political happening in Bihar let us see the implementation of panchayati raj in Bihar.

Panchayati Raj in Bihar:

Historically, the village system in Bihar has been a highly interactive, democratic system sustained and supported by the age-old institution of panchayat. The Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 1947 which came into operation in 1949, assigned the village panchayats some executive functions, functions of implementing development programme and power of trying and deciding minor civil and criminal cases. Later the article 40⁸¹ of the Constitution provided a boost to the act. Even though Bihar is criticized for its utter neglect of the development of panchayat, it is an irony of history that it has, the distinction of being one of the first states of India to enact a formal legislation on panchayats. However they have had a vegetative existence since then. "In appearance, this action of the Bihar government could be shown as fulfillment of a commitment to the Gandhian principle of gram swaraj. However, panchayats under the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act of 1947 had nothing to do with Gandhi's gram swaraj. In substance, the two structures of gram panchayat and gram kutcheri were meant to perpetuate the existing feudal social order in the villages (Kumar 1999)".⁸²

With the implementation of the community development projects all over the country since 1952 the panchayats suffered from a setback. There was no participation of the panchayats or the people in the community development projects. A large section of people remained deprived of the benefits of development. No significant progress in the rural areas could be made. Corollary to Balwantray Mehta committee's recommendation (1957), the

⁸¹ The article 40 envisages that the state government shall endow panchayats with requisite powers and responsibilities so that they can act as institutions of local self-government.

⁸² Kumar, Vijay (1999), "Panchayati Raj in Bihar: A Critical Survey", in Ghosh, Ratna and Pramanik, Alok Kumar (Eds), *Panchayat System in India - Historical, Constitutional and Financial Analysis*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 50-66.

Bihar panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishad Act 1961, created only two new units of local government- Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad. The village panchayat was already in operation since 1949 (Kumar 1999).⁸³ The establishment of three tiers of panchayats however was very slow and tardy. Halfhearted attempts were made to implement the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the state. The reluctance of the state government was reflected when the panchayats were first implemented in the southern districts where it had no stakes, as the legislative representatives and these districts were not considered as forming the core whose interest mattered for the state leadership (Bhushan & Pathak 1996).⁸⁴ It took nearly two decades to enforce it throughout the state. It was only by 1964 that all villages of the state could be covered by panchayats and only by early eighties all the districts in Bihar could be covered by the Panchayats Samiti and Zilla Parishad i.e. all the three tiers of PRI. However hardly ever did the three tiers function simultaneously in any district. The two tiers—the Panchayats Samiti and Zilla Parishad in fact could never get institutionalized as properly functional institutions (Kumar 1999).⁸⁵

Panchayats before 2001 election:

Unfortunately the Operation of Panchayats in Bihar is a sad saga. Although the vision was good but due to certain inherent systemic impediment and lack of political commitment the panchayat system was crippled at infancy and could never attain its youth. The main features of the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 1947 were that it provided a 'gram panchayat' as an elective body for village of 4000 population, an elective judiciary called 'Gram-Kutchehary' with a panel of nine 'panches' and village volunteer force called 'Gram Raksha Dal'. "In a feudal rural society marked by wide caste and class divisions, intra and inter-caste rivalry and factions, there was little chance for the marginalized people to get justice from a gram kutcheri (Ghosh & Kumar

⁸³ *ibid*

⁸⁴ Bhushan, Shashi and Pathak, Narendra (1996), "*Present Status And Future Prospects Of Panchayati Raj In India, Bihar-II: Polity's Stalagmites*", Institute of Social Sciences.

⁸⁵ *op cit.* notes 82

2003)”.⁸⁶ Due to personal biases and caste relationship Gram-Kutchehary was never impartial and after sixties it remained practically defunct (Bhushan & Pathak 1996).⁸⁷ The linkages between PRIs and various groups like- the people, the PRI leaders, the bureaucrats, the local politicians, the government etc. was very poor. It was difficult to muster support from them due to government apathy and political squabbling (Kumar 1999).⁸⁸ One of important functions of Gram Raksha Dal was to organize a village volunteer force to protect the village and to combat emergency situations like fire and epidemic. Soon it was found that in the name of village protection, the poor and the property less was being used as night watchmen for the rich, free of cost. Very few from the rich families offered such voluntary service. The influential people in the village often manipulated to push the non-active volunteers into the police force. This dampened the enthusiasm of those who were interested to work in it (Bhushan & Pathak 1996).⁸⁹ After mid sixties this force also became inactive. The gram sabhas or the entire gram panchayat never met to decide its role. The very purpose of self-rule was overshadowed (Bhushan & Pathak 1996).⁹⁰ Common people had little or no chance to contribute to these bodies.

Though the mukhiyas were member of the advisory committees at the block level in 1955, and then of the Block Development Committee in 1958, the entire programme was run by the block officials with little involvement of panchayats (Ghosh & Kumar 2003).⁹¹ Such an arrangement continues till today (Bhushan & Pathak 1996).⁹² Zilla Parishad was mainly given the planning function to coordinate with the block plans in practice; however, planning was “undertaken by the District Planning and Development Council

⁸⁶ *op cit.* notes 71

⁸⁷ *op cit.* notes 84

⁸⁸ *op cit.* notes 82

⁸⁹ *op cit.* notes 84

⁹⁰ *ibid*

⁹¹ *op cit.* notes 71

⁹² *op cit.* notes 84

(DPDC) under a minister as chairperson and a development commissioner as the executive head (Sinha 2000)".⁹³

Panchayats in Bihar were of little significance in terms of decentralization of governmental function. They served basically as allies of the dominant power structure of the respective areas. "Mukhias and other members invariably belonged to the dominant castes or classes (Ghosh & Kumar 2003)".⁹⁴ "The gram panchayats in the state had a very weak financial base right from their inception. In spite of the various amendments made in the panchayat acts from time to time, these institutions were neither financially viable nor effective (Sinha 2000)".⁹⁵

Though panchayats in Bihar couldn't be a model of decentralized democracy but they remained as centers of power and political patronage. The Mukhiya could become an ex-officio member of the Panchayat Samiti and to get elected as Pramukh. As a Pramukh he was eligible to be ex-officio member of the Zilla Parishad with a possibility to get elected as Zilla Pradhan. This possibility led to a tension between the Pramukh and the popularly elected MLAs. The fact that a Pramukh had much more effective command over allocable resources of the block than the MLA accentuated the tension between them (Ghosh & Kumar 2003).⁹⁶ Therefore the funds and resources of panchayat samiti were gradually cut and upward mobility checked by checked by erratic elections and political promises for prolongation of their tenure through ordinances (Ghosh & Kumar 2003).⁹⁷

Due to political instability as mentioned above each political party was engaged in strengthening its political base and in the process the panchayats which were seem as a threat to their local power were neglected. Only the Janata Dal government aimed to broad base its political power through panchayats and reservations to the backward castes but it also could not stay

⁹³ Sinha, K K (2000), "Bihar" in Mathew, George (Ed), *Status Of Panchayati Raj In The States And Union Territories Of India 2000*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi.

⁹⁴ *op cit.* notes 71

⁹⁵ *op cit.* notes 93

⁹⁶ *op cit.* notes 71

⁹⁷ *ibid*

in power for long. The Congress Party which held the power continuously in Bihar except for three small intermittent periods till 1990 had introduced 'plebiscitary politics'. The actual power was concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. As local democracy which creates space for grass root leadership with popular support, goes against the 'plebiscitary politics' hence revival of panchayats was the least that could be expected from such a regime (Ghosh & Kumar 2003).⁹⁸

Two committees – Bage (1973) committee and Tyagi (1961) committee were appointed by the government of Bihar to suggest amendment in the act of 1947 and act of 1961 respectively but the recommendations of both the committees remained only on paper and no action was taken on the part of government (Bhushan & Pathak 1996).⁹⁹

Election

The elections to panchayat had been held regularly till 1964. After 1964, the panchayat elections were held only twice that is in 1971 and in 1978-80, both during the chief ministership of Karpoori Thakur (Sinha 2000).¹⁰⁰ If one looks at the 1961 Act, it is very evident that the framers of the Act did not want panchayat samiti and Zilla Parishads to become centers of power as in none of these bodies were there provisions of direct election (Ghosh & Kumar 2003).¹⁰¹ After the expiry of the five-year term, the term of the office of mukhiya of a gram panchayat and pramukh of a panchayat samiti were extended by the government every six-month. In case of deaths of such persons the government filled the vacuum by nomination. In fact, fulfillment of the post and nominations became a full-time job of a deputy director in the directorate of panchayats (Ghosh & Kumar 2003).¹⁰² It should be noted that the term of the adhyakshas and up-adhyakshas of the Zilla Parishads after expiry was not extended after 13 November 1986. The deputy development commissioners-cum-chief executive officers of the districts replaced the

⁹⁸ *ibid*

⁹⁹ *op cit.* notes 84

¹⁰⁰ *op cit.* notes 93

¹⁰¹ *op cit.* notes 71

¹⁰² *ibid*

vacant posts. The Zilla Parishads were thus superseded (Sinha 2000).¹⁰³ In 1997 under an order of the Supreme Court the elected members in office since 1978 were dismissed and their powers were passed over to the panchayat officials till 2001 election (Ghosh & Kumar 2003).¹⁰⁴

The panchayat elections were not free from the violence and killings whenever they were held (Sinha 2000)¹⁰⁵. The influence of caste and class politics could be seen in 2001 elections as well, that was held after a lapse of 23 years (Sharma 2001).¹⁰⁶ The upper caste who owns muscle men to control the people and the election do not allow the lower castes to vote against them, as was seen in the case of Nariyar panchayat in Saharsa district in 2001 election (Sharma 2001).¹⁰⁷ Although the 73rd amendment and 2001 election has been a turning point in changing the social and political equation to some extent but the upper castes still have a substantial power base in rural Bihar (Gupta 2001).¹⁰⁸ According to Arjun Sharma caste has been politicized and provides the basis for political participation. Caste elites understand panchayat politics as a means to capture political power. However transfer of power to rising middle caste is clearly seen. The elected and nominated members of the panchayat executive reveal the fact that the traditional domination of higher castes in the power politics has shifted. New political elites are emerging but the nature of the governing elites seems to be the same (Sharma 1988).¹⁰⁹ The influence of caste politics on panchayat politics could be observed well in a government of India's study of a successful panchayat in Bihar, done in 1960. According to the study the Noor Sarai panchayat in patna district had a

¹⁰³ *op cit.* notes 93

¹⁰⁴ *op cit.* notes 71

¹⁰⁵ Anecdote of 1978 election can be seen in Sinha, K K (2000), "Bihar" in Mathew, George (Ed), *Status Of Panchayati Raj In The States And Union Territories Of India 2000*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi and Bhushan, Shashi and Pathak, Narendra (1996), *"Present Status And Future Prospects Of Panchayati Raj In India, Bihar-II: Polity's Stalagmites"*, Institute of Social Sciences.

¹⁰⁶ Sharma, Mukul (2001), "Bihar, Making of a Panchayat Election", *EPW*, Vol. 36, No. 19, May, pp.1577-81.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*

¹⁰⁸ Gupta, Shaibal (2001), "Bihar, New Panchayats and Subaltern Resurgence", *EPW*, Vol. 36, No.29, July, pp. 2742-44.

¹⁰⁹ Sharma, Arjun (1988), *Caste, Class And, Politics in Rural India, A comparative study of two village panchayats, Bihar and West Bengal*, Phd. Thesis, CPS, JNU (unpublished).

homogeneous caste composition (GOI 1960).¹¹⁰ This was one of the main reasons for the success of this panchayat.

Panchayats remained self-government of the people but not by the people and for the people. In reality power did not percolate beyond the offices of the Mukhia, the Pramukh and the Adhyaksha of Zilla Parishad (Ghosh & Kumar 2003).¹¹¹

The Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1993

After 73rd Constitutional amendment a Bihar Panchayati Raj amendment Act was passed in 1993. But the act was not implemented then. Only after the intervention of the high court that the elections were held in April 2001 and the new panchayati raj based on 73rd amendment came into force in June 2001.

“The Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution gives twenty-nine subject to panchayats. The Bihar act assigns thirty-one functions to gram panchayats, twenty-seven functions to samitis and twenty-four functions to parishads, ‘subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by the government from time to time’ (Sinha 2000)”.¹¹² However the real devolution is yet to take place in the gram panchayat (Datta 2004).¹¹³

The gram sevak who is the secretary of gram panchayat is appointed by the state government. The BDO is the executive officer of the block panchayat. The Zilla planning officer and the chief accounts officer are also appointed by the state government. The district magistrate is the chief executive officer of the Zilla Parishad, who remains in overall control over financial matters of the parishad. MPs and MLAs or MLCs of the areas are ex-officio, full-time

¹¹⁰ Government of India (1960), Planning Commission, Programme evaluation Organisation, *Some Successful Panchayats- Case Studies*, P.E.O Publication No. 34.

¹¹¹ *op cit.* notes 71

¹¹² *op cit.* notes 93

¹¹³ Datta, Chandan (2004), “*New Panchayati Raj System In Bihar*”, in Palanithurai, G (Ed), *Dynamics of New Panchayati Raj System In India, Vol. III, Select States*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi.

members of the samitis and parishads. The mukhiyas are also members of the samitis and the pramukhs, the members of the parishad (Sinha 2000).¹¹⁴

Main features of the act:

The main features of the act are as follows¹¹⁵:

The gram sabha has been made more powerful and they have to meet once in every three months.

The quorum of the meeting will be one-tenth of the total members of the gram sabha. The gram sabha will consider – the annual statement of accounts of gram panchayat, report of administration of the preceding financial year and the last audit note and replies, budget of the panchayat for the next financial year, report of the development programmes of gram panchayat relating to the preceding year and current year, and report of the vigilance committee. They are responsible for the identification of the beneficiaries of the development schemes.

Reservation of seats for women, SC, ST, and backward classes (BC).

The number of seats reserved will be in the same proportion to the total number of seats to be filled up by direct election in that panchayat as the population of the SC, ST or BC bears to the total population of that area and such seats will be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a gram panchayat in such a manner as may be prescribed by the State Election Commission. One-third of the total number of seats will be reserved for women.

Elections have to be held after every five-year term of the panchayat.

Every panchayat will continue for the term of five year. The election of the next term should be complete before the expiration of the previous term. Election will be held in case of dissolution before the expiration of a period

¹¹⁴ *op cit.* notes 93

¹¹⁵ Government of Bihar(1994), Bihar Gazette, Bihar Panchayati Raj Act 1993, 28 October, and Singh, S.S. *et al* (1997), *Legislative Status of Panchayati Raj in India*, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi.

of six months from the date of its dissolution, provided the panchayat has been dissolved six months before its expiry term.

Standing Committees and Vigilance Committee

“There are provisions for three standing committees in gram panchayats (production, social justice and amenities), four in samitis (general, finance and audit and planning, and social justice) and five in parishads (general, finance and audit and planning, social justice, education and health, agriculture and industry)(Sinha 2000)”.¹¹⁶

An important feature of the Act is that the gram panchayats will have vigilance committee consisting of persons who are not members of the Gram Panchayat to supervise the gram panchayat activities relating to the village (Datta 2004).¹¹⁷

Gram Katchahry

Like the act of 1947 a gram katchahry consists of a Sarpanch and a panel of panches - each representing 500 population of the panchayat area. Every gram katchahry will continue for a period of five years and discharge judicial functions as given in the act. However gram katchahry have not been functional yet.

Direct election at all the three levels.

All the members of the entire three tiers are elected directly by the people, except the Up-mukhia, Pramukh, Up-pramukh, Adhyaksh and Up-Adhyaksh.

Critical analysis of The Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1993

The act provides for the direct election of the members at all the three levels of the Panchayat Raj except for the pramukhs and up-pramukhs of panchayat samiti and adhyaksh and up-adhyaksh of the Zilla Parishad. Hence unlike the act of 1961 it reduces the influence of the state government in it.

¹¹⁶ *op cit. notes 93*

¹¹⁷ *op cit. notes 113*

The gram sabha seems to be strengthened by the act as its meeting have to be held once in every three months. Gram sabha consists of all villagers who are eligible to vote. But the loophole in the act is that the quorum of 10 per cent of total voters for the gram sabha meeting can be waived in the subsequent meeting for which no quorum is required. So mukhiya can misuse this as he may many a time take decisions on important matters in such meetings where no quorum is required.

The powers of the state government under Section 132 for dissolution of any tier of panchyats on grounds of incompetence can be misused and it carries dangerous implications for the autonomy of the PRIs (Sinha 2000).¹¹⁸ This provision will lead to an increase of political and bureaucratic control (Kumar 1999).¹¹⁹ Under section 127 of the act the government has further empowered itself by having power to get any PRI office inspected and demand explanation for matters related to administration through any of its officers (Kumar 1999).¹²⁰ On the other hand such provisions also keep a check and balance on the functioning of the PRIs.

The two unique features of the Bihar's Panchayati Raj were the 'gram raksha dal' and the 'gram kacheri'. By the amendment made in 1995 the gram raksha dal has been reincorporated in the act while the gram kacheri had been given more powers. However the "chief judicial magistrate or the sub-divisional magistrate can withdraw any case of the gram kacheri on the apprehension of miscarriage of justice" which gives a low profile to the kacheri in the public esteem (Sinha 2000).¹²¹

The 1993 act entails unwillingness of the state government towards power sharing with the Panchayati Raj institutions. This is evident in the act as it allows maximum possible representation to the ex-officio members in all layers of the tier. This speaks of the intention behind in dilution of democratic character proposed in the Act, though legally this is not barred (Bhushan &

¹¹⁸ *op cit.* notes 93

¹¹⁹ *op cit.* notes 82

¹²⁰ *ibid*

¹²¹ *op cit.* notes 93

Pathak 1996).¹²² The involvement of the MLAs and MPs in panchayat samitis and Zilla Parshads respectively in accordance to section 34 and 61 respectively may lead to rivalry between them and the local leaders. Their interest and votes can influence the decisions of the Panchayat Raj. These legislators can also use this as a platform to patronize the grass-root leadership as their link with the general masses (Kumar 1999).¹²³

The recent allotment of a sum of rupees one crore every year to each MP for the development of his local area by the central government without any involvement of the panchayat institutions is an arrangement to strengthen their position above the panchayat (Kumar 1999).¹²⁴ The act of 1993 makes adequate provisions for financial resource generation for the panchayats however the local authorities are reluctant to levy tax because that makes them unpopular (Kumar 1999).¹²⁵ As most of the rich people are the once who hold power so they are not interested in imposing any tax because they are the ones who will have to pay for it (GOI 1960).¹²⁶ The funds earmarked in the state budget and annual plan depends on the arbitrary decision of the government (Kumar 1999).¹²⁷ Thus the PRIs are still dependent on the state government for their expenditures.

The provisions of reservation vide section 13, 35 and 63 respectively, for SC, ST and women gives scope for changing village power pattern (Kumar 1999).¹²⁸ It may also lead to conflict, proxy representation and governance as is the case in Tamil Nadu's Keerapatti, Pappapatti and Nattarmangalam panchayats where the dominating upper castes cannot accept to be governed by a dalit (Hindu 2005).¹²⁹ According to an estimate the number of reserved constituencies may be nearly 70 per cent (Kumar 1999)¹³⁰. The panchayat election commission will be faced with the stupendous task of identifying

¹²² *op cit. notes 84*

¹²³ *op cit. notes 82*

¹²⁴ *ibid*

¹²⁵ *ibid*

¹²⁶ *op cit. notes 110*

¹²⁷ *op cit. notes 82*

¹²⁸ *ibid*

¹²⁹ The Hindu (2005), "Quitters don't win, but winners do quit", Saturday, April 30, p. 10.

¹³⁰ *Op.cit. 82*

reserved constituencies (Kumar 1999).¹³¹ which has already lead to unnecessary litigation (Ghosh & Kumar 2003).¹³² However change in the status of SC, ST and women cannot be ruled out. “The reservation does not mean much for the weaker section unless and until fair and free elections are guaranteed” to them (Atmanand 1999)¹³³.

The provision of supervision under section 153 and 156 of the act by the chairpersons of the respective PRIs of the schools, health sub-centre, primary health centre, referral hospitals etc is bound to lead to friction and problems (Kumar 1999).¹³⁴ Apart from this the punitive measures to be taken by them are not strong enough to act as a deterrent.

The act is silent about the role of NGOs, the most important among them being the statutory Bihar Raj Panchayat Parishad which has its branches spread all over the districts. There is also no mention about the village voluntary force which did policing function and worked in times of natural calamities (Ghosh & Kumar 2003).¹³⁵ The act also does not mention anything about the training of the panchayat members that is very essential.

The Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 1993 still contains a lot of loop holes but some scholars like Girish Kumar is very optimistic about it and believes that it “will pave the way for effective people-friendly governance (Kumar 2001:1681-84)”.¹³⁶

¹³¹ *ibid*

¹³² *op cit. notes 71*, p. 215.

¹³³ Atmanand (1999), “*Panchayati Raj In Bihar, Quest for New Direction*”, in Atmanand (Ed), *Financing of Panchayati Raj*, Excel Books, New Delhi.

¹³⁴ *op cit. notes 82*

¹³⁵ *op cit. notes 132*

¹³⁶ Kumar, Girish (2001), “*Bihar, Panchayat Elections: Overcoming State’s Resistance*”, *EPW*, Vol 36, No.20, May, pp.1681-84.

Chapter IV

*Socio-Economic Status, Caste and Health in
Hussepur Gram Panchayat*

Chapter IV

Socio-Economic Status, Caste and Health In Hussepur Gram Panchayat

Saran District Profile

There are nine administrative divisions and thirty eight districts in Bihar. Saran district comes under Saran division. The district has three sub-divisions namely- Chhapra, Marhowrah, and Sonapur. In Saran there are twenty community development blocks namely- Chhapra, Revelganj, Jalalpur, Manjhi, Ekma, Baniapur, Garkha, Parsa, Marhowrah, Masrakh, Taraiya, Amnour, Sonapur, Dighwara, Dariapur, Panapur, Maker, Isuapur, Nagra & Lahladpur. The district has an area of 2641 Km Sq. according to 1991 census. Ganga, Gandak and Ghaghra rivers flow through the district. River Ganga flank the whole of the south east border of the district and river Gandak flank the whole of the north east part of the district. The district is situated at the confluence of both Ganga and Gandak rivers. It's a flood prone district as it lies in the low lying northern plains of Bihar. It bears all characteristic of being a northern Bihar district.

The district is known for some of its historical peculiarities. Sitab Diara the birthplace of late Shri Jai Prakash Narayan who had initiated the famous JP movement which proved to be a turning point in the history of Bihar and India is situated in this district. The world's largest cattle fare i.e. *Harihar Kshetra Mela* is held each year in Sonapur block of this district. Hundreds of thousands of people take a holy dip at the confluence of Ganges and Gandak River on *Kartik Purnima* during this mela. Patna the capital of Bihar is 70 Kms. away from Chhapra, the district headquarter.

According to 2001 census it ranks eighth in population in Bihar with a total population of 3248701. The population growth rate was 26.8% between 1991 and 2001. With a positive sex ratio of 1033, Saran ranks first among all the districts of Bihar in comparison to sex ratio according to 2001 census.¹ The density of population is 974.24. According to 2001 census total rural population is 2950064

¹ Director of Census Operations, Census of India 2001, *Series- II, Bihar, Provisional Population totals, Paper- I of 2001*, Bihar

and total urban population is 298637. The schedule caste population is 389933 and the schedule tribe population 6667. Total literate population in the district is 1347610 out of which 888812 males and 458798 females are literate. Total working population is 860940 out of which 695396 are male workers and 165544 are female workers.

According to 1991 census the district has 11.71% of the schedule caste and 0.13% of Schedule Tribe.² The district has literacy rate of 41.79%. Out of this literate population 60.18% of males and 22.71% of females are literate.³

The main crops in the district are Paddy, Wheat, Maize and Pulses. It has a few sick & closed industries like Morton's Confectionery and Saran Engineering at Marhowrah.

Saran is a poor district. The total below poverty line population in Saran district is 169933. In Amnaur block the total population is 24643. This whole block comes under rural area and so there is no urban population. In Amnaur total below poverty line (BPL) population is 8020 i.e. that is 4.71% of BPL population of the district is in Amnaur block.⁴ Almost 1/3rd of the population is BPL in the block. Total male population is 168339 and total female population is 86326.

² Census of India 1991, Directorate of Census Operations *A Potrait of population Bihar*, Bihar.

³ Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Census of India, *Primary Census Abstract, General Population, 1991*, Part II-B(i), Series 1, Vols 1 and 2, New Delhi.

⁴ Source is DRDA office- (allotment for IAY)

Hussepur Gram Panchayat profile

The research work is based on a case study of Hussepur Gram Panchayat which is situated in Amnour Block of the Saran district in Bihar. It is a part of Amnour panchayat samiti. In Amnour Block there are 18 Gram Panchayats and 26 Panchayat Samities. Total below poverty line population in Amnour block are 8020. The highest tier of Panchayat Raj Institution at the district level in Saran district is known as Saran Zila Parishad. The profile starts with a brief introduction of the panchayat, followed by description of the area, socio-economic status and ends with the infrastructure and resources present in the panchayat.

Hussepur Gram Panchayat:

The Hussepur Gram Panchayat stretching over an area of 1888.94 acre¹ has got six villages under its jurisdiction – **Hussepur, Gheyaspur, Mani Sirisia, Jagdeo Sirisiya, Sirsia Khab and Ganaura**. Of this Hussepur is the main village on whose name the gram panchayat has been named. Sirsia Khab is an uninhabited village as it completely consists of agricultural land.² The local dialect of the people is Bhojpuri. The panchayat came to office on 11th of June, 2001.³ The Panchayat Bhawan (panchayat office) is situated in this village. Panchayat Bhawan is not used by the panchayat and it is in a very dilapidated condition. The Mukhia of the panchayat resides in this village.

There are 14 wards in the panchayat. The panchayat members consist of (14 ward members + 1 Mukhia =) 15 members. Of the fourteen wards, ward number 1-5 are reserved wards for females and the rest nine wards are for the general candidate. From all the rest nine wards males have contested and won. There was no reservation for Scheduled Caste in the panchayat.

¹ Calculated from document of village revenue and given by statistical officer of the Amnour block.

² Information given by the Gram Panchayat Officer of Amnour block.

³ As told by the Gram Panchayat president, locally known as Mukhia of the Hussepur panchayat.

Description of the area

The total population of the panchayat is 8483,⁴ (4298 males and 4183 females) according to 2001 census. Of the five villages the Hussepur village has the highest population- 4343. Sirsia Jagdeo has 1282, Sirsia Mani has 1246, Ganoura 896 and Gheyaspur 714 population. The total number of house holds is 1254. According to 2001 census the total population of the scheduled castes in the panchayat is 281. They are settled merely in two villages i.e. in Hussepur with a population of 131 and in Mani Sirsia with a population of 150 scheduled castes. Hussepur Panchayat is the biggest panchayat in the block but it has the least population of the scheduled castes in the block. There are no scheduled tribes in the panchayat.

Total electorate population in the panchayat according to the Gram Panchayat Officer on deputation named Lakhan Pd. Shrivastava is 5575 approximately.

Literacy:

Total number of literate population in the panchayat is 3491 which is less than total number of illiterate population in the panchayat which is 4990, according to 2001 census. Total number of male literate population is 2379. Total number of female literate population is 1112. About more than half of the population is illiterate in the panchayat. Total number of male illiterate population is 1919. Total number of female illiterate population is 3071. We can observe an inverse relationship between gender and education in the panchayat. More number of females are illiterate and more number of males are literate. The females in the panchayat do not go for higher education.

Marriage:

In an interview with the ladies of backward castes and lower castes in all the five villages it was observed that the girls of backward and lower castes get married at the age of 15-16 years of age. The boys get married at the age of 18-20 years. The poor has to spend minimum of Rs 25000-30,000 approximately in marriage. They spend this amount either from their savings if they have any or by taking money

⁴ It needs to be emphasized that under section 11 of the Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 a Gram Panchayat has to be constituted over a population of 5000 but in this panchayat the population is more than that. (Government of Bihar (1994), Bihar Gazette, *Bihar Panchayat Raj Act 1993*, October 28, Patna.)

from the money lenders. And some sell their cattle which is a very good asset for them in times of need, to arrange the money for the marriage.⁵ Group of Noniya women said that earlier their girls were married at the age of 15-16 years. But, now the trend is changing, some of the people are marrying them late as they realize that the adolescent girls have to face a lot of problems after marriage. The upper castes get their daughters married at the age of 17-18 years. It may also be late for some girls.

Working and non- working population:

Total number of **working population is 2359** according to 2001 census. Out of this almost half of the workers are main workers i.e. **1332** and the other half is marginal workers i.e. **1027**. It is worthwhile to mention here that the main workers get employment for more than 180 days in a year whereas the marginal workers get employment for less than 180 days in a year. Total number of male workers is 1913. Total number of female workers is 446.

There is very high pressure of the dependant population on the working population. About 6122 non-working population is dependant on 2359 working population i.e. around three fourth of the population is dependant according to 2001 census data. Out of the total of 2359 of working population about half that is 1027 is marginal working population i.e. they are employed for less than 180 days in a year. In such case the ratio of dependant population on the working population increases. This shows that higher percentage of population is poor. Most of the marginal working population is agricultural laborers who are lowly paid. Thus the socio-economic conditions of most of the people are very poor even if they are above below poverty line.

Sources of income and employment:

Agricultural labour, cultivation, small entrepreneurship are some of the sources of employment in the panchayat. Since seasonal employment is there in agriculture, so people migrate outside. Earlier they used to go only to Assam. But now they go to all parts of India, especially Delhi, Punjab, Gujrat, Bombay, Pune, Banglore etc. They work on Rs 800-1200 monthly basis on an average.

⁵ An in-depth interview with the ladies of the backward and lower castes revealed this fact.

Earlier Marhowrah Sugar mill, Saran Engineering Works factory, Distillery and Morton confectionary factory used to give good employment to nearby people. All factories were in Marhowrah block but they were a great source of employment for all kinds of people of the nearby areas ranging from those rearing cattle, agricultural workers, entrepreneurs to factory workers. Sugar cane was grown as a cash crop at that time. The socio-economic condition of all the people of Amnour and Marhowrah block were very good at that time i.e. around 1970s and 1980s. But now due to the problem of unemployment some people migrate and some do small business in the village or nearby this area.

Settlement Pattern:

The panchayat is sparsely populated with scattered settlement. People of one caste settle in one group known as Tola in the local dialect. In a particular tola a few households of other caste can also be found but the tola is known in the name of the dominant caste residing in that tola.

Infrastructures in the panchayat:

Schools:

There are seven government schools in the panchayat. All the schools are primary school except two primary schools in Hussepur village which has been recently upgraded to the middle schools i.e. till class eighth standard. The teachers have not been recruited yet for the upgraded classes and it is still to commence its function. So there is one primary school and two middle schools in Hussepur village, one primary school in Mani Sirsia village, two primary school in Ganoura village, and two primary school in Jagdev Sirsia village. There is no school in Gheyaspur village. Recently in 2004 one Vikas Vihar school is opened for the children under 'Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan' scheme.

There are three private convent schools – two in Jagdev Sirsia and one in Hussepur village.

PHC and Health Sub-Centre:

The Hussepur panchayat comes under Amnour Primary Health Centre. There is one health sub-centre in the panchayat but it doesn't have a building of its own. It is situated in the house of Bageser Singh in Ganaura village. There is no sign

board and it is difficult to trace the sub-centre which is situated in a hut belonging to Bageser Singh. Bageser Singh gets rent of Rs 50 for having given his land for the sub center. The sub-centre is used only as an immunization centre as ANM sits there only on immunization days. People do not even know that it is a sub-centre. When I enquired about it most of the people said that there is no sub-centre. Later on being asked about ANM they said that ANM sits in the house of Bageser Singh. Then I told them that it is called as a sub-centre. When people came to know that it is a sub-centre then they complained that though it is a sub-centre but no doctor ever comes to sit there. The fact that people are not aware of the functions and responsibilities of the health care delivery system situated near them shows the inefficient functioning of such systems. This also express the need of the people that a government health sub-centre should have a doctor.

Panchayat Bhawan:

The Panchayat Bhawan is situated in the main village of the panchayat i.e. Hussepur. The panchayat bhawan was constructed by Shambhu Sharan Singh who stood for Panchayat Samiti election in 2001 panchayat election. But it was not completed and handed over to the panchayat. Its construction started in the year 1994-95 and later it was left half built for lack of funds. The panchayat bhawan had one hall one office and one room and toilet set for for Panchayat Sevak's residence. At present it is completely in a dilapidated and ruined shape and people have stolen its asbestos, wooden window frames and bars. The toilet pan has broken and mud has almost filled it. Small trees have taken roots in its walls and weeds are growing on the floors which have not been cemented. The maintenance cost of the building now will be almost equivalent to the amount already spent in its construction or it has to be rebuilt. The present panchayat took no steps for its maintainance. The Panchayat Sevak who should stay in the panchayat, actually, stays in Marhowrah and runs the panchayat office from his home. This makes it difficult for the people to visit the panchayat office and on the contrary helps the Panchayat Sevak to get rid of the burden of transparency and information sharing.

Irrigation:

There is one government tube-well in the panchayat for irrigation which is situated in the Hussepur village, almost at the border of the Hussepur and Gheyaspur village. The government employee is very irregular and he is a resident of Tejpurwa panchayat. He complained that as there is no regular and continuous supply of the electricity, so the villagers can not utilize the tube-well potentially for the irrigation purpose. The irrigation canals or channels are also not built properly to cover large land area and the one which was built earlier are now broken due to absence of regular maintenance.

Gandak Canal Project:

It is one of the major irrigation projects in the district. Its main branch runs through the middle of the panchayat and the link canals from the main branch are not completely built to cover the whole of the panchayat. Water doesn't come in it properly. The check dams to control the water flow are also not built properly. This is due to departmental negligence. When water for irrigation is required then it doesn't come and when not required, it comes. As a result in the year 2004 due to drought the rice crops couldn't be irrigated and most of the crops were damaged even though the canals passed through the panchayat. It has also blocked the traditional drainage system. In rainy season, the villages especially the Mani Sirsiya village gets flooded due to blockade of traditional drain. This in turn floods Hussepur and Gheyaspur villages. Gyaspur doesn't have irrigation benefit due to canal but it has to bear the brunt of flood due to it. This is one of the main reasons for the occurrence of floods in the panchayat in the recent past otherwise this area was not much affected by the floods (Jha 1997).⁶ The water logging continues till December in the fields and this affects their cropping pattern.

On both the sides of the canal the lands have been dug for bunding the canal and the dug land is not filled. So the top fertile soil has been removed and the land has become a waste land. Actually under the project the canal should not have been

⁶ Praveen Jha provides a succinct discussion on this. According to him as a consequence of flood control and irrigation projects the flood-prone area has increased in Bihar. "North Bihar has been most severely hit by ill-thought and badly executed flood-control measure" which has adverse implications on agriculture in the State. It has resulted in water logging of approximately 8 lakh hectares of land where almost nothing is grown. Jha, Praveen K. (1997): *Agricultural Labour in India*, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, pp 112

bunded with soils of nearby lands but it has been done so and the farmers have to face the difficulties due to it.

The 'Gandak committee and cultivators club', do not work properly and members are not active in it. They did not meet after its formation.

Apart from the Gandak canal people mostly use the private bore wells or rain water for irrigation. The charge for diesel pump is Rs 60/ hour which is very costly according to the villagers.

Crops:

The main crops grown are rice and wheat. Other subsidiary crops are rabi crops like- urad, moong, peas, masur. Due to water logging the kharif crops like rahar is not grown. The sowing of the rabi crops is generally late due to the same problem. Yield is consequently affected and low. Oil seeds and pulses are not grown as most of the lands are flooded till December or January. For the same reason vegetables are also not grown properly. The right months for sowing vegetables is September and October after that it is late but due to water logging it can not be done often. The farmers use high yielding variety of seeds due to which late sowing is possible to some extent. Around 20th of November is the right time for sowing the high yielding variety of seeds and if seeds are sown later than that then it requires more seeds and fewer yields is there. In winter season most of the cultivators sow tobacco which fetches good profit for them. But continuous growing of tobacco which requires large amount of pesticide and insecticide reduces the soil fertility.

The farmers are in trouble most of the time. Block agricultural supervisor doesn't come to meet them or guide them. No new information is given by him regarding new methods of cultivation. The farmers learn from each other, through radio or from someone outside the village or panchayat. There is no facility for checking soil, which will help the farmers in putting right amount and type of fertilizers.

Post office:

There is a post office in the panchayat. Its post man is a government employee. It is situated in the centre of the panchayat in the Hussepur village in the house of Laxmi Shah. Laxmi Shah gets Rs 50 as rent for having having post office at his home.

Electricity:

Electricity is present only in a few places in the panchayat. Only near the main market in the Hussepur village and on the other side of the river Dabra, in Gheyaspur, Mani Sirsia and Ganaura the electricity is present. Earlier getting the electric cable was easier but now the criteria are much more difficult to fulfill so the rest of the people are not able to get the electricity. People also tap electricity illegally. The voltage is low and the supply is irregular. Due to inappropriate electricity facility a lot of work of the people becomes difficult and costly like irrigation, threshing. Some of machines with some of the farmers couldn't be used do to irregular electric facility.

Market:

One main small market is there in the Hussepur village. A few people say that the goods in the market are fake, low quality and cheap. In this village there is a small main market in which three days in a week vegetable market is held. For the villagers the main market is 'Marhowrah Bazar', which is in Marhowrah block. Other markets for the villagers outside panchayat is Rasulpur, Tehti and Lalapur which are a nearby villages in the Amnour block itself.

There are no good play grounds, Samudayik Bhawan or community hall or meeting place in the panchayat.

Railway station and Line:

The nearest railway station to the panchayat is Marhowrah which in Marhowrah block. It is about 9kms away from the panchayat.

A railway line passes through the main village Hussepur which is not in use now. People said that when Sugar mill was working in Marhowrah (a block adjacent to the north-west side of the Amnour block) then this railway line was used for transportation of sugar canes. At that time the socio economic status of all most all the people was good. Due to Morton Confectionaries factory and Saran engineering industry in Marhowrah all the people of the Saran district were employed. These factories were a boon for the people of specially two blocks Marhowrah and Amnour. Everyone from agricultural labourer, livestock farmers to the landlords flourished. People had either direct employment in the factories or indirect through selling milk to the factory and its workers, shops, selling sugar

canes in bulk amount to the sugar mill, etc. After, all the three factories closed down the socio-economic status of the people declined. Sugar cane was grown as a cash crop at that time. Some people migrate and some do small business in the village or nearby this area.

Water Sources:

River:

One non-perennial tributary river called Dabra flows through the panchayat which flows into the river Ganga. It flows through the Hussepur village and divides the village into two parts. A small proportion of the population mainly of Avadhiya Kurmi and Yadav caste living on the other side of the village get isolated from the main village and its markets due to bifurcation of the village by this river. For them the main market is either Tehti or Marhowrah. People of the two sides hardly meet each other due to the physical barrier made by the river.

Pond:

There are two main ponds in the panchayat. One is in Hussepur and the other is in Jagdev Sirsia. Apart from this there are a few small ditches in the panchayat.

Hand pump and wells are used by the people for their daily chores and for drinking.

Bus Services:

People have to catch bus or jeep from Tenhti (6kms approximately) or Marhowrah (7kms approximately). There is no transport available in the panchayat. People either use their own motor cycle or cycle. People hire tricycle if they do not have any motor cycle and especially when women have to go out of the village.

Socio-Economic Conditions

This section discusses the socio-economic and caste status of the people of Hussepur panchayat. An understanding of the socio-economic condition of the people and the problems faced by the poor people especially the Scheduled Castes and women is deemed to be necessary to understand how decentralized democratic system i.e. the gram panchayat is working for the people. What are the problems of the people especially regarding health and how is panchayat dealing with it? Knowledge of local village level structures and functions and the power equations existing in the villages between the rich dominant castes and the poor lower castes will provide a background for understanding the functioning of the gram panchayat and the impediments in it. Further an attempt is made to understand the socio-economic life of the poor people living in the Hussepur Gram Panchayat and their problems regarding health that can be or should be dealt by the panchayat.

Dukhia a 26 years old widow is wife of late Bhunbhun Manjhi. Dusadh by caste she has six girl children. All her daughters have the age difference of one year. The eldest one is twelve years old and the youngest one is six years old. On the day of my visit she had not gone to work as she did not get any work in the village. As it was first of January i. e. beginning of the calendar year she had cooked rice and potato curry, otherwise most of the time she and her family have to sleep on an empty stomach.

Dukhia's life is stark. She and her six daughters have to live on daily wage of around Rs 10 per day. After labouring the entire day at her landlord's field she earns barely to fill her own stomach, leave alone feed the family. Whenever she can, she goes out to work in other's field apart from the nearby landowners; she then earns around Rs30 or more. She also gets payment in the form of grains especially during the harvesting season. This, the payment in kind, is a great

source of income for her and her family as it fulfills their food requirement to a great extent. In this plight she was not alone. Dukhia had her husband to share the burden of everyday living till five years back.

However the knee infection that could not get timely treatment snatched him away. He was only 25 years old. The village doctors treated it thinking it to be filaria. Within 2-3 days it got worse and people took him to Marhowrah. He succumbed to his ill fate there. According to the doctors the cause of his death was an infection developed in his knee. The local doctors could not diagnose and treat him on time. He lost his life as a result. With her husband's death, Dukhia was not only emotionally shattered, but is burdened with a debt of around Rs 3000 incurred for his treatment.

Her problems did not end here. Her fourth daughter Ruby, 10 years old, suddenly developed some problem in her eyes two years ago, and, within eight to ten days of treatment by the local doctors she went blind in both eyes. Now she remains sitting at one place and cannot work or do anything. About Rs 300-400 was spent on her treatment. This amount too was taken as a loan at a high interest rate from local moneylenders.

Dukhia said that she is the sole bread earner in her family of seven members. Her daughters are too small to earn. Her husband's elder brother lives separately. His wife has died and he has eight children. He himself is overburdened with his poverty and so cannot help her. He is also under heavy debt because of the marriage of his two daughters. Her father and mother in laws are also dead.

One of her sisters has kept one of her daughter even though their financial condition is also poor. Another of her daughter is taken care of by an aunt. The other four daughters stay with her. She said that no one helped her in her bad days. The rich do not even write off the interest if she takes any debt. She has got into deep debt during the time of her husband's and daughter's illness. At present she doesn't know how much it must have become and how she will repay it. Her income is not even enough to sustain the daily expenditure of food for the family. She

doesn't have any of her goats with which she could repay some of her debts. Her goats have already been sold to repay her earlier debt.

Or, take the case of a biscuit seller, a Chamar by caste, Chathoo Ram.

Chathoo Ram, a 42 year old biscuit seller, lives in the main village Hussepur. His 37 year old wife Ranimati is blind since birth. They have one son of 14 years and two daughters of 16 years and 9 years of age respectively.

Chathoo Ram and his family live in penury. His one room house is made up of mud and bricks with a thatched hay ceiling. It is very old and is fallin apart at places. Water pours through the ceiling in the rainy season. People say that hay thatched ceilings should be repaired every year but this is very costly. But he doesn't have money to repair the ceiling even once in five years. The assets in the one room house were very meager. A broken cot, an old broken toy, two bundles containing perhaps clothes and mattresses, a small lamp made up of a bottle of medicine hanging on to the bamboo supporting the ceiling, a big iron box and a big sack of grain. Outside the one room house was a small compound in front. The entrance to the compound was wide open as the walls enclosing it have fallen down. In the courtyard or the compound there was a small chullah on to the right side of the entrance and on to the left side a climber of a vegetable was grown. Due to cold season without sunlight at around 10 a.m. and floors wet with dew drop's falling like a drizzle, the ambience was most gloomy.

The moment I came and stood near his house with the ward member Moti Raut who was explaining how poor they are and yet the Mukhia has not given any benefits to them, Chathoo Ram's wife heard us. Irritated by the thought that another government servant had come for yet another survey she came out shouting angrily at us. Thankfully that very moment Chathoo Ram had returned from selling the biscuits and he talked to us. After knowing about me he told his blind wife that I am not another surveyor who had come for survey. Then she cooled down a bit and started explaining that every now and then someone or the other will come, write our name but not give any thing. She said that she is blind and her name was taken

for giving benefits under blind scheme but it never reached her. She showed her house and said they are very poor yet they did not get any benefit under Indra Awas Yojna scheme. She said the big brick house in ruins at the right of the house is their ancestor's but they do not have money to repair it. So they had to shift to the one room thatched house as the ceiling of the old house could fall at any moment.

I asked Chathoo Ram how the domestic work is managed, as his wife is blind. He said that things are managed by the collective effort of his wife, his sixteen year old daughter and he himself when he comes back after his day's rounds, selling biscuits. His daily income through selling biscuits on an average was Rs 25. At times he gets grains in lieu of selling biscuits. This is stored and stalked gradually for the unfavourable time in the year. With a paltry income of Rs 25 a day, feeding the family itself is a huge struggle. His son at times works in a small band party. At times, if Chathoo is able to save he repays the debt. In times of health need or any other extra expenditure he has to take debt from the moneylenders at the interest rate of about Rs.5-7 per Rs. 100 per month. The moneylenders charge interest rate on their monopoly. When I asked how and when would he be able to repay his debts, with a worried expression on his face he said that he doesn't know. Then he adds on that he doesn't think that he will ever be able to repay his debt. He said that many times, in times of need the moneylenders do not lend him any money thinking that he will not be able to return it. For instance, when Chathoo Ram's wife was at the verge of death during a complicated delivery at home, no moneylender was willing to lend him money. Finally a private nurse from outside the panchayat saved his wife's life free of cost. The child could not be saved. Such instances had happened thrice wherein for the first time the case was made more complicated by local doctor. In all the cases no moneylenders gave him money for medicine.

The common thing with the two examples is that hunger stalks even those people who labour twelve to fourteen hours a day, earning barely enough earnings to feed

their stomach. So meager are their earning that their daily life is bogged down on how to feed themselves. Other responsibilities like sending children to school, or getting the necessary medical treatment is obviously unthinkable. But health needs cannot always be postponed. This compels them to borrow money at high interest rates, landing them in a spiral of debt.

In stark contrast to this in the same panchayat, in the same surroundings, one also has Satyendra Singh. Satyendra alias Bhutel Singh, an upper caste Rajput, owns vehicles, double storied buildings, and shops. He lives in a joint family and own five acre of land. Given his position nothing is a problem for him. Everything from medical expenses to education and luxuries are at the tip of his fingers. Or take the case of Dharmnath Tiwari, a Brahman by caste. He was employed as a government teacher in a primary school. The very fact that he earns a decent amount of Rs 5000 as pension, even after retirement, means that he is able to take care of his extended family including grand children.

In all these cases earnings are not proportional to the amount of work put in. This is particularly in the case of agricultural labourers and other wage earners. Their earnings are not enough for just food even if every member of a family works.

Lalparo Kunwar, a Dusadh by caste, is wife of late Bhadai Manjhi. Her husband died of when he accidentally fell from a tree while cutting firewood. She has seven children: three females and four males. Lalparo herself, her eldest son Rajesh, 17 years of age, and three other children 13, 15 and 16 years of age respectively, all work as wage labourers. They all work on Darab Singh's land at the daily wage of Rs 10 a day or one kilogram of maize or rice. At times, Rajesh go out to work on other upper caste's people's land in the same panchayat, earning between Rs 30-50. With all of them working, they are not able to feed themselves. They do not even earn enough to make a bare existence and are forced to live in abysmal poverty.

This is the plight of a number of villagers coming under the panchayat, most of whom are low paid agricultural labourers. There is huge social inequality that exists

in the panchayat between the rich and the poor.¹ Interestingly this is embedded on social relations organized around land ownership and caste. The upper caste seems to fall in the category of rich and well to do and the lower castes are condemned to live a life of penury, where even getting two square meals is a constant struggle.

Forced to borrow money for necessary medical treatment vital for living, they are caught in the whole circle of indebtedness. So what should these poor people do when confronted with critical medical problems? The only option left with them is to borrow money at high interest rates from the local moneylenders.

The living conditions of the poor are appalling. Their houses comprise very small rooms, the walls of which are made either of brick or dried wheat sticks and bamboo. Their assets are meager. There's no privacy as all the family members live and sleep in the same room. In rainy season most of the huts leak as the thatched roofs are rarely repaired and maintained. The bed, clothes and even people get wet. Most of them do not have even a string cot are compelled to sleep on the damp mud floor. Winter is difficult but the rainy season is worst for them. A poignant account of Sarita Devi and her husband Harendra Prasad a Kanu by caste vividly explains this.

Sarita Devi and Harendra Prasad have three sons: Ramchandra (13years), Kishorechandra (9years) and Gyanchandra (7years). Harendra Prasad is a skilled labourer and can do any kind of work. Depending on the employment available, whether seasonal or on a daily basis, he works as agricultural labourer, in brick kiln, or making thatched roofs of people's house etc. He earns daily wage of Rs. 60 or Rs.70 or at times even less than that. He owns 10 kathas but cannot cultivate properly due to shortage of cash. He has planted a few guava trees; selling guavas

¹ I have, for purposes of this study, broadly defined the rich as the one who owns a big house of four to five rooms or more, a courtyard minimum of 30 sq ft., with brick walls and either thatched roof or concrete ceiling. The earning of the households is enough to fulfill the basic needs and amenities and meet the health needs. They are not in debt and if at all they take debt they are in a position to return it soon. I have considered poor as those who have smaller houses in comparison to the rich and the roofs are thatched. Their earnings are not enough to fulfill the basic necessities of the family like food, clothes, health and education. Typically, they are frequently in debt, which may be a small or a big amount.

in season gives some amount of income. They own two goats, which again is a big asset for them.

His eldest son Ramchandra works as a domestic helper in the house of Omprakash Singh who is a Rajput by caste. Though only 13 years old he has to take care of Singh's cattle and work as a house servant. For this he earns monthly salary of Rs 500 and gets lunch daily. His income is the only regular source of income for the family.

They live in two tiny thatched huts, with a small courtyard in between. One hut is used for storing fuel wood and for storing grains and cooked food. In another hut they sleep. There is very small cot in the hut that Harndra Prasad sleeps on. She sleeps on the hay spread on the mud floor with her three sons. In rainy seasons, living becomes all the more difficult for them as the mud floor gets wet and the ceiling also leaks. During hot summer season due to intense heat and absence of electricity they sleep outside the house in open air on mattress made of particular type of grass. They have no toilet. In dark nights if they have to go to the field to relieve themselves, they risk snakebites.

Absence of electricity puts half of their day and life in darkness. In the summer, when the temperature is around 48-50 degrees Celsius, the plight of the females cooking on a chullah can only be imagined. They do not have enough money to buy kerosene to light lamp daily at night. So most often the people cook and have dinner early and go off to sleep. Sarita Devi says that she cooks dinner during day light as kerosene is costly and they can not afford to burn lamps at night.

Some of the poor do not have enough winter wear even to cover their children. The cruelty of poverty could be observed in children playing on the road without even a thin sweater in the severe winter evening with a cold chilled wind blowing.

The majority of houses, including among the rich upper castes, do not have a toilet. People go to fields to attend to nature's call. This is very problematic during rainy

season, floods or dark nights. If a person has diarrhoea or dysentery his or her problem is even worse.

The Scheduled Castes, with a population of about 281, all of whom can be unequivocally categorized under as under the poverty line. They are embedded in debt and many have lost their lands in repaying their debts. The majority of them were forced to get into debts in order to deal with health contingencies, pushing them further into poverty. This is already clear from the above examples of Chathoo Ram and Dukhia. This reaffirms the World Bank's study that concluded that nearly 2 per cent of the population is pushed below poverty line every year due to out of pocket expenditures on health [Misra 2003].² They have no savings as whatever they are able to save from the income of Rs 15-20 a day goes in repaying the debt. At times when they are sick or when they do not get work then they either remain hungry or dip into their meager stocks of grain, if they have them.

People like Sarita Devi, Lalparo Kunwar and Chathoo Ram are compelled by circumstances force their children to enter the exploitative labour market. Poverty does not leave them with any bargaining power in their hands.

Life for poor widows in the village is very difficult especially when she does not have any other earning hands. They are exploited by moneylenders, landlords, and even the panchayat members and government servants like panchayat sevak. As they are illiterate so they do not even understand the calculations made by the moneylenders and cannot read and understand whatever the panchayat members bring to them for taking their signatures. In this state of abject poverty also they have to bribe the panchayat sevak or the gram panchayat secretary for getting the red card that they are entitled to.³ Bereft of a male's support, vital in a patriarchal society, they cannot even migrate out and are forced to work as agricultural labour

² Misra, Rajive, Chatterjee, Rachel and Rao, Sujata (2003), *India Health Report*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

³ Red Card is the ration card given to the below poverty line people.

for pitiful wages. Lalparo said that since she is a widow so she is afraid of walking distances alone to find work.

Devjharia Kunwar is a 48 year old widow of late Faudar Ram. Faudar Ram a chamar by caste and a migrant worker was able to sustain his family well by working in tea plantation in Assam with an income of Rs 3000. But he died of a heart attack two years back. Devjharia Kunwar and her daughters were bereft of this financial and social support. She has three daughters. The eldest one is married. The middle daughter, who was then 19 years old, died of kalazar last year. Her youngest daughter, 16 years old, used to stay with her father and study in Assam. She has studied till eighth standard. But she has not been alright since her father's death. She now neglects herself, does not take care of her appearance and seems lost to the world. It is likely that she has schizophrenia.

Devjharia Kunwar is an Indira Awas Yojna (IAY) beneficiary but her house is not yet complete. She says she does not believe her house will ever be completed. She had to give a "commission" to the panchayat sevak and the mukhia for the IAY house. She and her youngest daughter live in a tiny thatched hut. The floor is of mud and the roof and walls are made of hay and supported by bamboo. The assets in her house are- one wooden cot (chauki), very thin mattress about a quarter inch thick (lewa) which they spread only while sleeping, one quilt the cover of which is almost turning black due to dirt, one table and one lamp. Two small bundles (gathris) may be having a few clothes and a few utensils. Apart from falling in continuous debt she has no savings and whatever she earns daily is spent in food or other small necessities. She has no land except the one room house where she is living and one room house which is less than half built under Indira Awas Scheme (IAY). Whatever land she had was given to mahajan (money lender) to pay off the debt. Her income of Rs 15-20 per day as an agricultural labourer is not enough to support the daily expenditure of her's and her daughter's. Her daughter who is mentally a bit abnormal doesn't go out to work. Devjharia is in debt of Rs 5000 which she took in the name of construction of her house. She said that there is some

other debt which she had taken for the treatment of her second daughter who died of Kala-azar. She doesn't know the total debt amount, and said that her moneylenders must have the account of it. She said that the moneylenders take interest @ Rs 5-15 / Rs 100 /month. After a year the interest rate changes and each moneylender has his own criteria of taking interest and nothing is fixed. She said that she doesn't think that she can ever repay the debt amount.

She also said that she gave Rs 250 as a bribe to get red card from panchayat sevak but two years has passed since then and she did not receive any card. With her inadequate income she can only spend on food expenditures. After it if at all anything is saved that is used for repaying debts to moneylenders. She doesn't have money to get her fifteen-year daughter treated who is suffering from a mental shock of the sad demise of her father. After her (Devjharia) death who will look after her daughter, is a big question mark lurking in her mind.

There are 10-12 harijan (Chamar) houses at the outskirts of Mani Sirsia village but no one owns land. The only land which is left for them is the small house where they are living. The land which a few owned has been lost in repaying debt. The very description of their house describes the abject poverty in which they are living in. The above case is a telling example of it.

With an askance glance at the Dusadh tola one can make out that it is the settlement of the schedule castes as the place of settlement is very unhygienic and is in the outskirts of main village Hussepur. The two pathways to go to that tola is the dumping place of the solid waste of the backward caste people living nearby. In the tola also there is no proper drainage system and water remains logged. It's a breeding ground of many of the mosquitoes. The ducks and hens kept by some of the Dusadhs wallow in that dirty water and then go in their small huts. The huts are closely situated. The whole place is very unhygienic and insanitary suggesting the burden of the diseases which the people must be having over there. Most of these scheduled castes are bonded to their landlords, as the scope of employment outside agriculture is less. Even in the villages the area of the labour is distributed and

fixed. Rarely does a labour go out of his area to earn. This gives the land owning class the maximum of the power to exploit their labour. This is clearly evident how Darab Singh exploits his labours at the daily wage of Rs 10 where maximum of the Dusadhs work. This wage is no way near the minimum wage of Rs 70-75 a day.

Same is the case of other poor backward castes like Noniyas, Yadavs, Kurmi etc. who work as agricultural labourers. Some of the marginal farmers of the backward castes especially the Noniyas and Yadavs work as tenants or *bataidars*. But their condition is merely marginally better than the scheduled castes or those living below poverty level. *Tenants like Person Mahto a Noniya by caste works as a tenant. His whole extended family – son, daughters-in-law, and grand children are involved in it and they cultivate around five bigha of land. All the agricultural inputs are his and he has to share half of the yield with the landowner. In case of adverse climate when the agricultural yield is low then he is at great loss, as he cannot even recover whatever he had spent in cultivation and the yield he has to share half with the landowner.* Poor, like Harendra Prasad who has a little bit of land, cannot cultivate, as they do not have enough of resources and money for the cultivation. If they take debt and cultivate, even then they cannot be assured of good yield with which they can return the debt.

Agriculture

The reason for poverty in the panchayat lies in the relationship formed between the forces of production and the means of production. The social hierarchy based on caste fortifies it. Agriculture is the only principle means of lively hood for all the people in the panchayat. The big shops in the main market of Hussepur are usurped by the rich uppercaste Rajputs. Small shops of tea, snacks, beetle leaf and vegetable haat is being run by a few backward castes that have small amount of money to do the business. The class hierarchy almost conforms to the caste hierarchy except in the case of a few middle castes or subalterns like Avadhia Kurmis, Yadavs, and Noniyas. For instance, most of the Avadhia Kurmis living on the other side of the river dabra in the main village Hussepur are all rich and well to

do. Many of the Yadavs and some of the Noniyas are also rich and are spread across the panchayat. Their economic independence has given them power to contest in the election against the upper caste Rajputs, Brahmans, and Bhumihars. This will be clearer from the discussions in the next chapter.

It was observed that agriculture does not provide a continuous employment to the poor people in the rural areas yet it is the main source of employment for them. The poor depend on it a lot for both cash and the kind. The 'kind', as discussed earlier, is in the form of cereals mainly maize, rice, wheat, pulses which helps them to stalk some food for the year although it is insufficient. For the poor females it is the main source of employment in the panchayat as they do not migrate out to nearby villages or towns to work. The other source of employment for the females in the rural areas is domestic help but this is not a practice in this panchayat. Only a few rich at times can call them to do their work but it is not regular. For a few of the skilled labourers the employment opportunity is available in the form of cutting bamboos and making *tokris* (a very big basket), making thatched roofs of the houses as most of the houses in the panchayat have thatched roofs which has to be repaired once in every five year at least, as a carpenter, etc. Those labourers who can do multifarious work have a good edge over their counterparts who can work only as agricultural labourers. Their wages are also more than the agricultural labourers. Agriculture provides income in cash or kind but the daily wage is lesser than the minimum wages act. The females are paid lesser than the males and they generally do weeding, transplanting, or harvesting. Males get around Rs 40-50 for ploughing and irrigating other wise for the same job they will be paid Rs 5-10 more than females. For instance Phoolmati weeding in the field along with her family and extended family said that the women are paid Rs 25 for it and males are paid Rs 30 for it. Now the demand for labour is less. Agriculture is costly so even the rich and the upper caste also work on the fields. Phulesar Mahto a Noniya tenant said that, "*Now the Rajput, Pandits, Bhumihars all work in their own field, as cultivation and labour is costly and they also are not that rich. So employment*

opportunity for the agricultural labourer is less and wages are also not enough to fill their stomach.” Lalparo and Dukhia also reiterated the same argument when they spoke about their plight. The income and employment opportunity in agriculture is low and the uncertainty of yield also affects the people especially the poor a lot. The small land holdings, lack of irrigation facility and absence of electricity do not provide space for carrying out agriculture on capitalistic lines. The Gandak Canal dug in the panchayat is of no use and instead it brings in flood in the rainy season.

Employments outside agriculture in the state are limited and as the people are unskilled and poor so they get drudge work which doesn't improve their socio-economic condition. Absence of any good industry in Bihar forces the people to migrate outside the state. Many of such migrant workers are able to maintain their family well. For example: *Jitendra Rai is a yadav by caste and a cultivator by profession. He and his two brothers jointly have six bigha of land. Though it is difficult to calculate monthly earnings of a cultivator as the earning is not regular and fixed and may be in cash or kind. Still on an average he earns around Rs 200 monthly. His two brothers are employed in a jute mill in Kolkata and each earn around Rs 2500. Their wives and children are living in the village along with Jitendra Rai's family. they have separate kitchens. The brothers share their income and spend jointly in certain matters like building of house, buying cattles, agriculture etc. They have a big pucca house with concrete ceiling and own two cattles. The family has a comfortable and happy living according to the village standards. Jitendra Rai said that he also wants to go out to earn but then there will be no one to take care of the family.*

Economic independence was one of the reasons why his (Jitendra Rai's) wife was unanimously elected as panchayat member from the ward number 1.

Same was the case with Devjharia whose husband used to work in Assam and after his death the circumstances forced her in pauperism.

There are many such examples in the panchayat where atleast one member of the family has migrated out. The families of that migrant labour who send a part of their earning back at home are in a much better condition than those who are completely dependent on agriculture.

Livestock are another major source of earning for the people, especially the Yadavs. Buffaloe's and cow's milk are sold by them which gives them a good regular source of earning. Those who have ox have an advantage in farming. Those who have goats, hens, ducks especially the poor, sell them whenever they need money. For, poor goats are big assets as many a time they help in repaying their debts.

Attitudes of certain people at times also make them poor. Jai Kisan Mahto a Noniya by caste is a retired lab technician from the department of health and family planning. He said that Noniyas are poor because if these people earn Rs 50 then they will drink alcohol of Rs 30 and buy food of Rs 20. They do not save. If they fall sick or any other contingency occurs then they will take debt. This is another main reason for their poverty. They never think about tomorrow. They are illiterate but would not educate their children. He also said that certain categories of people like Chamar, Noniya like to eat stale cheap fish. They would not buy fresh cheap green vegetables. Bad food habit is a reason for their poor health. They take a lot of alcohol. Even if they are given money then they misuse it on these bad habits.

Education

Literacy brings awareness and consciousness among people about their rights. It also gives the person strength and confidence to fight for a change and protection from all kinds of exploitation. It also makes them eligible for various jobs and vocational courses. It gives them the power to enhance their skills and a better bargaining power in the job market. Mental and skilled work is always paid higher than just physical labour. But unfortunately more than half of the panchayat is educationally backward. The percentage of literates is 41.15 whereas 58.82 per cent

of the population is illiterate. 55.35 per cent of males are literate and 26.58 per cent of females are literate⁴. Female literacy is very less.

Illiteracy is one of the reasons why the poor people in the panchayat are never able to free themselves from the yoke of continuous exploitation and low wage labour. Number of literate females is less than the males. The reason for this can be attributed to low status of women in the patriarchal society. Interaction with the people revealed that the highest level of achievement for them is to read till class 8th or 10th or maximum till class 12th. Very few go for higher studies like graduation or above. The importance of literacy is very low among people. The girls can read maximum up to class 8 and then they are married at an early age that is at 14 -16years. People do not want to send girls to for higher studies, outside village, mainly because the culture is not so and because of the security of girls. Earlier there were only seven primary schools in the panchayat. The children then had to go to Rasulpur middle school for higher secondary studies. The children of the other side of the river Dabra study in Silhoura or Tehti schools after class 5. But since 2004 one primary school in Hussepur and one primary school on the other side of the river Dabra have been upgraded to middle school that is till class 8th.

It is observed that people also do not motivate their children for studies. The children are supposed to help in the daily household chores or agricultural work once they come back from the school. The poor are forced by adverse economic circumstance to absent their children from the school for work especially during harvesting and sowing season. The upper castes or backward castes that can afford to send their children to school and can avert from their assistance also have a lackadaisical attitude towards their studies.

The state of education is deplorable in the panchayat. The teacher's number is less in comparison to the strength of the children in the school. For instance the Hussepur American School has 395 students and only three teachers including the principal. A lady teacher Devi Singh also reiterated the same fact about the

⁴ 2001 census

Rasulpur Middle School.⁵ The teachers of the Hussepur American School said that apart from the stated problem, Government also do not give them time to teach as they are entrusted with other responsibilities like conducting election, surveys etc⁶. They have to do the clerical works of the schools. As their salaries, bonus and other school related work are done through block so one teacher is always busy in going to block. The workload apart from teaching is also more. They said that now according to the government's policy all teachers are transferred to their native place for their convenience of staying and avoid commutation to long distances. The gram panchayats are now supposed to monitor the teachings in the school. But the teachers of this school have not been transferred to their native places and teachers have to come from far off villages. They do not have any place to stay in Hussepur. All these problems of their affects the teaching in school which is another demotivation factor for the students.

Under 'Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan Scheme', the para teachers called 'Shiksha Mitras' are selected to teach in the government schools. They are paid only Rs.1500 whereas government teachers are paid Rs. 10,000 and they get all government facilities. So Shiksha Mitras are also demotivated to teach⁷. No sanitation, water and toilet facility was observed in any of the schools.

The fifth and eighth standard children have Bihar board exams but according to education policy of the state no child has to be flunked. A villager explains this in a very good way, '*panchawa aur aathwa class mein to kursi table bhi pass kar jata hai*', i.e. in class fifth and eighth even tables and chairs pass. This flaw in policy is another reason for the disinterest of both the teachers and the students in studies.

⁵ Devi Singh is a lady school teacher of the Rasulpur Middle School situated in Rasulpur village, which is outside the panchayat. She resides in the Hussepur village. Most of the children of the panchayat go to this school to study after fifth standard.

⁶ A group interview was conducted with the teachers of the Hussepur Americal School to understand their problems. The school was chosen as it is the oldest and main school in the panchayat which is recently upgraded till eighth standard.

⁷ This was told by Abdul Sattar a teacher selected as Shiksha Mitra and teaching in the primary school in Ganaura village. Abdul Sattar was an Up-mukhiaya of the panchayat earlier and he resigned from the post when he got selected as Shiksha Mitra.

Agricultural backwardness, illiteracy and lack of technical and infrastructural inputs from the government's side could be assigned as the reasons for the poor socio-economic condition of the poor in the panchayat especially the Dalits. However it is also observed that the poor socio-economic condition is also organized on caste lines. As we go down in the caste hierarchy so we observe the descent of the economic status and social relations. There is a broad congruence between castes and economy. This conforms to Chakravarti's argument that in Bihar caste is embedded in class⁸. It is also seen that the subalterns that is the Yadavs, Kurmi's and Koeri's are in a much better position due to their enhanced economic status. The scheduled castes are the ones who have to bear the brunt of caste oppression and they are trapped in such a situation that all the doors to development are closed. The following section discusses about the caste oppression that is in practice in the panchayat which delimits the opportunity for change and development of the people in the panchayat.

Caste oppression

The panchayat is the home of people belonging to different castes; professions and religions. The caste wise population in the descending order according to the villagers is Yadavs, Noniyas, Kurmi and Kanu, Rajput, Dusadh and Chamar, Brahman, Bhumihar, Lohar, Koeri, Hajam, and Teli. There is a discrepancy between the people's perception and official list. As according to the voters list, from which if calculation is done on the basis of 'heads of extended family'⁹, the upper caste Rajputs are more in number followed by Yadavs, Noniyas, Kanu and Kurmi, Bhumihar, Dusadh and Chamar, Brahman. Around 260 Rajput 'heads of extended family' are settled across the panchayat but they are mainly concentrated in the main village Hussepur. They are the dominant castes in the panchayat who

⁸ Chakravarti, Anand (2001), "Caste and Agrarian Class, A View from Bihar", EPW, Vol. 36, No.17, pp.1449-62.

⁹ 'heads of extended family'

hold all kinds of power and have the reign of the panchayat in their hands. The Bhumihars (39 'heads of extended family' approx.) and Brahmans (30 'heads of extended family' approx.) share power along with the Rajputs. The middle caste Yadavs have maximum population among all the caste groups in the panchayat according to the people and according to the official list they are the second most populous caste. In fact if the backward castes like- Noniya, Kanu, Kurmi, Koeri, Yadav, Lohar, Teli, and Hajam are counted together then they have the maximum population in the panchayat followed by the upper castes and dalits respectively. In the village panchayat the scheduled castes are very less in population i.e. 281 in comparison to the total population of 8483 and they are concentrated in mainly two villages –Hussepur and Mani Sirsia. Only two scheduled castes i.e. Dusadh mainly living in Hussepur village and Chamar mainly living in Mani Sirsia village are settled in the panchayat. Their socio-economic condition is very poor. There are no scheduled tribes in the panchayat. It is interesting to note that the different caste groups live separately in clusters in all the villages.

A stunning expression of caste oppression by a backward caste woman illuminates the deplorable plight of their life. A 60 year old woman Lakhpati Kunwar, a teli by caste said that the lower castes are not allowed to rise by the upper castes. Whenever they try the upper castes will either create some enmity among the family members of lower caste or will use multifarious strategies to oppress them. They will not allow them to pass through their lands or roads passing near their house. They'll not give them money in times of need or beat them or will not give them work. She said that the lower castes have a lot of problems and have to listen to what Rajputs say otherwise they can't live, earn and feed their families.

During election she said that the present Mukhia Shayam Sunder Mishra said that, "*hum Bagh aa bakri ke ek hein khunta par baandhaem. Bake abhi ta ihan ta bagh baghe banataa aaur bakri bakriye banataa*", i.e. I will tether the tiger and goat together. But here tigers are becoming more ferocious and goats are becoming meeker. In other words she meant that the present Mukhia had told the lower castes

during the election campaign that he will reduce the caste difference and unite the upper castes and lower castes but in reality even after he won the caste discrimination has increased and the gap between them has widened.

The caste oppression is so much that the dalits are embarrassed in speaking about their caste to anyone. While talking for the first time to a group of women sitting out in the sun in winter season in Chamar tola, when I asked a lady to which caste she belongs to then she hesitated to speak and was quiet. Then another lady asked her as to why is she not saying and said that she is not ashamed to say that she is a '*Chamar*'. This shows the low self-esteem and confidence the dalits have about them because of continuous exploitation and repression. They are so scared of the discrimination that they do not want to reveal their caste to any stranger.

The lower castes especially the scheduled castes are repressed by the dominant castes like the Rajputs, Brahmans and Bhumihars in the panchayat. This could be observed in the form of low wage payment to them, attached or bonded labour to the landlords because of their debts, social status in which dalits and backward castes are in a lower position and the dominant castes are in a revered position etc. The gender discrimination compounds the problems of the women of lower castes specially the Dalits. For instance going back to Dukhia's case - due to her debts and obligations to her landowner Darab Singh she is compelled to work in his lands at a very low wage of Rs 10 which makes the basic question of survival of her and her family of six children at stake. She is a bonded labourer who can go out to work on others field only if she doesn't get any job on his lands. At one point during the interaction she broke and candidly said that '*ee jaan jaien ki bari natti jataa taa. Log kahe laa ki naanh jaat ke ghar duaar ban jai ta hamani ke ghare kam kare na aihan log*', i.e. you just know that our necks are being pressed (strangulated). People (upper castes) say that if lower caste's houses are made then they will not come to work in our house. From this the oppression of the upper castes on the scheduled castes is evident which was seconded by other women surrounding her. The scheduled castes are the most marginalized and oppressed section of the

village. The life of Devjharia, Dukhia and Lalparo vividly reveals this. They hardly get two meals in a day. They are oppressed by the upper castes and remain bonded to the person from whom they take debts. There are certain poor who work as tenants but the scheduled castes are so poor that they cannot even even work as tenants. They cannot send their children to school, as they are also economic strength for the family. The scheduled castes are debarred by circumstances to develop themselves by any means.

The Dalits are surrounded by the lands of upper castes and they said that, '*babu sahab log ke dabaav mein baani*' i.e. they are forced to live under various kinds of pressures of upper castes. The inhabitants of the Dusadh tola said that, '*There is no road for us. We are surrounded by lands of upper castes. In marriages the bride and the groom has to leave the rickshaw from a great distance and they have to come walking.*' A dalit lamented that if they work for the upper castes they (upper castes) will excuse all their faults and if they do not then '*duaar par ghinch ke le aaii aa maari, izzat utaar li hi*', i.e. they (upper castes) will drag them to their own house and thrash them and outrage their modesty. All the upper castes act in solidarity as a group when it comes to dominate the scheduled castes. They are the most deprived and unprivileged section of the panchayat. The poor backward castes are comparatively much better than the scheduled castes. The attricities on them are atleast not in physical form. The very dependence of the scheduled castes on the dominant castes for their survival renders them so powerless that they can not even seek for any police protection or legal protection under 'Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 alongwith Rules, 1995'.

About rice and wheat of Public Distribution System (PDS) the poor people said that all do not get it. Those who get it said that it is very irregular and there is lot of irregularity involved in it. A lady candidly said '*chaval gehun je aata se hamani ke bhetaa taa? Card jekra baa okra milataa. Uoo log direct kahata ki tu log ta kamaa ke khayelu, Rs 10 mein pet bhar jai. Hamani ke kahan jaa ke kamayam*', i.e. the rice and wheat which comes do not reach them. Those who have card they get it

(upper caste specially). Those people tell us that you earn and you can fill your stomach with Rs 10. Where will we go to earn? Very few of the Below Poverty Line people have yellow card or red card under 'Antoday Anna Yojna'. They do not receive the benefits regularly and there is a lot of corruption in it.¹⁰ This year a few of the beneficiaries got it only once. A Dalit complained, "*Harijan ke khaatir sab kuch aavela baaki okra paas paisa naikhe ki u kharid sake. Aa jekra paas baa u ghus de ke card le leta. Hamani ke kuchu na mileta*", i.e. all the benefits come for the harijans or below poverty line people but they do not have even that small amount of money to buy the food grain.¹¹ And the rich, who have money, bribe the Mukhia and the Gram Sevak and get the cards and buy the food grains at cheaper rates when it comes.

Almost all the poor in the panchayat are in debt. It seems to be a cardinal rule of the panchayat. The rich, powerful moneylenders mostly the uppercaste Rajputs calculate the debt on their own condition. Chathoo Ram's wife said that the interest rate varies from Rs5-25 per Rs 100 per month. The interest rate is higher than banks and it is a good source for earning for the upper caste villagers. All Dalits-Chamars and Dusadhs are in exorbitant debt. Each person has about 5000- 10,000 or more debt on them. A dalit said that his loan of Rs 2800 in ten years have become Rs 12000 as debt with the addition of the interest. In six months another person's RS 2000 has become Rs 4000 as debt. Even though they pay off their interest but the balance remains the same on which the intrest keeps on increasing or adding. A father's debt the son or his grandson has to pay. They are never out of debt during their entire life. It keeps continuing from generations to generations. A

¹⁰ This has been said by maximum number of population of the panchayat from whom the question was asked. The respondents were from the rich upper caste as well as from the backward caste and scheduled caste.

¹¹ Under Antoday Anna Yojna the yellow card holders or poorest among the poor i.e. BPL get 21kg of wheat @ Rs. 2 and 14kg of rice @ Rs. 3 per kg per month respectively. Under the same scheme the red card holders or the BPL population get 21kg of wheat @ Rs. 4.85 and 14 kg of rice @ Rs 5.85 per kg per month respectively. (This information was given by Dept. of Food and Supplies, Govt. of Bihar.)

poor old lady lamented, 'This is why we are too much in trouble all our life'. No Dalit has land apart from the land where his house is. Similar is the case of all the Dalits and those who had land lost it in repaying their debt.

To make the situation worse their wage is also less. The agricultural labourers are told by the landholders that cultivation is very costly so how can they get more wages. It is the poor who have to bear the brunt of all the adverse situations. A group of poor landless labourers in Hussepur village said that, '*if our wage increases then a lot of our problems will be solved. This promise we want from someone. For all our work apart from food we take the loan*'. But who is going to give them this promise is the big question mark on their hungry sole.

Lalparo and the group of Dusadh women sitting along with her said that during panchayat election they were not allowed to vote as people were standing with rifle on booth and they snatched their papers and stamped themselves. For fear of being shot they came back without casting her vote.

The rich employ all kinds of socio-economic power, physical power and their nexus with the government authorities to exploit and oppress the poor especially the scheduled castes. They usurp all the benefits which are meant for the BPL population by illegal means and by bribing the authorities. They own land to generate financial resources and exploit the landless. The underdeveloped agricultural economy provides them with another tool to repress the weaker sections of the society. Caste oppression is rampant and since caste is embedded in class so the combination becomes highly oppressive and powerful.

Religious Groups

There are two religious groups in the panchayat i.e. Hindu and Muslim. The Muslim population is very less about 10-15 (13) houses. They live at the border of the Hussepur village and Mani Sirsia village. Apart from cultural discrimination between Hindus and Muslims the relationship between them is very peaceful. People say that only once during partition time of India a few Hindus of outside

panchayat came to kill the Muslims. But due to presence of a Hindu – Subh Narayan Singh who was respected by large number of people in and outside the panchayat at that time, they couldn't do anything and the riot was averted. A little bit of cleavage at times is aroused on the issue of beef. But there had never been fights or violence on communal lines.

Access to Health and Health Issues:

The health problems are numerous but the solutions are a few. It is well known that a poor with his paltry income is pushed further into debt if he is cursed by illness. A few cases have already been discussed. A few more shades of such problems are presented below to understand the magnitude of such problems faced by the poor:

In Dusadh tola, Parvati Devi of 33 years of age has a heart problem. She said that she remains sick all the time. Sometimes she can not even cook and then her neighbours help her in those times. She said that her heart will suddenly start beating faster and then she will get very weak, and will not be able to breathe properly. In serious case she is taken to either Chapra or Marhowrah. The Doctor's fee is Rs 40. She remains on medicine continuously which is prescribed by the doctor in Chapra.¹² She said that her medicine is over now but her husband can't buy medicine or take her to the doctor as he is having heavy debt burden because of her disease. Now it is too much and no one will give them any more debt. Her husband Jamna Manjhi who is 46 years of age is an agricultural labourer said that he doesn't have any account of how much debt he has. He said that Rs 200 taken 7-8 years ago will now must have become Rs 5000-8000.

The couple has no children. Whatever Jamna Manjhi earns he spends on food and medicine for his wife. He said that had she not been sick he would not be having any debt and would have been living peacefully. In two months of sowing season he earns around Rs. 1000 and rest of the month he earns around Rs 500-600 per month as agricultural labourer or as brick kiln labourer.

¹² Chapra is the main head quarter town of the Saran district.

Or take the case of Saheb Mia who was a Dhobi by caste:

Saheb Mia, a Muslim by religion, died of cancer at an age of 39 years. In spite of having cancer he worked till the last breath of his life in a brick-kiln, which used to earn him Rs. 100 per day. He was a versatile man and a sole bread earner of his family of six. All his four children-youngest son of 6 years, another son of 8 years, one daughter of 14 years, and the eldest daughter of 24 years, were dependent on him. His eldest daughter is married but still she was a liability for him as gifts had to be sent to her in-laws on festivals or other important occasions. Most of the time she stays at home. After his death now his wife, daughter and all children wash clothes and work to eke out their bare existence. Till the end of his life, his wife and children had never worked but poverty and ill fate wedged them to an extremely deplorable state.

These were a few cases of acute illness but causes of death for the poor are simple reasons like stomachache, wrong treatment, no money, accidents etc. Death occurs even in simple curable diseases due to improper diagnosis of the local non-medical practitioners. For instance from Dukhia's husband's case this fact is very clear. Some of the basic health problems and issues of the people in the villages of the panchayat are:

Sanitation and toilet facilities- a public health concern:

Though there is no proper drainage system in the village but maintenance of sanitation and hygiene is not much of a problem for the rich in the villages as they take out the drains in their fields around their house. But the poor specially the Dusadhs have a lot of problem. As they have very small piece of land on which they construct their house they have no place for drainage. They cannot construct the drains to the upper castes field surrounding them. They are forced to live in small cluster which is damp and dirty and a breeding place for most of the communicable diseases like Kala-Azar, Tuberculosis, and Malaria etc. As they have thatched houses of hay and mud floor, in the rainy season their place of

inhabitation becomes all the more unhygienic. Their insanitary condition is clearly imaginable from the living conditions described above.

Hand-pumps few places have impure water which tastes like that of drain water which could be a cause for water-borne diseases in the panchayat. The reason is that hand-pumps are bored near drains of the house or boring is done till low depth.

It is also observed that people live and sleep with cattle in the same room. This is one of the reasons for prevalence of Kala-azar among the backward castes. Their children ride on buffalo's back while taking it for grazing. The sand fly, which is the carrier of the protozoa of kala-azar, is found on the buffalo's back in innumerable numbers. The cattles are also tethered near their house. The nearby areas are unhygienic and damp making it to be a good breeding ground for the sand fly.

For toilet except about 1-5%¹³ of villagers everyone else goes out in open fields and they do not find it to be unhygienic or problematic. It is all right for them except in times of flood, or cold season. Very few have importance of toilets in their house. People while getting their pucca house built do not make bathrooms and toilets to save money and it is also not a necessity for them. In ward number one it was observed maximum pucca houses of the Yadavs except a few did not have toilets.

The problems of the people aggravates at the time of flood due to absence of toilets. A lady said that in 2002's flood she had stopped eating for the fear of going to toilet. Human faeces used to float in water at that time. She said that the upper castes were in a better position as they had constructed a temporary raised platform for defecating near their house. The poor did not have money and resources to do so.

ANM:

¹³ This is just an approximate estimate based on observation during the research in the panchayat as no quantitative survey was done regarding the number of people having toilets in their houses.

Meena Devi is the ANM working since 1985. From 1994 she has been working in the Ganaura Sub Centre, which is located in the Ganaura village of the panchayat. Except Gheyaspur all the villages of the panchayat come under this sub-center. Gheyaspur village comes under another panchayat named as Rasulpur panchayat.¹⁴ She is in-charge of two Sub-Centres. Another Sub-Centre is in Visunpura Lakha village of Jhakhra panchayat, which is located, adjacent to this panchayat. For three days she works on Ganaura Sub-Centre and for another three days she works on Visunpura Lakha centre.

Though one Sub-Centre should cater to the needs of a population of 5000 but Ganaura Sub-Centre caters to the need of 7767 population approximately. It does not have a building of its own and is located in the house of Bagesar Singh a Rajput by caste. Many people do not even know that a sub-center exists in the panchayat. The ANM Meena Devi has a heavy workload as she has to cater to the needs of seven villages under the two sub-centers. Her husband assists her in her work. Infact his full time job is to work for his wife. It was observed that her maximum of the time goes in vaccination, surveys, polio programme, trainings and meetings. When it was asked, where does she go for the survey? She gesturing to her children said that '*ekni ke papa janat hokhem*', i.e. these children's father must be knowing. Later during the talk it came to light that though she knows the things but she depends on her husband completely for all her work. Wherever people talked about her they said that she rarely goes out of her house and all the survey work is done by her husband. It was observed that she gives ante natal and post natal care to only a few of the elite groups as the scheduled castes and the poor backward castes complained that they did not know about her and she never comes to them.

Village Doctors- Life Line of the Village:

¹⁴ This information was taken from the PHC document.

No MBBS doctor sits in the panchayat! There are six private non-qualified western medical practitioners and one BAMS ayurvedic doctor who practice western medicine in the panchayat. Two doctors have a small clinic in the main market in Hussepur village. Out of which one belongs to the Mukhia or the panchayat president- Shyam Sunder Mishra who is also a non-qualified medical practitioner. The other one is of Dr Shekhar Suman Singh who is a BAMS ayurvedic doctor. One of the seven medical practitioners is a skin specialist. He has learnt by working under a good skin specialist in Ahmedabad. He charges people according to the skin problem ranging from Rs 15- 300 or above. He also looks after cattle's health problems! Similarly all the rest have learnt by working under good experienced medical practitioners. All can deal with general illness. They are basically physician but they do small surgeries as well. Their fees are between Rs 10-20 per visit and it varies from patients to patients. At times when they give medicine and injection then they charge Rs 50. Mukhia among the rest of the doctors is favourite of people as a doctor as he was the first to start practice in the Hussepur village and is well established. So people know him from a long time. He also allows the poor people to give money in installments and at times he waves off his fee for them.

The importance of the village doctors can be seen from the following example:

A child was seen having some kind of skin infection wherein small boils were formed all over his body. He was observed being cured by the local skin specialist. The child's mother had put neem paste on the wound which had dried up. When the skin specialist was cleaning the neem paste, the child was in intense pain and was wailing loudly. Had the paste been soaked with savlon for sometime then it would have been removed easily without giving much pain to the child. But the doctor didn't seem to be interested in spending more of his time, as he had to attend to health problem of a cow of Jaydev Singh! He was too busy and had no time. He told his mother that it has increased due to applying neem paste to which she also agreed. The mother said that the doctor is very good and because of him her child's infection was reducing. For this treatment she had to pay Rs 60 to the

doctor which included the medicine cost. On the contrary if she would have consulted a skin specialist then her out of pocket expenditure definitely would have been more than Rs 100.

This is the reason why people prefer local quacks rather than the government hospital or MBBS private doctors outside panchayat.

Private Care sans Public Health Care:

Even though people know that the local doctors do not know much but they are dependent on them a lot as they do not have money to spend on qualified private doctors who stay far off the panchayat. Commuting to outside the village is another problem as the connectivity of the panchayat with other towns or block is poor. People do not go to the government hospital as it is far off and there are no proper road and commutation system. The nearest Primary Health Care (PHC) is in Amnour and Marhowrah which is an adjacent block to the Amnour block. Both are at the distance of 7-9 Km approximately from the main village Hussepur and accessibility is a major problem. There is no bus service and the roads are also Kuchcha or brick soled. To get a bus or any four-wheeler people either has to travel 7km to Marhowrah or 6km to Tehti, which they do, on foot except the rich who have their personal vehical. There is one villager, Bhikhan Raut who pulls rickshaw and if in emergency people go by his rickshaw they have to pay him Rs 40 for to and fro distance. Other wise when he is not available then in case of emergency they have to call rickshaw puller from outside the panchayat. People have to buy medicine even if they go for check up in the PHC and only doctor's fee which would be maximum Rs 40 is saved. So paying Rs 40 to rickpuller and saving Rs 40 in doctors fee becomes equivalent for the villagers. Apart from this, daily wage earners do not have time to spend their full day in que and in medical check-up in government hospitals, as they cannot afford to loose their day's wage. Another reason for preferring private local doctors is that in government hospitals doctors are not regular and as a result many a times patient may have to return or go to nearby private doctor of that place. In that case it's a great loss for the patient in

terms of time and money. Many times the compounders in government hospital suggest the patients that if they want a good check-up then they should go to the private clinic of the government doctors, so patients finally are forced to go to private doctors. Dr Manjulata Singh is a government gynaecologist in Marhowrah PHC but people go to her private clinic especially in case of serious deliveries. People in serious cases go to private clinic of another government doctor- Dr. S.K. Singh¹⁵.

About eight to nine years ago people used to go to government hospital. But now all depend on the local private doctors (quacks) and only in serious and emergency cases they prefer going outside the panchayat. Government hospitals according to the people are costlier than private clinics and they (government hospitals) do not check like the private doctors do. *“We have to buy medicines for ourselves even if we go to the government hospital. Many a times we do not have money to pay fees to doctors or buy medicines. To private doctors we can pay the fees later. Moreover for going to government hospital, we have to spend Rs 300 or more for commutation, so no one goes.”* This was repeatedly said by almost all the respondents who were poor whether marginally above poverty line or below poverty line.

Communicable Diseases:

Communicable diseases like Kala-azar, malaria, tuberculosis, and leprosy are prevalent in the panchayat. According to the ICMO of the Amnour PHC under which this panchayat comes, the prevalence of Kala-azar, tuberculosis, leprosy and malaria is high in the Amnour block. Reason is insanitation and dampness especially in the place of inhabitation of the poor people.

Regarding leprosy, Birendra Bharti H/o the ANM showed the records¹⁶. On record in 2001 three leprosy patients were there. In 2002 only two patient but in 2003 it

¹⁵ These are the two well-established government doctors who are busy in running their private clinics about which maximum number of the villagers interviewed talked about (their names are changed).

¹⁶ This is known from the record register maintained by ANM.

increased to 10 cases and in 2004 it further increased to 12 cases. It has been on the rise. The reason for this he says is increased surveillance by the WHO. Regarding leprosy cases in the panchayat he said that all the cases in his record have been cured by medicines. However one patient named by local doctor Chandra Shekhar Singh¹⁷ who is BAMS Ayurved is not included in his list. This patient is seeking Ayurvedic treatment from Banares in Uttar Pradesh. This shows that the survey is not being done properly and as leprosy is a stigmatized disease so people also tend to hide their disease. Hence co-operation of the people and panchayat is necessary for proper surveillance of the diseases.

Though the ANM or her husband could not provide the number of cases of Kala-Azar or Malaria as their record book was sent to the district head quarter but it has a high prevalence in the panchayat. Birendra Bharti said that in 2004 three cases were treated according to his record. On the other hand Dr Chandra Shekhar Singh said that about 10 cases of Kala-Azar had been treated by him in the year 2004. No government tests are done for Kala-Azar or Malaria. The government laboratories give negative report in order to get rid off their own burden. So he sends people to the private laboratories.

Similarly they also could not provide the recent data of TB cases as the treatment of TB cases through the government hospitals have been suspended as government is trying to open up DOTs centres for it. So preparation and training programmes for its implementation is going on. However, about 14 cases of Tuberculosis were cited by one of the medical shop owner of the panchayat from where these people are buying medicines for their disease. Dr. Chandra Shekhar Singh said that about 30-45 TB patients are there in the panchayat. Birendra Bharti said that due to lack of medicines in government hospitals the TB patients go to private doctors. His own brother is also suffering from TB but is getting private treatment.

¹⁷ Dr Chandra Shekhar is the only qualified Ayurvedic doctor but he practices allopathic medicine in the panchayat.

There is a lot of discrepancy between the surveillance record made by the ANM or her husband and what was reported by a good doctor of the panchayat and the medical shop owner regarding a few of the major communicable diseases. People do not go to government hospitals for the tests either as they do not know or there are myths that the tests are not done properly. The panchayat can co-ordinate with the PHC for proper surveillance and can get proper tests and treatment done.

Reproductive health:

The ANM Meena Devi said that her main work is to search the pregnant women and give them the required care. She also has to educate women about the various family planning contraceptives. However interaction with the women revealed that they did not even know her, who is working in the panchayat for the past ten years! A few women said that a lady comes to the sub-center for vaccinating the children but they do not know who she is? All the women of the Dusadh tola said that they do not have any knowledge about the ANM and that she has to look after the pregnant women. They never call her and all of their deliveries take place at home. A few of the women of the Chamar Tola knew Meena Devi but they also never call her. From this it can be made out that the ANM rarely goes for any home visits to provide antenatal and post-natal care to a large number of the women. It is surprising that the women do not even know about her who is working there from last ten years because in rural areas people know about each and every person who is living in and around their village for such long years. Even the women who rarely go out of the house also know about all the people of their village by their name though they might not have seen them.¹⁸

Deliveries:

Interaction with the people revealed that maximum of the deliveries takes place at the home of the people in the supervision of the women of the house or a Dai or at

¹⁸ The researcher also experienced that the news of her arrival used to spread fast among the women in the villages before she met and interacted with them.

times in the supervision of the local quacks¹⁹. This saves their money as well as their time and other hassles. Talking to the women of the village it was known that the village women have a good knowledge about pregnancy and delivery. They learn by sharing experiences of their family members and through personal and neighbours experiences. If at times they feel the need then they call village Dai or the local self proclaimed non-qualified doctors. These doctors are considered to be good by the villagers. If the doctor or they themselves feel or find that a particular case of delivery will be difficult they refer them to a good gynaecologist in the nearby Marhowrah block.

The villagers depend on the local doctors for the antenatal and the postnatal care. Regarding the vaccination of the children it was observed that due to administering of the polio vaccine at home people have developed a myth that other vaccines are either not required or they expect them to be delivered at their home. Most of the poor women said that they do not get their children vaccinated except for polio. On the other hand Birendra Bharti the husband of the ANM said that the vaccines are supplied in excess and at times they are returned also. This shows the contradiction between what is proclaimed and what is truth.

Family Planning:

Poor women especially of the scheduled castes who had four or more children said that they do not go for sterilization as they are poor. They said that they couldn't go for sterilization even if it is free of cost, as they cannot afford to lose even a day's wage. Apart from this, they said that they might get weak or complications may arise if they go for sterilization so they do not prefer it.

People are interested in family planning but they are not given family planning education. One pregnant woman, Sulekha Devi of 27 years of age and a lohar by

¹⁹ Regarding infant and child mortality and maternal mortality no quantitative data could be collected, as the ANM did not have it and the statistician at the block level also did not have proper birth and death registration data. He himself admitted the flaws in the data and said that the panchayat sevaks do not know how to fill such forms properly.

caste said that she consumed medicine to abort the child but it was not successful and she is expecting the child now. She has one son and one daughter and was not interested in having any more children. Her husband works in Kolkata and she stays with him. She said that she had come for the delivery to the village because the nurses in the hospitals do not give much of the personal care which the dais in the village gives. She finds delivery in the village, at home to be more safe and comfortable. She wants to go for sterilization but doesn't know where to go for it. She is not open to her husband to talk about such things.

Interaction with the various group of women in the panchayat revealed that though they are interested in going in for family planning but they do not have contraceptive knowledge, choice and availability. Even the Muslim women said that though family planning is not allowed by their religion but they are interested in it and some of their family members who could afford it have already undergone sterilization.

Conclusion

Several visits around the villages and in-depth interviews and interactions with various people either in groups or individually produced a lamentable quality of life led by majority of the population in the villages. The panchayat is ruled by those who have atleast two out of the combination of 'caste, cash and criminal'. Those who have all the three powers are the most powerful. Power gets skewed towards the middle castes and upper castes. It is observed that the subalterns due to the enhancement in their economic status, especially a few Yadav and Avadhia Kurmi families also share some powers along with the upper castes. Life is miserable for those who do not own these three qualities. The worst of the ill fate is borne by poor who are in majority in the Hussepur Gram Panchayat. The scheduled castes have no land, no food, no house and no road for them. The basic amenities and necessities are not there for them. They are wedged under heavy debts and are struggling daily for their survival.

Due to improper sanitation and pathetic toilet facilities the people especially suffer from a lot of health problems of which they are not much aware of. This is one of the reasons for high prevalence of communicable diseases in the panchayat. Children continuously suffer from Helmenthic diseases, this combining with malnutrition, affects their health status and their growth.

The public health services are ineffective. Maximum numbers of people are not even aware of the existence of the sub-center in the panchayat and its functions. The ANM also dedicates her services to the elites of the panchayat and completely neglects the have-nots. Non availability of medicines in government hospitals, irregularity of the doctors, coercion to go to private clinic of the government doctors for getting personalized care, inaccessibility in terms of distance, shortage of money and time to stand in que were some of the reasons given by people for not preferring government hospitals. People living in abject poverty especially the scheduled castes cannot afford to lose their daily wage, which earns them a square meal for their family. Whether the services are provided for free or not, is not their requirement. They need services at their doorsteps, as they do not have time and also money to take care of their sick kins in the hospitals. Money, to a great extent they somehow manage by taking debt but not the time.

The government hospitals have also lost their charm of providing personalized care which is required more than the medical treatment by the people. Inaccessibility of health service system and poverty are reasons for people preferring the village quacks. In serious cases a few people go to private doctors in Marhowrah as government doctors take time and at times they do not have all the equipments for the check-up. At times especially those who are marginally above povety line in simple diseases go to the government doctors to save the private doctor's fee. The women said that they go wherever their husbands take them. The quality of services of government hospitals have degraded in comparison to the past eight to nine years and people do not prefer it as there is no difference between private or public hospital for them. Rather private local doctors give better services

in comparison to the government hospitals and to them people can pay fees later also if they do not have enough money. The fees of the local doctors are also less in comparison to the professional medical practitioners which reduces the out of pocket expenditures of their people to a great extent. At the same time, sometimes people have to pay heavy price for their dependence on the local quacks like that of losing their life or eyesight permanently. Accessibility and convenience is more for the people in seeking local private medical care. The very fact that a few of the villagers did not know about the government hospitals shows how oblivious it has become for the people because of its improper services and care. Absence of road and transport services increases the problems and out of pocket expenditures of the people. The socio-economic status of the majority of the people is poor and there is ample scope and need for the gram panchayat to work consistently for the development of the people.

Chapter V

Local politics of Hussepur Gram Panchayat

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Introduction

One significant indicator of democratization of the political process is to see people of which socio-economic strata occupy the seats of power. Although it is not always the formal holders of power who actually wield power, yet it is of great significance to find out who are occupying the formal seats of power. The re-emergence of PRIs after the 73rd constitutional amendment aimed at breaking the traditional power nexus and ushering in socio-economic development through people's participation. In villages today, every developmental and administrative activity takes place in the name of elected representatives of the panchayats. Hence in this chapter an attempt is made to examine and understand the power equation existing in the Hussepur Gram Panchayat, people's participation in the Gram Sabha meetings, male and female ward member's participation in the panchayat proceedings, developmental programmes undertaken by the panchayat which in turn will improve the health of the people and co-ordination of the panchayat with the health service system. An attempt is made to analyse how democratic and empowering the panchayats have been for the people especially for the women and the scheduled castes.

Electoral Politics:

The 2001 election for the panchayati raj institution was conducted on the lines of 73rd constitutional amendment and Bihar Panchayati Raj act 1993 in the Hussepur Gram Panchayat. The elections were held based on the guidelines of Bihar Panchayat Election Guideline 1995 which came out in a special issue of Bihar Gazette on 27th September 1995 (GOB 1995).¹ At the panchayat level the electorals had to elect one representative from the panchayat for the Panchayat Samiti at the block level, one representative for the post of Mukhia

¹ GOB (1995), Bihar Gazette, *Bihar Panchayat Nirvachan Niamavali*, September 27, Patna.

and fourteen representatives for fourteen wards of the panchayat. Ward number 1-5 were reserved for women but no seats was reserved for scheduled castes.²

There were seven booths one in each of the seven government schools of the panchayat.

Interaction with the people and the contenders revealed that caste, the class position enjoyed by the contender, amount of cash spent for the election campaign, illegal and corrupt means employed by the contenders and social welfare work done by the candidate and his family were some of the important determinants for winning in the election of the gram panchayat and panchayat samiti representatives. Age group or educational qualifications were immaterial for the people during election process. It is also interesting to note that unlike Kerela, West Bengal and a few other states where political parties are actively involved in the election of the panchayats, in Bihar and especially in this panchayat the political parties had no involvement in the gram panchayat election.

An in-depth interview with the contenders and villagers gave insights about how election was carried out in 2001 and the reasons why certain people won and certain lost the election.

Election for Panchayat Samiti:

For the post of Amnour Panchayat Samiti there were 12 contestants out of which one had to be elected by electorate population of 5575 approximately, of the Hussepur Gram Panchayat. People said that before the election all the candidates for the Post of Mukhia and Panchayat Samiti had met on the American School and pledged that they will see to it that the election is held fairly and no illegal stamping on the booths will be done. But a few people broke their pledge and made use of all the techniques and tactics to win the election.

Out of the twelve contestants for the post of panchayat samiti six were Rajputs, four Yadavs and one Athith Brahman and one Kurmi by caste. It should be

² No seats were reserved for the scheduled castes in the Hussepur Gram Panchayat because the scheduled caste seats are reserved on rotation basis. For the 2001 election panchayat number 1-9 were reserved for the scheduled castes therefore this gram panchayat seats were not reserved. This information was given by the Gram Panchayat Officer of the Amnour block.

noted that the Yadav and Rajput caste are maximum in number in the panchayat. The age and educational qualification of the contenders did not play any role in the election process.

The name of the contestants for the post of panchayat samiti and certain specific information about them are as follows:-

Sr No.	Name	Age	Educational Qualification	Occupation	Monthly Income Approx.	Land owned	Caste
1.	Gazendra Singh	47	Xth	Agriculture	Rs 2000-3000	7-8 bigha	Rajput
2.	Darab Singh	65	VIIth	Agriculture and business	Rs,10,000	14 bigha	Rajput
3.	Shambhu Sharan Singh	50	XIth	Agriculture & social work	Unemployed	3-4 bigha (joint)	Rajput
4.	Ram Naresh Singh	61	Graduation and LLB	Agriculture and Buisness	3000-4000	8 bigha	Rajput
5.	Chathi Lal Bharti	50	VIth	Working in Gujrat may be as labourer	Rs 500	16 Katha*	Athith Brahman
6.	Shubh Narayan Singh	35	XII	Agriculture	200	2 ½ Bigha (joint)	Kurmi
7.	Dev Nandan	70	Graduation	Agriculture & tuition	1500	5 Bigha	Rajput

	Singh						
8.	Devnath Singh	36	VIth	Agriculture & Buisness	1000	3 Bigha	Rajput
9.	Banaras Rai	43	Xth	Agriculture & work in Assam	900	3-4 Bigha	Yadav
10.	Shankar Rai	25	VIth	Agriculture & Buisness	2500	1-1 ½ Bigha	Yadav
11.	Ladoo Rai	40	Vth	Agriculture	1000	10 Bigha	Yadav
12.	Ram Dev Rai	46	IXth`	Agriculture, Cattle & politics	300	1 ½ -2 Bigha	Yadav

There was a tough fight between two Rajputs – Darab Singh and Gazendra Singh. Both the candidates are rich landlords. Gazendra Singh is a rich landlord having 7-8 bighas³ of land and monthly income of Rs 2000- 3000.⁴ He lives in a big double storey building. On the other hand Darab Singh is richer than him. He owns 14 bighas of land and has a monthly income of Rs 10,000. However Gazendra Singh won the election for the panchayat samiti by 866 votes and Darab Singh got 826 votes.

Gazendra Singh won the election because he had spent an exorbitant amount of cash in the election campaign and had also bribed people on the eve of election- a strategy used by him which no other contenders could imagine and

³ 20 Katha = 1 Bigha

⁴ It should be noted that the land and monthly income are just approximates given by the people. These approximates may not be correct as certain people might not reveal their real income and property owned by them. Many people had difficulty in calculating their income as agricultural incomes are in cash and kind as well as certain amount is put in it as inputs.

do. He has also stamped the votes. People also supported him because of his social position in the panchayat. Shambhu Sharan Singh, a Rajput by caste was another contender for the panchayat samiti. He indirectly talking about Gazendra Singh said, *“kuch log meat, machli, daru ya galat tarike se pralobhan de kar log ko bargala kar vote le lete hain. Panchayat samiti ke election mein paise ka tamam upyog hua hai. Ek din phele tak rihan hamare pas tha aur kuch hein samay mein rihan kahien aur ho gaya aur kuch log jeet gaye. Uska bhi pariwar samaj kalayan kiya hai.”* i.e. some people had treated villagers with non-veg, alcohol and had made them in his favour a night before the election. People have misused money in order to get the vote of people in panchayat samiti’s election. He said a day before the election most of the people were in his favour. But every thing changed on the eve of election and certain people won. His family has also done social work.⁵

Jai Kisan Mahto, a villager and Noniya by caste, said that most of the Noniyas favored Gazendra Singh instead of Darab Singh as he had bribed them by giving them feast of alcohol and meat. Shankar Rai (a rich Yadav contender) said that he became overconfident in the end that he will win and had been careless in the last few days of campaign. At the end on the night before the Election Day he said that, *“ek raat phele log paisa khaa kar badal gaye”*, i.e. one day before people took money and changed their mind to vote the person who gave them money.

Ram Dev Rai, active member of BJP and Ladoo Rai, active member of RJD (both were Yadav contenders for panchayat samiti) said that though people had pledged that they will not stamp vote but Gazendra Singh, Bhutel Singh (contender for the post of Mukhia), Ram Naresh Singh (contender for panchayat samiti) and Darab Singh had stamped votes illegally. Ladoo Rai’s (a Yadav contender) relatives also said that reason for his loosing in the election was that Gazendra Singh had illegally stamped votes on the booth.

⁵ Here his means Gazendra Singh. Gazendra Singh’s father was a social worker and he had donated land for the Hussepur American School in 1965. So people had a soft corner for him and this is one of the reasons according to Shambhu Sharan Singh that he won.

The above statement given by the respective contenders and a villager affirms how Gazendra Singh won the election. The other four Rajput candidates said that they had not spent as much money as Darab Singh or Gazendra Singh. Among the four Yadav candidates as told by them, the votes of the Yadav caste got divided and some of their caste people were bought off by Gazendra Singh by immoral means. Apart from that they did not stamp votes like the Rajputs. One of the Yadav candidates, Shankar Rai is comparatively rich among other Yadavs in the village. He could also spend money like the other two contenders but he said that he could not strategize like Gazendra Singh.

Among the other two contenders Chathi Lal Bharthi an Athith Brahman by caste was very poor. Shubh Narayan Singh an Avadhia Kurmi by caste said that he had done his setting with Bhutel Singh, a Rajput contender for the post of Mukhia. That is Bhutel Singh's people will vote for Shubh Narayan Singh and vice versa. But he said that Bhutel Singh duped him in the end. He had also not spent much cash amount in the election process.

It is interesting to observe that though the all the contestants didn't say openly but from their talks it could be made out that they had contested for getting the power and money which are accrued with the post which they will hold after wining the election. Though some of the members are active members of political parties but there was no involvement of the political party in the election process.

Election for the post of Mukhia:

There were nine contenders for the post of Mukhia. It needs a mention that Late Chandraket Singh was the Mukhia of the panchayat before the 2001 election for about 20 yrs. During the election of Mukhia he also contested but he lost. He died in the year 2002 due to cancer.

It is worthwhile to note that for the election of Mukhia caste, class, cash and immoral means were not the only deciding factor. The collective public opinion of the women had played a major role in determining the victory of a contestant.

Before the detailed discussion on the election process of Mukhia certain basic background information regarding the contenders is as follows:-

Sr No.	Name	Age	Educational Qualification	Occupation	Monthly Income Approx.	Land owned	Caste
1.	Shyam Sunder Mishra	44	Science Graduate	Non-qualified Doctor	Rs 15000 before winning election and Rs 6000 after wining election	10-12 bigha in joint family	Brahman
2.	Avadhesh Singh	55	VIIth and ITI welder	Agriculture and PDS dealer	Rs,10,000	6-7 bigha	Rajput
3.	Satyendra alias Bhutel Singh	29	XIIth	Agriculture & Buisness	5000	5 Acre (joint)	Rajput
4.	Raj Kishore Rai	35	XIIth	contractor	5000	7-8 bigha	Yadav
5.	Jai Kisan Mahto	60	Xth	Retired health and family planning technician. At present secretary of Shiksha	Rs 3000 pension	2 ½ -3 bigha	Noniya

				Samiti of Ganoura Primary School.			
6.	Hari Rai	43	IXth	Agriculture and sell milk.	1000	2 bigha	Yadav
7.	Chandraket Singh	70	VIIIth	Agriculture	1500	8 Bigha	Rajput
8.	Anil Kumar Singh	29	VIIIth	Agriculture & Buisness	1500	3 Bigha joint	Rajput
9.	Chandeshwar alias Bhukhal Sharma	32	IX	Agriculture	300	2 bigha	Lohar

Out of the nine contestants for the post of Mukhia four were Rajputs, two Yadavs, one Brahman and one Noniya and one Lohar by caste. Financially Shyam Sunder Mishra a Brahman non-medical doctor, Satyendra alias Bhutel Singh and late Chandraket Singh both being Rajputs were strong candidates. It is to be emphasized that Shyam Sunder Mishra is not a resident of the panchayat because people generally tend to elect the candidates of their caste, community or place. He originally is from Chiran village. He had shifted to the Hussepur village in 1980s and since then he had been practicing as a doctor in the panchayat though he doesn't have any MBBS degree!

There was a tough fight between Satyendra alias Bhutel Singh and Shyam Sunder Mishra. In the end Shyam Sunder Mishra won by a landslide victory.

The reasons for his victory were that he had spent exorbitant amount of money, he had duped poor women by saying that he will treat them free of cost if they cast their vote to him, and people also thought that since he is a doctor and is also not from the village so he will definitely work for the people. For instance while casually interacting with a group of women who were Yadav by caste in the Mani Sirsia village, an old women Laxminia Devi said that, *“we all gave him vote because he told us that if he wins then he will treat us free of cost. We thought that though he is not from our village but he will be benevolent to us. So we gave him vote rather than giving to any of our own villagers. But after that he didn't fulfill his promise.”* People collectively said that since Shyam Sunder Mishra was a doctor so most of the women have given vote to him which is one of the main reasons for his victory. Jai Kisan Mahto, a sensible 60 year old Noniya contestant said that though he doesn't have proof but present Mukhia had bought people's vote by bribing them. He said that Shyam Sunder Mishra must have spent around Rs 60,000-70,000 approximately in the election process. The other people of the village thought that since he is not from the village so he will not aggrandize money, therefore they cast their vote to him. But later they found that he is just opposite of what they had thought.

On the other hand Satyendra alias Bhutel Singh had spent around Rs 80,000-90,000 in the campaign. He had spent money in giving liquor, meat and cash to people to win their vote. He had also stamped votes illegally. That is why, there was a tough fight between him and Shyam Sunder Mishra. In the end he was planning to bribe the counting officials to declare the result in his favour but later due to interference of few prominent villagers and on their advice he didn't do so. And in the end Shyam Sunder Mishra won by a landslide victory.

The reasons why the rest of the candidates lost are:

Avadhesh Singh, a Rajput got 200-250 votes. He said that he could not win the election as he was financially weak in comparison to other candidates.

Anil Singh, an active member of RJD party said that he spent Rs 1000-1500 in the election campaign. He is a Bhumihar by caste and lives in Jagdeo Sirsia village where the Bhumihar population is concentrated. Most of the Bhumihar

votes were anticipated to go to another contender late Chandraket Singh a Rajput by caste.⁶ Anil Singh said that Late Chandraket Singh had once hurt his sentiments by pointing out to him and saying that these young people will not win the election. So he stood in the election to cut the vote of late Chandraket Singh so that Shyam Sunder Mishra wins the election. In other words, as Anil Singh was a Bhumihar by caste so that all the Bhumihar votes went to him instead of Chandraket Singh. Late Chandraket Singh lost the election as he was not much popular among people because of his rude behaviour, and also because he couldn't strategize his campaign well.

Raj Kishore Rai, a Yadav by caste and a contractor by profession said that he lost because the Rajputs did not favour him and he was also having financial constraints. After the death of his father, grandfather and one brother in an accident, the financial condition of his family had become weak because the business had gone down as the number of working hands has reduced. He got only 470 votes. Apart from this there was illegal stamping of votes which he did not do. The reason for him standing for the post of Mukhia was "samaj kalyan ke liye khare huye aur ham aur hamaraa parivaar bhi thik thaak rahe", i. e. he stood for doing social work and also so that he and his family can also live nicely. The subtle meaning was that if he would have become Mukhia then he would not only do social work but would also get money with which he and his family could also live nicely.

Hari Rai, a Yadav by caste said that in comparison to other contenders he was not having enough money to spend in the election campaign and he also couldn't buy manpower to help him win through illegal means.

Chandeshwar alias Bhukhal Sharma and a lohar by caste said that he lost as he didn't have many people of his caste to vote in his favour and in front of other upper caste he was also financially weak.

Jai Kisan Mahto is an active member of BJP. He stood in the election for working for the people. He said that he had spent only Rs 5000 approximately

⁶ Chandraket Singh was Mukhia of the panchayat since last 22 years. His term used to get extended in the absence of election before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act.

in campaigning for the election which was spent in filing nomination in the block and hiring a few vehicle, tea and snacks for the campaigners and in posters. He got 475 votes and the reason for his loosing was that he said that he did not have cash and caste power to win. He said that he belonged to the Noniya caste which is not allowed to vote according to its will. Some of the members gave around Rs 1000 to people including the upper and lower caste and bought their votes. Some of the people of his caste were not allowed to cast vote and they were sent back. Hence the election was not held democratically and fairly and therefore he lost.

Election of the ward members:

There are a total of fourteen wards in the panchayat. Ward numbers 1-5 were reserved for the females. Ward number six to fourteen were for the general candidates. There was no reservation for the Scheduled caste population in the panchayat (the reason has already been explained).

Election for ward number 1:

Kanti Devi wife Of Jitendra Rai, a Yadav by caste was elected unanimously from ward number 1. No other candidate contested against her. Kanti Devi said that her husband had made her nominate her name for the ward member. Financially Kanti Devi's family is strong.⁷ It should be noted that this ward has maximum of the Yadav population. Hence caste and her financial status may be a reason that no one else of other caste contested against her. Some of the important facts about her are as follows:-

⁷ The financial status of Kanti Devi and Jitendra Rai has been discussed in chapter IV on page no. 13

Ward no 1:	
Name :	Kanti D evi
Wife Of:	Jitendra Rai
Caste:	Yadav
Village:	Ganaura
Age:	25
Educational Qualification:	Class VIII
Occupation:	House Wife
Husband's Occupation:	Agriculture
Monthly Income:	Rs. 200
Land owned:	2 bigha
No. of Children:	3 = 2M + 1F
Won:	elected unanimously from reserved seat

Election for ward number 2:

Sarita Devi, a Rajput by caste and Radha Devi, a Lohar by caste contested from ward number 2. Sarita Devi won the election. Some of the important facts about both are as follows:-

Ward no 2:

Name :	Sarita D evi	Radha D evi
Wife Of:	Vijay Singh	Vishwanath Sharma
Caste:	Rajput	Lohar
Village:	Ganaura	Mani Sirsia
Age:	28	40
Educational Qualification:	Class VIII	Class V
Occupation:	House Wife	House Wife
Husband's Occupation:	Agriculture	Agriculture
Monthly Income:	Rs. 200	Very less, just sufficient to eat.
Land owned:	2 -2 ½ bigha	20-22 katha
No. of Children:	3 = 2M + 1F	7 = 3M + 4F
Won:	elected from reserved seat	Lost

Both Sarita Devi and Radha Devi said that they did not go out for campaigning. Their husbands campaigned for them. Radha Devi was at first hesitant to give information thinking that her husband will give information more clearly and she being illiterate will not be able to say anything. Later after talking on general issues and probing she started speaking and told about what had happened in the election. She said that she was made to stand for the post by Chandraket Singh and Bhutel Singh both of whom were the contenders for the post of Mukhia. It should be noted that both are not of this ward. Later as she was Lohar by caste so wife of Vijay Singh a Rajput was made to contest against her as the population of upper caste Rajputs is more in this ward. She

said that she lost because of illegal stamping and because of more population of Rajputs in the ward who did not give vote to her.

It is observed that the upper caste in order to serve their specific interests or to show down another group of upper caste will favour lower or backward caste and when they do not have any interest then they will suppress, dominate and exploit the lower castes. The lower castes have to stay at the mercy of the upper castes.

Election for ward number 3:

Ramawati Devi, a Rajput by caste and Shanti Devi, a Chamar by caste contested from ward number 3. Ramawati Devi won the election. Some of the important facts about both are as follows:-

Ward no 3:		
Name :	Ramawati Devi	Shanti Devi
Wife Of:	Prabhunath Singh	Late Adalat Ram
Caste:	Rajput	Chamar
Village:	Mani Sirsia	Mani Sirsia
Age:	28	36
Educational Qualification:	Class III	Class VI
Occupation:	House Wife	Agricultural labourer and mid wife
Husband's Occupation:	Industrial worker	Not applicable
Monthly Income:	Rs. 2500	Just to eat and survive
Land owned:	3 bigha	5 katha

No. of Children:	4 = 3M + 1F	4 = 2M + 2F
Won:	elected from reserved seat	Lost

Shanti Devi is a very poor agricultural labourer. She also works as mid wife. Shanti Devi's brother-in-law said that he was told to make her contest in the election by Vijay Singh and Kanhaiya Prasad, the reasons of which he does not know. (It should be noted that Vijay Singh and Kanhaiya Prasad are people living outside this ward.) So he made her stand in the election. But on seeing a Scheduled caste contesting the election, wife of Prabhunath Singh a Rajput was made to stand against her. As the population of Rajputs is more in this ward so Ramawati Devi won the election.

Election for ward number 4:

Sarita Devi, a Rajput by caste and Shivrati Devi, a Chamar by caste contested from ward number 4. Sarita Devi won the election. Some of the important facts about both are as follows:-

Ward no 4:		
Name :	Sarita Devi	Shivrati Devi
Wife Of:	Sachinder Tiwari	Jwahaar Ram
Caste:	Bhumihar	Chamar
Village:	Jagdeo Sirsia	Jagdeo Sirsia
Age:	27	30
Educational Qualification:	Class VIII	Illiterate
Occupation:	House Wife	Agricultural labourer

Husband's Occupation:	Sahara Agent + Buiseness	Agricultural labourer
Monthly Income:	Rs. 1000	Just to eat and survive
Land owned:	3 bigha	5 katha
No. of Children:	4 = 1M + 3F	4 = 2M + 2F
Won:	elected from reserved seat	Lost

The votes in this ward were divided into two groups- Yadavs and Bhumihar and Yadavs and Harijans. Sarita devi got 122 votes. She got vote mainly from Yadav and Bhumihar group and won. Shivrati Devi is very poor. Her house is in dilapidated condition. She could get only about 118 votes from Yadav and Harijan group and thus lost.

Election for ward number 5:

Manju Devi a Lohar by caste and Pramila Devi a Yadav by caste contested from ward number 4. Manju Devi won the election. Some of the important facts about both of them are as follows:-

Ward no 5:		
Name :	Manju Devi	Pramila Devi
Wife Of:	Chandeshwar alias Bhukhal Sharma	Jaiprakash Rai
Caste:	lohar	Yadav
Village:	Jagdeo Sirsia	Jagdeo Sirsia
Age:	27	30

Educational Qualification:	Class V	Class V
Occupation:	House Wife	House Wife
Husband's Occupation:	Agriculture	Industrial worker in Karnataka
Monthly Income:	1000	2500
Land owned:	10-12 katha	2 bigha
No. of Children:	5= 1M + 4 F	4 = 1M + 3F
Won:	elected from reserved seat	Lost

Pramila Devi's father-in-law, late Chathoo Rai had made her stand in the election thinking that if she wins then it will be beneficial for the people of the ward as well as his family. Pramila Devi said that as both the contestants were staying nearby so their votes got divided. Though Yadavs are more in number than the Lohars in the ward but Manju Devi a Lohar by caste won. Villagers said that Manju Devi won because her Husband Chandeshwar alias Bhukhal Sharma feasted this ward's people with non-veg food, a night before the election. Hence they gave vote to his wife. It should also be noted the Chandeshwar Sharma also contested for the post of Mukhia but lost it. On the contrary he won the election for the ward member. He has also used the same trick to win the election which the other winner Gazendra Singh had employed on large scale in the whole of the panchayat.

Election for ward number 6:

Jaydev Singh, a Bhumihar by caste was elected unanimously. No one stood against him in his ward as he is old and respected by the majority of the people. Apart from this the population of the Bhumihars is more in this ward. Some of the important facts regarding him are as follows:-

Ward no 6:	
Name :	Jaydev Singh
Caste:	Bhumihar Brahman
Village:	Jagdeo Sirsia
Age:	75
Educational Qualification:	Class X
Occupation:	Retd. Govt. employee (from finance dept.)
Monthly Income:	Rs 3000 (pension)
Land owned:	4 bigha
No. of Children:	3= 3M + 0 F
Won:	elected unanimously

Election for ward number 7:

Prabhunath Prasad, Anil Singh and Umapati Singb contested from this ward.
Some of the important facts about them are as follows:-

Ward no 7:			
Name :	Prabhunath Prasad	Anil Singh	Umapati Singb
Caste:	Yadav	Avadhiya Kurmi	Avadhiya Kurmi
Village:	Hussepur (on the other side of the	Hussepur (on the other side of the	Hussepur (on the other side of the

	river Dabra)	river Dabra)	river Dabra)
Age:	32	34	40
Educational Qualification:	Class X	Graduation	Class VI
Occupation:	agriculture	agriculture	agriculture
Monthly Income:	1000	4000	200
Land owned:	5 bigha (joint family)	3 Bigha (joint family)	3 Bigha
No. of Children:	4= 3M + 1 F	2= 1M + 1 F	6= 3M + 3F
Won:	won	lost	lost

To be emphasized that in this ward Yadavs and Avadhiya kurmis are the dominating castes. The winner Prabhunath Prasad who is a Yadav by caste favours the RJD party. So the members of RJD party in the village have helped him in the election campaign. Anil Singh an Avadhiya kurmi by caste said that the reason for his losing the election was that from the same caste i. e. Avadhiya kurmi two people had contested, hence the votes were divided. He got 75 votes and Prabhunath Prasad got 95 votes and won. Umapati Singh, he also being Avadhiya kurmi by caste said that total votes were not casted by the people especially the Avadhiya kurmis. A rumour was spread by the Yadavs, that after all the Yadav community had voted that poling will be cancelled. They tore ballot papers, made hue and cry of the situation and did not allow some of the villagers especially the Avadhiya Kurmis to cast their votes. But poling was not cancelled and counting of the ballot paper was done. As maximum of his community people could not vote, so he lost. He had also formed ally with Bhutel Singh. Bhutel Singh (contesting for the post of Mukhia and Rajput by caste) anticipating that he will win as Mukhiya in the election

did not take steps to appeal for re-polling. Umapati Singh said that if election would have been done fairly then he would have definitely won.

Election for ward number 8:

The election were held twice in the ward number eight as the first ward member Abdul Sattar Ansari who was also an Up-Mukhia of the panchayat was later selected as a teacher under Shiksha Mitra scheme, so he had to resign from the post of ward member and Up-Mukhia as he could not hold two posts together.⁸ So after his resignation election was held again in the year 2004.

First time Abdul Sattar Ansari a Muslim and Shankar Singh a Rajput had contested the election and Abdul Sattar Ansari won the election. Some of the basic information regarding them is as follows:-

Ward no 8:		
Name :	Abdul Sattar Ansari	Shankar Singh
Religion:	Muslim	Hindu (Rajput)
Village:	Hussepur	Hussepur
Age:	33	50
Educational Qualification:	Class XII	Class V
Occupation:	Teacher	Agriculture
Monthly Income:	3500	500
Land owned:	1 bigha	25 katha
No. of Children:	4= 2M + 2F	non
Won:	Won	Lost

⁸ Up-Mukhia is selected among the ward members.

Abdul Sattar Ansari said that he won as he is a teacher so people respect him and favoured him. On the other hand Shankar Singh said that he lost because he couldn't spend more money in the election campaign. He had spent only Rs 200-250 in nomination, tea for his friends and posters. He said that though he is a relative of Gazendra Singh⁹ but he (Gazendra Singh) did not help him. As Gazendra Singh was contesting for the post of panchayat samiti so he formed a tie with Abdul Sattar Ansari who had Muslim votes with him. All the Muslims are concentrated in this ward. Rajputs, Muslims and Noniyas are dominant castes in this ward. So both Gazendra Singh and Abdul Sattar Ansari spent money in providing liquor to their caste or religion members and exchanged each other's vote. Abdul Sattar Ansari won with the help of Rajput and Muslim votes.

After the resignation of Abdul Sattar Ansari election was held for the second time in the ward in the year 2004. There were three contenders- Shivji Singh, Gaya Singh and Manoj Rai. Out of these three contenders Shivji Singh a Rajput by caste won the election and got sworn in as a ward member on 18. 12. 04¹⁰. Some of the basic information regarding them is as follows:-

Ward no 8:			
Name :	Shivji Singh	Gaya Singh	Manoj Rai
Caste:	Rajput	Rajput	Yadav
Village:	Hussepur	Mani Sirsia	Ganaura
Age:	38	50	30
Educational Qualification:	Graduation	Graduation	Class IX

⁹ Gazendra Singh contested and won as panchayat samiti representative.

¹⁰ Researcher was present in the field on this day.

Occupation:	Agriculture	Agriculture	Agriculture and sell milk
Monthly Income:	Rs 500	Rs 1000	Rs 500
Land owned:	7-8 Bigha (joint)	6 bigha	3 bigha
No. of Children:	4 = 3M + 1F	5 = 4M + 1F	4 = 2M + 2 F
Won:	won	lost	lost

It is to be noted that this ward is very strategically located. On one side of the road Hussepur village is located and on the other side of the road Mani Sirsia village is located. Gaya Singh's house is in Mani Sirsia. He said that since he lived in Mani Sirsia so most of his family members were outside the ward and couldn't vote in his favour. The Muslims had made Gaya Singh stand in the election but later they ditched him and gave vote to Shivji Singh. They had made Gaya Singh spend Rs 7000 approximately. Muslim votes were divided between Shivji Singh and Gaya Singh and more of the Muslims voted for Shivji Singh because of the influence of Gazendra Singh. Hence Shivji Singh won the election.

Manoj is not from this ward. He is from ward number 2 which is in Ganoura. He was asked by some of the influential people of the village to stand in the election. He said that about 20 women of Shivji Singh's house cast vote twice in Shivji Singh's favour.

Election forward number 9:

Puneet Mahto and Kedar Mahto both Noniya by caste contested from ward number 9. Puneet Mahto won as the ward member. Some of the important fact about them are as follows:-

Ward no 9:		
Name :	Puneet Mahto	Kedar Mahto
Caste:	Noniya	Noniya
Village:	Hussepur	Hussepur
Age:	50	45
Educational Qualification:	Class V	Class VIII
Occupation:	Agriculture	Agriculture
Monthly Income:	500	800
Land owned:	1 ½ Bigha	1 ½ Bigha
No. of Children:	7 = 4 M+ 3 F	6 = 5M + 1F
Won:	Won	Lost

Kedar Mahto said that he lost because public did not chose him. He got around 70-75 votes and Puneet Mahto, his competitor got 120 votes and won. There was no tension between contenders during election. In this ward maximum of the population is of Noniyas. As both the contenders were Noniya so there was no rivalry between them on caste lines.

Election for ward number 10:

Avadhesh Mahto a Noniya by caste was elected as a ward member for this ward. He defeated Raja Mahto who was also a Noniya. Some of the important facts about them are as follows:-

Name :	Avadhesh Mahto	Raja Mahto
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Caste:	Noniya	Noniya
Village:	Hussepur	Hussepur
Age:	36	40
Educational Qualification:	Class VIII	illiterate
Occupation:	Industrial worker	Tenant
Monthly Income:	1000	200
Land owned:	1 ½ Bigha (joint family)	2 Bigha (joint family)
No. of Children:	6= 3M + 3F	5= 2M + 3F
Won:	Won	Lost

In this ward the population of Noniyas is more. Avadhesh Mahto won because of his good campaigning which Raja Mahto could not do as he did not have money to spend in the election campaign. Raja Mahto is a poor tenant who ekes out his existence by cultivating others land on Bataiya. On the contrary, since Avadhesh Mahto is a migrant worker working in a jute mill in Kolkata so his condition is comparatively better than Raja Mahto. It is worthwhile to note that though Avadhesh Mahto is a ward member but he works in Delhi and his brother takes care of the things in his absence.

Election for ward number 11:

Parma Rai, a Yadav by caste was elected unanimously in this ward as Yadavs are dominant castes in this ward. Some of the important facts about him are as follows:-

Ward no 11:

Name :	Parma Rai
Caste:	Yadav
Village:	Gheyaspur
Age:	42
Educational Qualification:	Class V
Occupation:	Industrial worker
Monthly Income:	500
Land owned:	2 bigha
No. of Children:	3 = 2M + 1F
Won:	Won

Parma Rai also works in Assam and his family members take care of the things in his absence.

Election for ward number 12:

Moti Raut a Kurmi by caste and Rameshwar Prasad a Rajput by caste were the contenders from this ward. Moti Raut won the election. Some of the important facts about them are as follows:-

Ward no 12:		
Name :	Moti Raut	Rameshwar Prasad
Caste:	Kurmi	Rajput
Village:	Hussepur	Hussepur

Age:	55	71
Educational Qualification:	Class IV	Class VIII
Occupation:	Agriculture	Agriculture
Monthly Income:	500	2000
Land owned:	1 ½ bigha	8 bigha
No. of Children:	10 = 5M + 5F	8 = 7M + 1F
Won:	Won	Lost

Though Rameshwar Prasad is a Rajput but he was defeated by Moti Raut a backward caste Kurmi by 30-31 votes approximately. He lost because the Brahmans of this ward supported Moti Raut. The Brahmans were against Rameshwar Prasad and his ally Shyam Sunder Mishra who contested and won the post of Mukhia. So internal politics between the two upper castes led to the defeat of an upper caste.

Though the Brahmans particularly Dharmnath Tiwari favoured Moti Raut but the caste discrimination still continues. Moti Raut doesn't sit on chair in the Brahman's house. He either sits on the floor or remains standing.

Election for ward number 13:

Shabhu Prasad Shah was elected unanimously as no one else contested against him. Some of the important facts regarding him are as follows:-

Ward no 13:	
Name :	Shabhu Prasad Shah
Caste:	Kanu
Village:	Hussepur

Age:	36
Educational Qualification:	Class X
Occupation:	Agriculture
Monthly Income:	Rs.3000
Land owned:	1 bigha
No. of Children:	3= 1M + 2F
Won:	Won

Election for ward number 14:

Manoj Kumar a Bhumihar by caste and Darbari Manjhi a Dusadh by caste contested from this ward. Monoj Kumar won. Some of the important facts regarding him are as follows:-

Ward no 14 :		
Name :	Manoj Kumar	Darbari Manjhi
Caste:	Bhumihar	Dusadh
Village:	Jagdeo Sirsia	Hussepur
Age:	30	40
Educational Qualification:	Graduation	Class IX
Occupation:	Agriculture	Agricultural labourer
Monthly Income:	2000	Less than Rs 100
Land owned:	1 bigha	1 katha

No. of Children:	$3 = 2M + 1F$	$4 = 3M + 1F$
Won:	Won	Lost

In this ward Darbari Manjhi first nominated his name after seeking permission from the influential upper caste persons from this ward. He asked them if no one from the upper caste is contesting so can he nominate his name. After seeking their approval he nominated his name. Darbari Manjhi said that later other people of the panchayat started condemning the upper castes of this ward. They said that, “*Dusadh ke log madad kara taran taki kaalh dusadh maath pe charh jaye*”, i.e. you people are helping Dusadhs so that tomorrow they stand on our head. Hence Manoj was compelled to contest even though he was not interested in it. Votes were also stamped in his favour and hence he won.

It is observed that educational qualification was not a criterion for winning or losing the election. It was caste, cash, popularity and immoral means used by the members which helped them win the election. The election was not held democratically and fairly. The dominant castes had not left a stone unturned to not to allow the backward castes and scheduled castes cast their vote. Those who spent less cash in the election process and stuck to their moral principles lost the election.

Money is observed to be more influential than caste in the election process. People of a caste would vote for the candidate of other caste if they get money. Public opinion was created and changed on the basis of cash rather than the election manifesto of the candidates and commitment of the candidates. The decision making is subtly influenced by short term financial benefits.

The whole of the elections process describes and delineates how much freedom did the females and Dalits had over making choices and how much control they had over the election process. The upper castes made the Dalits lose election where ever they made an attempt to contest. The social hierarchy in the panchayat was re-emphasised in the panchayat election. The females were made to contest the election on the will of either their husbands or their family members. None of them had gone out of their house for campaigning. Their

family member campaigned for them. As the ward numbers 1-5 were reserved for females so they were made as proxy contenders and in the rest of the wards no females contested. The females were neither interested nor did they had any knowledge regarding what was happening in the panchayat.

The subaltern Yadavs and Kurmis in the panchayat due to their economic independence have been able to challenge the Rajputs in the election process. It is observed that though there was no direct involvement of the RJD party in the election process but its members residing in the panchayat had worked in unison and had helped each other in the election. The Yadavs and Kurmis could not win the post of Panchayat Samiti and the post of Mukhia as their votes got divided among their own caste members and also they were not as strong in terms of 'cash, caste and crime', together as some of the other Rajput candidates. It is also observed that some of the upper castes had formed an alliance with the backward castes to exchange votes between their castes residing in a particular area.

In the ward election also we can very clearly see the role of caste. Where ever the scheduled cāstes had tried to contest, the upper castes had made their candidate stand and win. It is also observed that the division of wards though was not done by keeping the caste factor in mind but it has been distributed in such a way that a particular caste population is more in a particular ward. This is because in villages the settlement pattern is in such a way that people of particular caste stay together in a cluster. As election is based on castes so the candidates of the caste having maximum population in the ward has got the natural benefit out of it.

People's Participation:

No training and awareness generation was carried out in any place by the government of Bihar to let people know about the 73rd amendment act and raise their political consciousness. After election also no training was given to the representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions regarding the functions of the panchayat and people's role in it by the government.¹¹ Hence people and panchayat representatives of the Hussepur Gram Panchayat were confused and ignorant of their powers and role in the Gram Sabha. Discussions with various people of the five villages brought to light the fact that Gram Sabhas are completely defunct in the panchayat and the meetings have rarely been conducted.¹² After the institution of the gram panchayat the Gram Sabhas were held only a few times. No public notice was ever taken out for Gram Sabha whenever it was held.¹³ Since there is no panchayat bhawan in the panchayat from where people could get the information of what is happening in the panchayat, so some people do not even know that it was held.¹⁴ There is confusion among the villagers regarding how many times the Gram Sabha meetings were held. Prabhunath Prasad, the representative of ward no 7 said that after the sworn in ceremony in 2001 at around five to six places Gram Sabha was held. After this the Gram Sevak who is secretary to the panchayat told Mukhia, not to call for the meeting as people created a lot of problems in the meeting. People used to question the Gram Sevak about the work which he had promised to do and for which he had taken bribes from them during the

¹¹ This information was collected during an interview with the staffs of the Directorate of Panchayat, Bihar and staffs of the NGO CENCORD working for spreading awareness among people regarding Panchayati Raj in Bihar. CENCORD is known in Bihar for its pioneering work on panchayats. (Only a few NGOs are involved in generating awareness regarding panchayats in a few districts of Bihar.)

¹² Under section 3 of Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 Gram Sabhas should be held in at least once in three months interval. (Government of Bihar (1994), Bihar Gazette, *Bihar Panchayati Raj Act 1993*, October 28, Patna, p. 6.

¹³ Under section 4 (1) of Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 a notice of the Gram Sabha meeting has to be pasted in the office of the gram panchayat and the same is to be brought to the notice of the public by a beat of drum. (Government of Bihar (1994), Bihar Gazette, *Bihar Panchayati Raj Act 1993*, October 28, Patna.)

¹⁴ The panchayat bhawan or panchayat office was constructed in the panchayat but due to absence of maintainance it is in a dilapidated state and is not used by the panchayat.

time from 1997 -2001 when the panchayats were suspended (Ghosh and Kumar 2003).¹⁵ Hence when it was seen that people are raising their voice against Mukhia and Gram Sevak they stopped calling for the Gram Sabha meetings. A group of villagers in ward number 5 and 10 did not even know that Gram Sabha was ever held in the panchayat. Manoj Kumar a representative of ward number 14 said that it was held twice.

Under section 5 (1) and (2) of Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 regarding the Gram Sabha there is a rule that the quorum of a meeting will be one-tenth of the total members of the Gram Sabha (GOB 1994).¹⁶ People, especially the ward members said that in order to show the quorum of the meeting in the proceeding register of the Gram Sabha their signature was taken on it without their knowledge. The people supporting the Mukhia in the panchayat used to help him in this. The common people including the ward members did not even know that Gram Sabha has a quorum for the meeting and that a proceeding register is maintained for it. Once people came to know that they were being duped and made to sign on the proceeding register, they stopped signing on it. For instance in ward number 5 people said that dealer Devnath Singh took signature of the villagers saying that they have to sign for getting the kerosene oil but actually he took their signature on the proceeding register of the Gram Sabha. As the villagers were illiterate they did not know that they were signing on the proceeding register instead of the register for getting the kerosene oil. When they came to know about it they stopped signing on it. Even the scheduled castes stopped signing on it when they came to know about it.

Ward members like Moti Raut, Shambhu Prasad Shah, Prabhunath Prasad said that in 2004 Mukhia- Shayam Sunder Mishra had himself called a Gram Sabha to let people know of the work he had done till then. In the meeting people started asking him questions regarding his work and later the situation became

¹⁵ In 1997 under an order of the Supreme Court the elected Panchayati Raj members holding office since 1978 were dismissed and their powers were passed over to the government panchayat officials till 2001 election. [Ghosh, Budhaddeb, Kumar, Girish (2003), State Politics and Panchayat in India, Manohar Publications, New Delhi.]

¹⁶ Government of Bihar (1994), Bihar Gazette, *Bihar Panchayati Raj Act 1993*, October 28, Patna.

so tensed that Mukhia had to literally run away from the meeting to save himself from being beaten by the crowd!

Whenever the Gram Sabhas had been held it used to be dominated by a few influential people of the Hussepur village. So people of other village could not put across their voice due to less number of people of their village who would favour their view. Such a complain was made by Jaydev Singh the representative of ward number 6 of Jagdeo Sirsia village. He said that for the same reason he never attended the Gram Sabha whenever it was held. No female representatives participated in it, rather their husbands participated on their behalf. Very few woman of the lower and backward caste had attended the Gram Sabha.

The meetings of the Gram Panchayat also do not take place.¹⁷ All the work is done at the monopoly of the Mukhia and Gram Sevak. No annual plans or budgets are made by the panchayat.¹⁸ Shamhu Prasad Shah, the representative of ward no 13 said that the meeting of the panchayat office bearers was held only twice in the year 2001 and after that it was never held. After that the representatives were never consulted regarding any work of the panchayat. The Mukhia and the Gram Sevak decide between themselves and do the work.

Female ward member's participation:-

Kanti Devi, representative of ward number 1 said that she never goes out of the house. Her husband does all the work of the Panchayat. She only signs on the register. On asking questions regarding functioning of the panchayat she says: '*uhien ke bataayam ki panchayat kaise kaam kare laa*', i.e. my husband will only tell you how the panchayat functions. She doesn't know any thing about panchayat and nor is she interested in it. She is educated till eighth standard but has no political awareness. She stood for the election as she was told by her husband to do so. She is a house wife and is happy and contented with her life. The family also seemed to be a prosperous family. On asking Jitender Rai her husband, why did he made his wife stand for the election, he said that he made

¹⁷ Under section 20 of Bihar Panchayat Raj Act it is given that a Gram Panchayat has to meet at least once in two months and at such times as the Mukhia may determine. Government of Bihar (1994), Bihar Gazette, *Bihar Panchayati Raj Act 1993*, October 28, Patna.

¹⁸ Not only the people but the BDO of the panchayat Mr Brijnandan Prasad who is a schedule caste (Chamar) also said the same thing.

her stand as it was a reserved seat and he was interested in the welfare of the village. Apart from this he will also get some work in contract if his wife is a ward member which can be another source of earning for him.

Sarita Devi a representative of ward number 2 said that she used to go to Gram Sabha on every Thursday but since last few months it has been stopped. She said that she also goes to panchayat office bearers meetings. She says: "*jaahan khoj rahe la tahan ja hein ke pare laa*", i.e. wherever I am required to go, I have to go. As a matter of fact she lied about the meetings as it is not held. She might be going out with her husband to any place wherever her signature might have been required. This also is a rare possibility as people say that they have never seen the female ward members. Shambhu the representative of ward number 13 said that he has never seen his female colleagues in any of the Gram Sabha meetings or panchayat representatives meetings whenever it was held.

In fact the mobility of females in the village is very restricted. They go only to their nearby neighbours and this is also very infrequent. In case of health problems also the doctors come to their house for the check-up. They go out only in case of emergency i.e. if they have to go out of the village to some other private doctors or in marriages in the nearby neighbourhood in the village or if they have to visit their relatives out side village. The mobility of lower caste females is more as they have to go out in others house or fields to work.

Sarita Devi might have lied for two reasons – one that she doesn't want to criticize panchayat fully as her husband is also an ally of Mukhia and due to him she has been selected as Aanganwari Sevika. Two – she also wanted to show that she is an active member of the panchayat and goes with her husband where ever her presence is required.

She also said that her red card has been cancelled, as may be there might be some mistake in it.¹⁹ It is observed that Mukhia always holds the reign in his hand. On one hand he selected her as Aanganwari sevika on the other hand he cancelled her red card which she was in possession of illegally. The number of benefits he gives to one person depends on the person's relationship with him,

¹⁹ Sarita Devi is a Rajput by caste and is not eligible to have red card. The red cards are ration cards given to the below poverty line people.

the power and public support the person holds in the village and how important his decisions can be in times of 'adverse situation'.²⁰

No standing committees are made in the panchayat.²¹ She says, "ee sab sarkar dwara suchna milela tab hein ta banela", i. e. all this will be made only when government issues any letter for its formation. This clearly shows that she doesn't know about the functions of panchayat and her own role in it.

Ramawati Devi of ward number 3 said that her brother-in-law attends the meeting in place of her. She said that Mukhia has never given any work to do in her ward and he never seeks her advice or her families' advice in any of the panchayat's work. She is very articulate and says that though she doesn't have any knowledge of how the panchayats should function and what are the roles, rights and responsibilities of the panchayat members but she is very interested in knowing it. She doesn't have a source from where she can gain this knowledge. She also said that earlier Gram Sevak used to take her signature in the proceeding register without her knowledge but when she came to know about it she stopped it. She said that ward members have complained against Mukhia but no response has come from the government authorities. Though she is only third standard pass but she can read Hindi if it is written clearly and is very perceptive and vigilant.

When asked about the problems faced by people in her ward she at first said that she doesn't know as she doesn't go out of the house but later after probing she told about the general problem of education, roads etc.

When Sarita Devi of ward number 4 was asked what work has been done in her ward by the panchayat then she said that she doesn't know anything and her husband knows it all. On probing and on being asked leading question she said that one well has been repaired and one road has been soled by bricks but she did not know from where to where and which road has been repaired. When

²⁰ Under section 18 (4) of the Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1993, every Mukhia will have to vacate his office if a resolution expressing want of confidence in him is passed by a majority of not less than two thirds of the total number of voters of the gram panchayat a meeting specially convened for the purpose. Here the adverse situation means such a kind of situation.

²¹ Under section 25 (1) of the Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1993, three standing committees have to be made- Production Committee, Social Justice Committee, and Amenities Committee.

the villagers were asked who their ward member is, they said that it is Sachinder Tiwari. When asked whether he or his wife is the ward member, then some said it is he, while some said that it is his wife. There was confusion for some time between them and they started clarifying who is their ward member among themselves. After clarifying among themselves they said that it is she but she is a ward member for name sake and all the work is done by Sachinder Tiwari, her husband.

When Manju Devi of ward no 5 was asked - she is a member of which number ward? Then she said: "panch kaa do ha? Ham kaa jani." i.e. may be five. What would I know? Manju Devi was not sure of which no. ward she is a member of. She was not at all vocal. Even for telling how many children she has, she used to look at her husband. And when the husband will tell her, "*why don't you say? Say that you have 5 children*". Then she would answer. What ever questions were asked to her, her husband gave the answers for them.

Though she knew what all work had been done in her ward but she depended on her husband to say that. Regarding the work done in her ward she said, "*Ham hein kaam karwayni ki ham janem. Jab kauno chij pe likhe ke avela ta likh dihi la. Sab uoo hein jane lan*", i.e. do I get the work done that I would know. When anything comes for writing I write it. He (my husband) only gets the work done and he only knows it all. On the other hand her husband lied that whenever meetings of the representatives take place then his wife goes. But he doesn't remember how many times meetings have been held. The villagers also said that his wife never went in any meeting,

When Bhukhal Sharma her husband was asked, "*what does his wife do?*" Then he said that, "She does nothing, only domestic work." When asked whether she has got any rights in the panchayat or not? He said that "she has got no rights." When I asked him to take me to his wife as I want to talk to her then he said that, "She doesn't know anything. She is illiterate. Whatever you have to ask you can ask me."

In ward number 5 too when I asked the villagers, "Who is their ward member?" They said, "It is Bhukhal Sharma." When asked whether he or his wife is the

ward member then they said that it is his wife. But she is ward member for name sake and all the work is done by Bhukhal Sharma actually.

Only Ramawati Devi of ward number three among all the woman representatives has a little bit of leadership capability and is interested in the work of panchayat. But she too is restricted by the culture and traditional practices of the rural society i.e. the gender discriminatory practices that are followed. She also doesn't go out of her house to attend the meetings.

In certain wards people do not even consider the female representative as their ward member. Rather they consider their husband or the family member who work on behalf of her as their representative. Females are just proxy representatives and the work is actually being done by their husband or any other family member. If there would have been no reservation for females then the proxy female representatives would also not have been seen. It is to be noted that in this panchayat no female contested from the general seats.

Devnath Singh who stood for the panchayat samiti said regarding female reservation that it is futile. Females can not do the work. Many a time's representatives have to go to block which females can not do. Their husbands have to do the work on their behalf. People's perception about the women is that they are illiterate and do not know any thing. They do not even know how to talk properly on serious issues. It is observed that males think that whether they are literate or not but they know every thing. The women also think the same about them. Whereas the actual reason is that the women never go out of their house. They do not even go to their nearby neighbour's house. Social visits are very infrequent and limited. What ever they know of their village is through their husband, children or other male members of the family who discuss at home. So its not that women do not know anything as they are illiterate but since their interaction with different kind of people is limited so they do not know much and do not have the confidence to articulate whatever they know.

Female's participation in the election process:-

When I asked a women group in Jagdeo Sirsia village, whom had they voted in the election? They said that, they voted whomever their husbands had told

them to vote. *“But no one has done any work. Next time onwards we won't listen to any one. We will cast vote to those who will work.”* It is seen that whether the women cast vote according to their choice or not but the process of thinking and observing as to who is working in the panchayat and who is not has begun.

Laxminia Kunwar, 55years old, a Yadav by caste while complaining about Mukhia with a group of women said that, *“Next time I will contest for the post of Mukhia. Let me see how the upper castes win.”* She is very poor. After some time during the interaction she asked me, *“Why don't you stand for the post of Mukhia. We all will caste our vote to you.”* It is seen that though while talking, she got excited and said that she will contest the election but later her confidence shaked and she wanted some one who is a good leader and will work for their welfare.

Another lady Lakhpati Kunwar of 54 years and a Teli by caste said that, *“Ee misirva ke ta hum dekh na sakatani. Sochani ki bahar ke baa ta sabke dekhi, baaki ee ta sabse bar chotta nikalalak.”*, i.e. I can't stand this Mishra (Mukhia). I thought that he is from out side the panchayat so he will look after every one but he is the biggest fraud. Then she went on to say, *“Aacha abki bar hum khara hokhem. Hamra ta mariyo dihi sab tabahun dar naikhe, baki sanch ke sanch aa jhooth ke jhooth kahem. Dekhetani ki babu sahab log ka kaha taran’*, i.e. o.k. this time I will contest. If everyone (upper caste) kills me then also I am not afraid but I will tell truth as a truth and lie as a lie. Let me see what (how) the babu sahab (upper castes) say (react to it). She said that if she wins she will work first for the poor either upper caste or lower caste and after that if money is more then panchayat members can distribute it among themselves.

Male ward member's participation:-

Jaydev Singh of ward no 6 doesn't have much knowledge about the new panchayati raj i.e. about the panchayats after the 73rd constitutional amendment. He had filed a petition against Mukhia along with other ward members to BDO but nothing happened, he left taking interest in the panchayats after that. No work has been done in his ward. He is very old and

lack dynamism which is required to work in the present situation. As he is old so he is less mobile i. e. he can't go to block office frequently to get any work done. Mukhia also didn't give him any work as he (Mukhia) never found him to be threatening enough to his position. Apart from that Jaydev Singh will not become Mukhia's ally even if he gives him (Jaydev) any work to do in his (Jaydev) ward. So he never gave Jaydev Singh any work to do in his ward in the past three years.

Prabhunath Prasad of ward no 7 said that in his ward flood broken road was repaired in 2001. In 2002 flood broke it again but it is not repaired. One well is repaired in his ward for which he was asked by Mukhia to take loan from any one if he requires more money than what is given to him and he will pay him later. So he took Rs 7000 as loan as required and spent it in construction of well. But Mukhia has not repaid him back. He says that Mukhia gets cash for all schemes but he misuses it i.e. he will spend it on something else instead of spending it on the implementation of the scheme for which it is sanctioned and asks the people to get the work done on debt which he promises to pay later. Prabhunath Prasad also says that 70 people's red card is made but it is not distributed in the panchayat. Mukhia uses his own list while making card for BPL population wherein no one's consent is taken. This list is not appropriate as it also contains certain people's names that are rich and will by no means come under BPL list.

Mukhia threatens Prabhunath Prasad by saying that "*gyada udane ki koshish mat kijiye nahi to hamare pas paisa hai. Aap par koi bhi claim kar ke mukadama lagwa sak te hain.*" i.e. don't try to be over smart otherwise I have money and power and will sue you in a fake case. Mukhia openly tells him that from his ward he has got only seven votes so why should he give him any work to do in his ward. In 2001 and 2002 his ward was worst affected by flood as it is surrounded by two small non-perennial rivers from two sides which gets flooded in the rainy season but Mukhia distributed the least of the relief to his ward. No development work has been done in his ward. Due to flood the Katcha road has been damaged and big ditches are formed on the road. They have not been filled by the panchayat.

Shivji Singh the representative of ward no 8 have a hearing problem. He doesn't have any knowledge of the functions of the panchayat and regarding the powers of the panchayat. Regarding the problems of his ward he said that people need Indra Awas-atleast 10 houses needs to be constructed under it, red card, yellow card, widow pension, roads, wells and hand pumps need to be repaired. When asked whether there is any health need, he said 'yes'. 'What?'. He says, "*Usme jo chij hoga vo chahiye logon ko*", i.e. people need what ever is given in health. He doesn't know the health needs of his village and is open to take whatever is provided by the government. He doesn't have a vision of his own as to how to develop his ward and what should they demand from their government and how they should plan it. Rather he is dependent on government to plan for him and find out what his village needs and accordingly provide services.

He doesn't have leadership ability to plan and implement anything on his own. He is not an exception but he is one among the general mass who are dependent on government and who articulate their needs in terms of government schemes. Shivji Singh is newly elected but he is least interested in knowing what is the work done and plans left by the outgoing ward member. He never went to find out from the outgoing ward member Abdul Sattar Ansari regarding the work done by him for the ward and as a villager he rarely observed what his ward member was doing. Regarding the work done by the earlier ward member he only knew that certain BPL forms have been filled and red cards have been made.

It is worth mentioning that he was earlier against Mukhia but after becoming ward member in 2004 he became his ally and supports him. Regarding the functioning of the panchayat he said: "*hamare samajh se to panchayat sahiye kam kar rahi hai. Isme khami kya hai?*" i.e. according to my knowledge the panchayat is working properly. What is wrong in this? Devnandan Singh a villager informs that Shivji was earlier anti Mukhia and he had written a very nice poem against Mukhia and how he (Mukhia) is involved in corruption and fools the villagers. But now he is an ally of Mukhia so he lied about the panchayat's functioning.

Avadhesh Mahto of ward no 10 has gone to Delhi to earn and his brother Dharmnath Mahto has taken the charge unofficially. In fact ward members do not have much role in the panchayat except for getting the contract for implementing certain work which the Mukhia gives them according to his own wish. So no one bothers whether ward members are present or absent from the village. Interaction with his brother revealed that he too does not have much knowledge about the new PRI. People of his ward were criticizing the Mukhia and panchayat sevak openly in front of him.

Shabhu Prasad Shah of ward no 13 used to read a book which contained information on the panchayats after 73rd amendment and used to learn certain provisions before going to the Gram Panchayat meetings that were held initially but no one gave importance to his words in the meeting. He was not given importance because he was a backward and had low status than few members who were from upper caste.

The Mukhia and the Gram Sevak never even involve the ward members in any decision making process. Initially people were completely unaware of the rules and provisions of the new panchayat, but gradually their awareness is increasing. A few members tried to complain against the Mukhia but as the bureaucrats and government officials are also involved in the corruption of the panchayat, so they do not take any action. For instance Prabhunath Prasad of ward no 7 said that he had complained twice against Mukhia but nothing has been done as the administrative officials are themselves corrupt. Mukhia openly says that, *“you all can not do anything against me, so better be my ally and get some work from me.”*

Kedar Mahto a villager of ward no 9 said that as the panchayat is not working properly so he is working with the group of people who are organizing against Mukhia and are trying to file a case against him. Md Ayub s/o Abdul Subhan another villager complained to Collector regarding the irregularities in Annapurna and Antoday yojna on 8.10.2004.²² Thirty six villagers signed on it but there was no response from the Collector. There are certain people in the village who are aware of the functions of the panchayat and the actions that can

²² A copy of the letter was seen by the researcher.

be taken if it is not functioning properly but they also have problem in organizing the mass together and another question is, “*who will spend the money in the process?*”

People said that Jitendra husband of member of ward number 1 was earlier against Mukhia but when his wife was made ‘Shiksha Sachive’ i.e. secretary of the education committee of Ganaura Primary School he became an ally of the Mukhia. Jai Kisan Mahto said that those who organize against Mukhia are less in number and they too get divided due to such divide and rule policy of the Mukhia- Shyam Sunder Mishra. So he can not be impeached by Gram Sabha.

The ward members have no role to play in the panchayat. The reign of the panchayat is in the hands of the Mukhia who controls the people and maintain his position by giving certain benefits to some people whom he think will support him and their alliance with him will strengthen his position in the panchayat. If people do not listen to him by peaceful means then he threatens them.

Some of the people have become ward member just to get the benefit out of the panchayat. Same is the reason why certain women representatives were made to contest the election by their family members. No one has any training on the functions and responsibilities of the new panchayati raj system. People are learning about it by trial and error method. People visit block office for some other purpose and accidentally happen to know something about the panchayat and thus is their learning.

Shabhu Prasad Shah, a Kanu by caste and representative of ward no 13 has some knowledge about the panchayats after 73rd amendment. He said that earlier not much significance was attached with the panchayat. It did not have any constitutional status. People were not much aware of the government schemes. But now panchayats have gained a lot of significance. People are aware of most of the government schemes and the devolution of fund is more in it.

Corruption And Irregularities In The Work Done By The Panchayat:

As it is already clear that there is lot of corruption and monopoly of Mukhia and the Gram Sevak in the panchayat and in its implementation of the

development work. Casteism was again a factor in implementation of the development programmes. A more descriptive picture of the corruption in the implementation of the programmes by the panchayat is given below:

Wells:

Kanti Devi's (representative of ward number 1) husband told that Mukhia has given only one job to him. . One well has been made by the panchayat in her ward. That well is near her house. Shambhu Prasad Shah of ward number 13 said that in his ward three wells have been repaired. In ward number 4 one well has been repaired. Two wells repaired in ward number 8.

It is observed that the well which has been repaired has started ruining. Cracks have appeared on the cemented raised boundary. The cement used was of very low quality. One child of about 10 years of age said that there was no difference between cement and mud. Though some of the wells in the panchayat have been repaired but it is seen that the wells which are used by the scheduled caste or backward caste and which required to be repaired in priority have not been done so. Rather wells of the upper castes have been repaired in priority. It was also observed that wells which are not in use are repaired. As in ward number 12 the well which was near the upper caste Brahmins has been repaired and another where Mukhia lives has been repaired. But the well which was near the backward caste Kurmis has not been repaired. A lady who was Kurmi by caste and uses that well fumingly said that, '*ihan admi log naa, kutta log pani piala! Ahi se ee naa banal aa aadmi log ke ban gail*', i.e. here not human beings but dogs drink water that is why it has not been repaired. The wells where human beings drink water has been repaired. It should be noted the representative of this ward Moti Raut, who won because of the support of the Brahmins is also a Kurmi by caste. The Kurmis of his ward had been criticizing him a lot and said that though he is of their caste but he has not done anything for them. On the other hand Moti Raut expressed his inability and said that the Mukhia doesn't give him any work and it was necessary to repair the well near the Brahmins. In ward number 13 a well has been repaired which is not used by the people. Same is the case in ward number 9.

Roads:

A few roads have been brick soled in the panchayat. For instance in Sarita Devi's ward number 4 one road has been soled by bricks. In ward number 13 also one road has been brick soled. A road in ward number 2 has been brick soled which passes through the panchayat samiti member – Gazender Singh's house. It has been built under panchayat samiti quota by him. One main road passing through the Hussepur village going to Marhowrah has been brick soled half under Zila Parishad's quota. The construction of the road stopped half way as there was a fight between Bhutel Singh and son of late Chandraket Singh for getting the contract of the road in their panchayat and thus the construction was stopped.

The villagers of ward number 12 said that, "The road which we use has not been repaired and roads which are used by the babu sahibs have been repaired." People said that the road which they use is used by heavy traffics like tractors and huge ditches are made on the road due to passing of tractors. In rainy season such ditches are water logged. They thus have to face a lot of problems. In that season they can not move without walking in the waterlogged road. They said that in times of flood they have to walk in waist deep water for going to toilet in the fields. Their situation gets worse at that time as the flood water is very dirty.

Hand Pump:

Though there is requirement of hand pumps to be repaired or instatilled in the panchayat but not enough work has been done in this regard. On the contrary when people tried to install it with their own money the Mukhia did not allow them and where people could install it, got the money sanctioned for such hand pump and aggrandized the money. People of Noniya tola in ward number 9 said that they do not have proper water facility. A well in their ward has been repaired which is not used by anyone. People use the water only in emergency only for washing and bathing. The well which they use is not repaired. They do not have a hand pump and the government hand pump has become defunct as it is very old. They asked the Mukhia to repair it but he did not do so. Finally the poor people collected money among themselves, bought the pipe and called the technical expert to install it at their own expenditure. But the day the experts came Mukhia came and stopped them saying that the government hand pump

can not be repaired without permission. People requested him but he did not listen. Finally people's money went down the drain and they are suffering. They have to collect water from a hand pump which is a bit far away from the place of their residence. Prabhunath Prasad, a representative of ward no 7 said that in his ward a hand pump near the government primary school was repaired by collecting money from the people of the ward but Mukhia showed that the hand pump was repaired from government's money and embezzled the money sanctioned completely. Ward number 13's representative Shabhu Prasad Shah said that in his ward two hand pumps have been installed.

Aanganwari:

Under the ICDS scheme the Aanganwari's are institutionalized in various panchayat to provide ante-natal, natal and post natal care to the pregnant ladies, provide nutrition to mothers and children and monitor growth of the children up to six years of their age. As told by the BDO Brijnandan Prasad of the Amnour block, in Bihar ICDS scheme was implemented only in a few districts. Hence till now there was no Aanganwari in the Hussepur panchayat. In 2004 a circular was issued to the panchayat for the selection of the Aanganwari worker. There has to be one centre /1000 population. So in Hussepur panchayat there are 10 centres.

The selection of the Aanganwari worker was to be done from the BPL population who are supposed to have red ration cards. However it was observed that it was the rich upper and backward castes who illegally held red cards were selected as Aanganwari workers. For instance all the ten sevikas except one are selected from the rich class. It needs to be emphasized here that Vibha Mishra wife of Shyam Sunder Mishra, the Mukhia is also selected as the Aanganwari Sevika. The ten Aanganwari Sevikas who are selected are- Rita Singh w/o Kanhaiya Singh (Rajput), Champa devi w/o Chandrika Rai (Yadav), Nirmala devi w/o Ranjit Singh (Rajput), Shivrati Devi w/o Jawahar Navin (chamar), Shobha Devi w/o Rajesh Kr Singh (Avadhia Kurmi), Vibha Mishra w/o Shyam Sunder Mishra (Brahman) (Mukhia), Kiran Kumari d/o Kishore Kr. Singh (Avadhia Kurmi), Sangeeta Devi w/o Shankar Rai (Yadav), Renu Kumari d/o Krishana Shankar Singh (Rajput), and Manju Devi w/o Brijnath

Singh (Bhumihar).²³ Sarita Devi a rich Rajput and the representative of ward no 2 has been selected as Aanganwari Sahayika. Similarly it is the rich class women who have been selected as the Aanganwari Sahayika. The real needy i.e. the below poverty line population especially the scheduled caste for whom the Sevika and Sahayika post would have provided a good income and would have improved their economic condition are left out.

Mid Day Meal Scheme:

Under the 'Mid Day Meal' scheme sacks of cereals are given to primary schools to provide supplementary nutrition to the children. Each bag has to have 50kg of cereals in it. But actually each contains only 35kg or less of the cereals. A Teacher has to sign on 50kg of received slip whereas actually he receives 35kg of the cereal from the block. They do not get the transportation cost for the cereals which are paid by the government. A teacher of the Jagdeo Sirsia Primary School said that at times he gets the transportation cost from the block but most of the time it is the students who pay for it. Devi Singh a lady school teacher of the Secondary School in Rasulpur which is outside the panchayat resides in the Hussepur village. In this school most of the children of the panchayat go for higher studies after fifth standard. She said that, "The sack of grains which comes for the children contains 30kg of grains whereas it should contain 50kg of the grains. If the teachers will not take the sack from the block then the BDO will threaten them that he will stop their salary. As the teachers are also poor and can not afford to lose their salary so they are forced to take. The officials from the top are corrupt, so the teachers are also forced to be corrupt. For the transportation of the grains the school should get Rs.500-600 from the block but they do not get it. So they collect the cost from the students."

The cereals are not distributed regularly from the block. Under the scheme the cereals are to be cooked in the school and given to the children but in Bihar this is not being implemented due to various reasons. The cereals are distributed to the children. In principal the cereals should be distributed equally to all the students of the school but in practice the parents of the children also come to

²³ This information was collected from the Amnour block, from the document given by the Mukhia of the Hussepur Panchayat to the Gram Panchayat Officer on Deputaion.

take the cereal and most of the time the upper caste parents or upper class parents take the greater share. At times some of them will snatch the whole sack and take them. The poor children and their parents are either left with a little or nothing.

School building maintainance:

The maintainance work for the school building under taken by the panchayat has not been done properly. For example a one room primary school was repaired in Hussepur near railway line by the Mukhia in 2001. At the time of the field visit in 2004 it was observed that its floors were broken, the roof made of asbestos have a big gap all along the joints. The children said that it leaks heavily in the rainy season. The woods used were of poor quality. On the contrary right in front of this school another two room set has been built in 2003 under the MP quota by Joginder Singh, a Bhumihaar by caste. This two room set has been built properly and Joginder Singh said that some money has been left out of the total fund given and he is planning to make the boundary of the school with that money though that in not in the passed proposal. But a few people who are ally of Mukhia are creating problems in that.

Indira Awas Yojna:

Under Indira Awas Yojna the grants for construction of the house is to be given to the scheduled castes living below poverty line. However there is inconsistency of the BPL data in the panchayat. According to the gram panchayat officer (GPO) there are 262 people living below poverty line (BPL). This is based on 1997-2002 survey done by the block. The definition of the BPL was taken as people whose annual income is Rs 20,000 or less and who do not have a motor cycle, a pucca house, and non-irrigated land of 2.5 acre or less. However this list is incorrect as the total populations of the scheduled caste in the village are 281 and all of whom are BPL according to the above definition. The gram panchayat officer also agreed to the inconsistency of the BPL data and told that a resurvey was done in 2003 by the government in which more of the variables were added to count the BPL population but the report of the survey is not yet available. Hence there is a lot of problem in

implementation of the developmental schemes like Indira Awas Yojna, Annapurna etc.

Similar kind of irregularity and corruption as discussed above exists in the implementation of Indira Awas scheme. As a matter of fact it is more evident in this scheme. Under Indira Awas Yojna Rs 20,000 is given to the BPL beneficiaries for the construction of their house. In this Rs. 20,000 which is sanctioned to the beneficiaries, Rs 500 is for the construction of the toilet and Rs 100 is for the construction of the smokeless chullah. The amount is paid in three installments. In the last installment if toilet and smokeless chullah is not made then Rs 600 is cut. For the up gradation of un-serviceable house Rs. 12,500 is given to the beneficiary. The completion of the dwelling unit in no case should take more than two years.²⁴ Since the year 2004 the amount is now increased to Rs 25000.

A few typical cases of poor who have been cheated by the Mukhia and the Panchayat Sevak are as follows:

In ward number 4 **Devjharja Kunwar**²⁵, a widow of late Faudar Ram is an IAY beneficiary. She is chamar by caste. About her house she says: "*Rai chai kar ke ban'ta, sal bhar se.*" i.e. her house is not being built continuously in one go. It is being built since last one year. She had given Rs 3000 as bribe to the Mukhia to get IAY sanctioned for her. She signed on Rs 12000 last year under IAY scheme but received only 8000 for building her house. The rest Rs 4000 was taken in the name of appeasing the BDO and block official so that she gets the other installment. She used her own bricks and took a loan of Rs 2000 from the money lender for building her house. But it could be built till linter till now. It seems to be a remote possibility that her one room house will be complete. She is supposed to get Rs 8000 more out of 20,000 under IAY. Out of this 8000 also Mukhia will take his share again. Till now she has spent (Rs 3000 as bribe + Rs 4000 as bribe out of 12000 given to her under the scheme + Rs 2000 loan from money lender =)Rs 9000 for her house. She is so entrenched in poverty that whether she will ever be able to return her debt amount also is doubtful.

²⁴ GOI (2003), Ministry of Rural Development, *Indra Awas Yojna, Guidelines*, New Delhi

²⁵ her socio-economic condition has already been discussed in chapter IV.

Chandrika Ram in the same ward is another IAY beneficiary who is also Chamar by caste. He got money in two installments (Rs 6000 + Rs 7000) = Rs.13000 in the year 2003. People say that he will not receive the next installment as out of Rs.20, 000, a beneficiary gets only around Rs.13000 or so and the rest amount is taken as commission by the Mukhia and the Gram Sevak. He took loan of Rs 7000 at the interest rate of Rs 5/ Rs 100/ month for building his own house. He used his own bricks which he had for building his own house. The house is built on a small land which is the only land which he has as his property. He has built three small rooms and a small space is left for toilet and bathing for the women. The roof is built of hay and bamboo. He hopes to get the roof concrete once he receives the next installment. But he doesn't know when he will receive his next installment and how much it will be. The assets in his house are also meager, just to eat and sustain his life. He has one son and three daughters. All his family members go to work in the field. The children go to school as well as also go to work in the field. Though apparently he looked no better than Devjharia Kunwar but his condition was much better than her comparatively as he had two males in the family.

Prabhavati Kunwar is an IAY beneficiary in ward number 5. But she has not been given any money for the construction of her house. Whereas under the scheme the provision is that the money is to be handed to the beneficiary. She said that she signed on Rs 6000 but Mukhia gave her only Rs1000. That Rs 1000 also was taken away by Bhukhal Sharma husband of the ward member, Manju Devi on account that he needs it to bribe Mukhia and others (*khilane pilane ke liye*). Bhukhal Sharma is her relative but he too didn't spare her from cheating her. Her house has been built by Mukhia and the ward member's husband. Her one room house has been built under IAY but instead of having a concrete roof it is built of asbestos and supported by bamboo and ropes. There's no door or window made to save on the expenditures on woods. This structure will not last for long. Apart from that two sides of wall of the one room house was already built by her late husband. Mukhia got wall of two other sides built. So this way he saved a lot of money. There's no toilet of smokeless chullah as given under the guideline in her house.

Prbhavati is a widow of about 26 years and has a 5 year old son and an old mother in law to look after. Her husband died of a heart attack a year ago in Kolkata where he used to work. At the time of husband's death she was pregnant by five months. Thereafter her one day old infant died; of what they do not know. The infant was delivered in her one room house helped by the local dai and her mother-in-laws (own and cousin mother-in-laws).

She works in the field and earns around Rs 20 per day or get 3 to 4 kg of rice or maize. Generally the land holders pay in cereals rather than in cash. She earns 4kg of rice daily for weeding or doing any work in the field. The villagers said that since she is so poor that they purposefully pay her more than what they pay to others. In cold winter days some times she wouldn't get the job or it would be so cold and the field would be wet due to dew drops so she herself at times would not like to go out to work. At times she is sick then she can't go out to work. In that case her old widow mother-in-law and she might have to remain hungry if they do not have any stock of food grain. Her son would be fed by the cousin mother's-in-law family. At times the villagers give her food.

Since it is a village so it is easier for her to survive but she has to remain obliged to the villagers like Bhukhal Sharma kind of people who help her as well as cheat her and exploit her vulnerability. She doesn't know how a panchayat functions or what her rights are but she knows that certain benefits are given to red or yellow card holders which she doesn't have. She had given Rs 50 to Mukhia for it but doesn't know whether she will be getting it or not as four months had already passed. She doesn't have a hand pump of her own to drink water and has to depend on her neighbours hand pump.

Mukhia had also got an IAY sanctioned in the fictitious name of Dhobi Baitha. Later when the people came to know of this and raised a hue and cry of this, the IAY amount was cancelled.

In ward no 9 Kedar Mahto said that Nag Narayan's (a Noniya by caste and a villager of this ward) house has not been completed under IAY since last two years. He has no land. He works as a casual labourer in a brick kiln outside the panchayat and his wife works on other's land in the village. He has seven family members to support. He can't not build his house of his own money as

he doesn't have any and he is not in a position to take loan as he already have a heavy amount debt to repay to the money lenders. In the same ward Shankar Thakur got Rs 3000 for repairing his house whereas he had signed on Rs 5000 in the receipt. After that one and a half year has passed and he has not received the rest amount. He took debt of Rs 5000 and got his house repaired.

In ward no 10 the ward representative Avadhesh Mahto and his brother have got house under IAY. Avadhesh's house is complete and Dharmnath's house is still under construction. These people are not so poor to be counted under BPL list. On interacting to the villagers it came to light that they are an ally of Mukhia, so both the brothers got the house sanctioned under IAY.

Apart from these four more people have been granted finance under IAY in this ward but none of their house is complete. All these four people i.e. Ramnath Mahto, Person Mahto, Timal Mahto, and Phulesar Mahto cultivate land on Bataiya or lease and are of backward caste. So their condition is comparatively better than the Dusadhs and Chamars who are agricultural labourers. They are in a position to complete their house even if Rs7000-8000 is cut as commission or bribe out of Rs 20,000 granted under IAY. They can take loan from the money lenders according to their convenience and complete their house. But some of the BPL people who are categorized as poorest of the poor like the scheduled castes are not in a position to complete their house and it seems that their house will remain half constructed.

Phulesar Mahto got Rs 14000 under IAY. The roof is not made and according to his wife full payment is done. They plan to make the roof later when they have money. He also cultivates land on lease. He and his four brothers together cultivate five bighas of land.

Person Mahto got Rs 12050 in hand under IAY in three installments. He also has been granted full amount and now he will not be getting any more amount. He has made three rooms, used his own bricks and borrowed around Rs 7000 money in 2003 to construct his house. It is still under construction. He has not made any smokeless chulha which is a must to be constructed under IAY for which Rs 100 is given so he did not get that money.

About Rs7000-8000 is cut from the cash amount of Rs 20,000 given to beneficiary in the name of commission. This amount is too exorbitant for commission and this is not so in the other areas. The beneficiaries are not even clear of how much commission is taken and how much more amount they will get. They are always in confusion and keep waiting to receive more money from the Mukhia. They will say that they have to get more but they do not know when will they get it and how much more amount. When they go to ask Mukhia he will say that it is yet to come. It is observed that the houses are also not constructed according to the guidelines laid down under IAY.

Rameshwar Prasad in ward no 12 is a Rajput by caste and is a prosperous person. He has a pacca house and Mukhia lives in his house. He has also got two rooms in the first story built by the IAY money sanctioned to him by the Mukhia. Abdul Sattar who was Up-Mukhia earlier, his house has also been repaired in IAY.

In the same ward another person has got money under IAY for repairing his house whereas he is also not eligible for it.

The corruption is so much that out of Rs. 20,000 under IAY scheme arroun Rs 6000-8000 is taken as bribe in this panchayat. The more vulnerable a person is the more bribe can be sucked out from them. Those houses who have male guardians or husbands get maximum money under IAY scheme and widows who can't run after the panchayat officials get all more less share. Though the beneficiary know that they ought to get the amount on which they sign but no one protests when they get less and are told by the Mukhia or Gram Sevakor Ward member that the rest amount is to be given as commission to the BDO and other govt. officials. They are satisfied on what ever they are getting and they think that something is better than nothing. If they will not take it then someone else in the que will take it. Probably the other person will be ready to take the lesser amount also.

Under IAY among the list of BPL, it is the schedule caste population who has to get the benefit first but it is observed that the rich upper caste and backward caste got the benefits while there are lot of Dalits who are in need of the house but they did not get the IAY benefit. The people are so poor that they can not

build their house of their own money. They are already in heavy debt and on top of that they take more debts thinking that at least they'll have a one room pacca house to live in. They think that if they add some more amounts then they can build the house quickly and easily. But they are neither given the full amount of Rs 20,000 which itself is not sufficient and nor are they able to build their house. Their half constructed house is of no use and they are in unnecessary debt.

Those who are not eligible for IAY i.e. those who should not come under BPL list are also included in the list and have got their house built or repaired under IAY. While the BPL population in the panchayat are still suffering.

It is also observed that the life for a woman in a village without a male family member is very tough. She can not go out of the village to work. The forced employment in the same village forces her to bear the exploitations inflicted on her. Particularly if she is young the problem for her is more as she has to conform to the norms of purdah more than the old women.

Similarly in various other developmental works of the panchayat such gross corruptions are clearly visible and the people are just helpless about it. Caste plays a major role in decision making and distributing the benefits. Its always those who 'have' get the benefits and those who 'have not' are left with either a little or nothing.

Co-Ordination of the Gram Panchayat with Health Department or PHC:

Dr B Rai Medical Officer In-charge (ICMO) of Amnour PHC under which the panchayat comes said that there is no co-ordination with the gram panchayat in any of the functions of PHC. He also expressed that with the co-ordination and co-operation of the Gram Panchyat they can implement the National Health Programmes more smoothly and various lacunaes of their implementation could be over come by it. Mukhias and Panchayat Samiti members are called for the meeting of the PHC to seek their co-ordination in the National Health Programmes. But they never come. With their co-operation the awareness generation among people can be easily done. Panchayat is directly involed in

the “Yauvan Mangal Mela” organized by NACO, under the RCH programme, and implemented by PHC, so that their involvement will help them to co-ordinate with the people of the panchayat.

The panchayat can assist and supervise the functioning of the ANM but they do not do so. The Panchayat Samiti Pramukh has the power to complain against the PHC doctors if they are irregular or not work properly. However the Panchayat Samiti member Gazendra Singh said that nothing is done against a doctor if a Pramukh complains. Since the Panchayat Samiti does not have any punitive powers in their hands to take action against the doctors so the doctors are also not afraid of them.

In the panchayat the ward members are not aware of the decentralized health service system and how it functions? The villagers are also not aware of it. Except a few many do not even know of, what a sub-centre is and what the functions of an ANM are? A few of them ofcourse! know that Babulal Bharti’s wife Meena Devi gives vaccination, looks in some delivery cases, gives certain medicines free of cost like iron tablets or filarial tablets but they do not know that she is an ANM of the panchayat.

Possible Role of Panchayat to Improve Public Health:

It is observed that Gram Panchayat has not made any deliberate attempt to improve the public health of the people. Whatever developmental work they undertake it is guided by how much it will benefit them financially rather than how much it will benefit the people and their health. The Block Development Officer of the Amnour block Mr. Brajnandan Prasad said that under ‘Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojna (SGSY)’ scheme sanitation programs like toilet, handpumps, drains construction can be undertaken by the panchayat. But in reality the Mukhia did repair of only hand pumps and left out the construction of drains and toilets. From the previous chapter it is observed that very few people have toilet facility in the village panchayat and it is an important and urgent requirement of the people. However nothing has been done by the panchayat in this regard. Under social forestry programme the panchayat has to plant trees to improve the environmental health of the people. But in this panchayat no such work has been undertaken.

Apart from this, panchayats can also keep a check on the sale of spurious drugs in the panchayat which the people complained of. But the Mukhia who himself practices as a doctor is least bothered about this. People say that he is himself involved in increasing the sale of the local drug store with which he is associated and might be getting the commission from them.

Conclusion:

The democratic process of people's participation is not achieved in the panchayat even after the 73rd constitutional amendment. With the strong nexus and abetment of the bureaucrats and certain influential people in the panchayat the Mukhia acts as a despotic ruler of the Gram Panchayat. He works on the British policy of 'divide and rule' to control each and every member of the gram sabha. He makes people his allies by contracting out work to certain people whose power and position in the panchayat he thinks he can utilize.

The mandate of conducting elections of panchayat's every five year, gives opportunity to the people to change their representatives. The adult franchise has given the common people, power to decide for their representative and change them if they are not good. However the description of the election process in the panchayat shows how undemocratic it was. The social hierarchy was re-emphasised in the elected Gram Panchayat members. The provision of 33% of reservation for the women could only help them to hold the posts of power however the actual power is in the hands of their husbands or family members. Its worth mentioning that no females contested the general seats. Gender discriminatory practices and low status of females is a great hinderance for their participation in the village. Those ladies who are interested and educated, for them reservation is an opening to share the platform of decision making, if the panchayat functions democratically. Since provision of 33% of reservation is applied on rotation basis so there was no such reservation for them in this panchayat during this election. Consequently no scheduled caste males and females could even become a proxy representatives like the females. Wherever they made attempts to contest they were brutally repressed under the powers of cash and caste.

The two child norm as directed by the Supreme Court is not being implemented in Bihar. The politics behind not accepting such norms can be observed by the number of children the upper caste elites or the middle castes have. If it is implemented they also will be ousted out of political and administrative power which is unacceptable to them.

The Gram Sabhas which are considered to be the testimony of decentralized participation are completely defunct in the panchayat. It observed that gram sabha was considered as a tool to help people participate in the planning process for their own welfare and it was given the power to select the beneficiaries for various government schemes and their decision was supposed to be final in it. But in this panchayat it is completely ignored and the reigns of decision making are in the hands of the Mukhia and the gram sevak. Work is being done in a highly undemocratic way. As people are illiterate and ignorant so they also do not know what has to be done. There is no people's participation. The government has also not conducted any training programs for the panchayat members or the gram sabha members as a result people are ignorant about the functions of the panchayat and their rights in it. Even when people are gradually getting aware of the functions of the panchayat and their rights in it they are just helpless to do any thing. This is because the economic relationship of production and distribution in the panchayat is such that the majority of the people are dependent on the creamy layers for their income and survival. Therefore they are left with no tools to fight against them. People can not dare to organize themselves against them. However attempts are made by a few villagers to complain against the Mukhia but such attempts are tuned futile due to the strong nexus between the government officials and Mukhia.

The upper caste elites and some of the middle castes exploit the ignorance and lack of awareness among the people regarding their rights and duties and make use of the power which they have in the panchayat to get the maximum benefits from the panchayat. They usurp the developmental benefits that are meant for the below poverty line people or the poorest of the poor. The wells, hand-pumps, road etc are all built near their house to serve their purpose. Employment benefits like shiksha mitra, aanganwari sevika and Sahayika are enjoyed by the rich upper and backward castes of the panchayat and the real

eligible candidates belonging to the poor scheduled castes are bereft of such benefits. A few of the poor are doled out certain benefits on whom the elites have mercy and their kind support.

The decentralization process has abated and increased the decentralization of the embezzlement of money. Now the number of people sharing the money has increased i.e. the ward members get the contract of certain development work which gives them the opportunity to aggrandize money. Unequivocally in the process the local people do get benefited to some extent though the quality of work done for them may not be good.

Regarding health the role of panchayat are many but as it is not a lucrative sector that will fetch them money so they always tend to neglect it. Apart from it since the social hierarchy overlaps in the medical hierarchy so the medical doctors are also averse to supervision and monitoring by the local panchayats. Though monitoring and supervision of the PHC is in the jurisdiction of the Panchayat Samities but the panchayat samiti can only complain. They do not have any punitive powers like withholding salaries of the staffs, transferring etc so rarely any action is taken on their complains which makes them demotivated to work.

To conclude the Hussepur Gram Panchayat is not at all working according to the rules and regulations laid down. There is complete disjunction between the work done by the panchayat and the real need of the people. Caste and cash play an important role in the selection of the developmental programmes and the beneficiaries.

Chapter VI

Summary and Conclusion

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The present study is an attempt to understand the process of decentralization in the state of Bihar given the socio-economic and political underdevelopment of the state compared to rest of the states in India. 'Decentralization policies 'as a package' got introduced to almost all developing countries as a major developmental strategy mainly supported by World Bank. It has become a major discussion topic for developmental scholars, sociologists, political scientists, economists and so on. There are umpteen literatures on this regarding the concept, different forms of decentralization, various debates, country experiences, and impact on particular sectors and like wise. It is argued that Decentralization processes in developing countries are generally aimed at improving the efficiency, equity, accessibility, quality of health service delivery, responsiveness to local needs, and ultimately the health of a country's population. Democratic decentralization was envisioned to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation of the developmental work.

However in India the 73rd Constitutional Amendment was brought about to institutionalize the Panchayati Raj institutions and provide a permanent constitutional status to it. It was envisaged that this would ensure smooth functioning of the local self governments based on democratic people's participation. In India the social hierarchy is based on caste and class and it is a well known fact that this hierarchy gets reinstated in all the institutions created. So the question is how the 73rd amendment would overcome such a problem. To what extent the reservation of women and scheduled caste ensure their participation in the panchayat. In order to understand this a micro-level qualitative study was conducted in Bihar. Bihar was chosen for the study because caste and class nexus is deeply entrenched here in comparison to other states of India. As it is socio-economically backward state so the absence of employment opportunities and poverty restricts the social mobility of the scheduled castes and the women.

The first chapter contains the background of the study. The second chapter briefly reviews existing body of literature and concludes with relevance of decentralization policies in a state like Bihar. The third chapter made an attempt to understand socio-economic and political underdevelopment of Bihar. While describing the evolution of Panchayati Raj system in Bihar it tries to bring out the caste, class hierarchies and political instabilities, that always worked as detrimental to the social economic and political development of the state. In the fourth chapter an attempt is made to explore the local political economy of Huzzepur panchayat in the state of Bihar. Further the socioeconomic status of the population and unimplemented land reforms, which acted as major factor hindering development of the village is addressed. Thus the relevance of democratic decentralization is reemphasized according to the local socio-political conditions. Finally the fifth chapter analyzed the last democratic elections held after implementation of 73rd amendment. It is observed that most of the contestants belong to the so-called elite community. Though the system envisages women and dalit empowerment, it is observed only mukhiya plays the decision-making role and rest of the members are for namesake. Moreover the minimum requirements to ensure transparency in systems functioning is not working and Gram Sabhas do not exist in real sense. Gram Sabhas were made as official affair and public health measures, which are to be implemented through PRIs, were never given any importance since it is not a lucrative measure for panchayat representatives. The very notion of development is identified with only those activities like constructions, which can fetch some money to the members.

The mandate of conducting elections of panchayat's every five year, gives opportunity to the people to change their representatives. The adult franchise has given the common people, power to decide for their representative and change them if they are not good. However the description of the election process in the panchayat shows it was done in a totally undemocratic manner. The social hierarchy was re-emphasized in the last election. The provision of 33% of reservation for the women could only help them to hold the posts of representatives but the actual power is in the hands of their husbands or family members. It is worth mentioning that not even single female contested for the general

seat. Gender discriminatory practices and low status of females is a great hindrance for their participation in the panchayat politics. Even those who are interested and educated, couldn't contest due to dominance of patriarchy. Since the reservation for Dalits is done on a rotation basis no Dalit reservation posts were there in this panchayat. Wherever they made attempts to contest they were brutally repressed under the powers of cash and caste.

The two child norm as directed by the Supreme Court is not being implemented in Bihar. The politics behind not accepting such norms is due to the number of children the upper caste elites or the middle castes have. If it is implemented they also will be ousted out of political and administrative power which is unacceptable to them.

The Gram Sabhas which are considered to be the testimony of decentralized participation are completely defunct in the panchayat. Though Gram Sabha is a platform where people can participate in the decision making process regarding developmental programs, people are completely ignorant about it whenever it is held. In this panchayat decision making power are exclusively in the hands of Mukhia and Gram Sevak. In short there is no people's participation.

The government has also not conducted any training programs for the panchayat members. As a result representatives are also ignorant about the functions of the panchayat and their rights in it. Even when people are gradually getting aware of the functions of the panchayat and their rights in it they are just helpless to do any thing. This is because the economic relationship of production and distribution in the panchayat is such that the majority of the people are dependent on the creamy layers for their income and survival. Therefore they are left with no tools to fight against them. People can not dare to organize themselves against them. However attempts are made by a few villagers to complain against the Mukhia but such attempts are tuned futile due to the strong nexus between the government officials and Mukhia. The upper caste elites and some of the middle castes exploit the ignorance and lack of awareness among the people regarding their rights and duties and make use of the power which they have in the panchayat to get the maximum benefits from the panchayat. They usurp the developmental benefits that are meant for the below poverty line people or the poorest of the poor. It is observed that most of the rural development programmes are given undeserving beneficiaries i.e. it is

given to non BPL people. For instance Employment benefits like shiksha mitra, aanganwari sevika and Sahayika are enjoyed by the rich upper and backward castes of the panchayat and the real eligible candidates belonging to the poor scheduled castes are bereft of such benefits. A few of the poor are doled out certain benefits for whom the elites have mercy and their kind support.

Regarding health the role of panchayat are many but as it is not a lucrative sector that will fetch them money so they always tend to neglect it. Apart from it since the social hierarchy overlaps in the medical hierarchy so the medical doctors are also averse to supervision and monitoring by the local panchayats. Though monitoring and supervision of the PHC is in the jurisdiction of the Panchayat Samities but the panchayat samiti can only complain. They do not have any punitive powers like withholding salaries of the staffs, transferring etc so rarely any action is taken on their complains which makes them demotivated to work.

To conclude the Hussepur Gram Panchayat is not at all working according to the rules and regulations laid down. There is complete disjunction between the work done by the panchayat and the real need of the people. Caste and cash play an important role in the selection of the developmental programmes and the beneficiaries Thus it is observed that the democratic process of people's participation is not achieved in the panchayat even after the 73rd constitutional amendment in the state of Bihar. With the strong nexus and abetment of the bureaucrats and certain influential people in the panchayat the Mukhia acts as a despotic ruler of the Gram Panchayat. He works on the British policy of 'divide and rule' to control each and every member of the gram sabha. He makes people his allies by contracting out work to certain people whose power and position in the panchayat he thinks he can utilize. In short the decentralization process has abeted and increased the decentralization of the embezzlement of money. Now the number of people sharing the money has increased i.e. the ward members get the contract of certain development work which gives them the opportunity to aggrandize money. Unequivocally in the process the local people do get benefited to some extent though the quality of work done for them may not be good.

From the above survey it can be summarized that the outcomes of decentralization policies is determined to a great extent by the socio-political and economic situation, political commitment of particular political parties who are in power, the way in which various provisions of 73rd amendment is implemented and supporting structures created for the implementation and preeminence of peoples participation which is the core of democratic decentralization. It is observed that most of the success stories are prior or independent rather than dependent variables in relation to democratization and decentralization reforms. Though the state is still in the process of devolution of powers and responsibilities and under modification still it is significant to look into the local political economy and social networks to understand the how far state wise amendments has to be made. I hope present study sheds some light for developmental experts and policy makers while making developmental policies for a state like Bihar.

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