

**EMERGING PATTERNS OF CASTE CONFLICT IN BIHAR:
A STUDY OF POST 1977 PERIOD**

**A Dissertation submitted in
Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirement for the Degree
of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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1982

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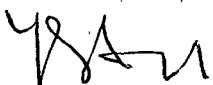
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr Nandu Ram, without whose valuable guidance, suggestions and encouragement, this study would not have been completed. He patiently went through the drafts and made fruitful comments for improvement.

I am deeply indebted to Professor T.K. Oommen, who helped me in numerous ways during my stay in J.N.U. Professor Yogendra Singh and Dr C.N. Venugopal were ever willing to discuss the problem of study. My sincere thanks are due to them. I must express my gratitude to Professor Sachchidanand, Professor Pradhan H. Prasad, Dr K.K. Verma and Mr K.N. Pathak of A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna for their help in course of material collection.

I take this opportunity to thank Mr. S.D.Dwivedi, Librarian, Legislative Assembly Library, Patna, the staff of J.N.U. Library, Nehru Memorial Library, Indian Council of World Affairs Library, New Delhi and A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies Library, Patna.

A number of my friends and well wishers provided the necessary encouragement and rendered assistance of various sorts in completing this work. I am thankful to

one and all. My thanks are due to my typists who in spite of their tight schedule of work, typed this work neatly and carefully.

Last but not the least, I acknowledge my supreme debt of gratitude to my mother, brothers and sisters for inspiring me to undertake higher studies against the heavy odds of life.

Alok Kumar Shrivastava
ALOK KUMAR SHRIVASTAVA

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Chapter-I

INTRODUCTION

Society in India is based on the caste system which is a closed system of social stratification. The closeness and rigidity of the system retards social mobility of the individuals, who are prevented from moving up in the traditional hierarchy of castes. This results into discontentment on the part of the aspiring sections of the people who feel deprived of what should have been due to them from the society. Ascription overrides the elements of achievement, giving birth to the phenomena of dissent and protest. Such protest is for the assertion of status and rights rather than for creating social disequilibrium as usually understood. The protest, however, does result into conflict and antagonism between the two caste groups, either on traditional issues (as mentioned above) or on modern issues, like reservation facilities provided for certain castes or the introduction of land reforms with the growth and expansion of certain democratic institutions.

The cases of caste tensions and conflicts on traditional as well as on modern issues have taken place in the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat, U.P. and Bihar ever since the beginning of the present century. After the independence, there has been phenomenal rise in the

incidents of caste tension and rivalry as political and social awareness has grown among the masses. The Brahmin-non-Brahmin conflict, especially in the states of Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra can be matched with the genesis and growth of the Buddhism and Jainism in the 6th century B.C. which also reacted against the Brahmanical dominance. In not too distant past caste conflicts have cropped up mainly on the issue of reservation for certain castes in the states of U.P. and Bihar. These developments have perpetuated the ills of the system by further strengthening the roots of the caste system rather than paving way for the formation of an egalitarian society. The tragic part of the Indian social structure is that the principle of equality does exist on paper but it is hardly practised in reality in day to day life.

The year 1977-78 saw many a change in the state of Bihar. Apart from the change in the Government the people in the state witnessed a large number of caste tensions and caste conflicts involving the three major caste-groups, the upper, middle range castes and the Harijans. The Harijans were the worst affected group as numerous atrocities, both physical and otherwise, got perpetrated over them and owing to which they have continued to live in a state of deprivation, fear and intimidation. This may be linked with the past also because ever since its separation from the province of

Bengal in 1912 Bihar has been a hunting ground for casteist elements.

However, in the post 1977 period, a great battle was waged on account of the Bihar Government's policy of extending the reservation facilities to the Backward Classes (who are actually the middle ranging castes) in the Government and semi-Government offices and undertakings. The upper castes raised their voice on anticipating threat to their supremacy from such policy. The Backward Castes also were prepared to get the policy implemented in their favour. Consequently, rising tensions between the two blocks of castes got culminated into caste-riots. The state Government, on its part, failed to take any effective measure to resolve the crisis. Hence, the differences between the said caste groups got sharpened.

The reservation policy could grip imagination of all the politically and socially conscious individuals, besides widening the gulf between the upper and middle range castes, there was tension and suspicion among the people throughout the state. The contradiction between the upper and middle range castes, which was, so to say, latent earlier became manifest with the announcement of 20 percent reservation for the Backward Castes in the Government services, as per the recommendations of the Mungeri Lal Commission.

As the number of seats reserved for the Backward Castes is not much in proportion to their population in the state, their rising expectations might soon result into frustration and dissatisfaction. It may take a little more time to realise that the reservation was a political gimmick and aimed at benefiting mainly the 'advanced' chunk of the people belonging to the Backward Castes whose economic condition is already quite sound.

The present study aims to analyse, in greater detail, the emerging patterns of conflict and antagonism between different caste groups in the post 1977 period in Bihar which has not only seen an escalation of conflict between the upper castes and 'other' Backward Classes or Castes but has also witnessed a phenomenal rise in atrocities on the members of the Scheduled Castes.

It will be useful to discuss some of the key concepts like the caste system, social tension and conflict and also to review the existing sociological literature on the caste conflict, before we examine the background, levels and repercussions of the caste conflict and other related issues in a state like Bihar.

The Caste System

The caste system, a unique type of social stratification, is found mainly in India. No social institution is found anywhere as comparable to the complex,

elaborate, and rigid system of castes in India.¹ It is an ascriptive system of status and hierarchy and can be considered as a predominant feature of the Indian society. With the help of the caste system social differences have been given institutional form with a religious and spiritual background.

The caste system said to be founded on the basis of the notion of purity and pollution, is one of the oldest and the most elaborate systems of social organization. The position of a person in the ritually determined status (caste) hierarchy defines the course of his total life.² In other words, social status of an individual, his prestige and honour are determined by his birth in a particular caste. Thus, his status is linked to the rank of his caste group in the hierarchy of castes.

It is necessary at this juncture to differentiate between the terms caste and the varna. The term caste has originated from the Portuguese word 'casta' which signifies breed, race or kind. The castes in India are relatively closed status groups. Each caste, being a commensal unity, has a traditional occupation, endogamy -

1 See J.H. Hutton, Caste in India. Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1946, p. 46.

2 Anil Bhatt, Caste, Class and Politics, Manohar, New Delhi, 1975, p. 2.

the members of which may eat together and possess a distinct name.³ These units are locally called as 'Jatis' and are numerous in number in different regions. Contrary to this, a varna literally means colour, originally referred to the distinction between the 'Arya' and 'Dasa.'

While castes or 'jatis' are the local endogamous groups, 'varnas' are categories and they refer to an all India frame of division of the Hindu society. Thus there are four orders - the Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudras. The first three are regarded as the twice-born groups of the people. The untouchables or the Chandals, however, are considered out of the varna scheme.

According to Manu, the great Hindu law giver, the four varnas were created from the mouth, arms, thighs and feet respectively of the Purush, the Brahma (the creator). Just as all the organs are indispensable for the proper functioning of the human body, so also the four varnas were indispensable for social harmony in the Hindu society. Many other castes or jatis originated later through a series of crosses, first between the members of the four varnas and then between the descendants of these initial unions. Besides these, many castes were also founded by degradation from the original varnas on account of non-

3 R. Jayaraman, Caste and Class Dynamics of Inequality in Indian Society. Hindustan Publishing Corporation (India), Delhi, 1981, p. 9.

observance of the sacred rites.⁴

In contemporary India we find the numerous caste groups varying in their nature from one region to the other. Each caste has a specific name and a body of customs and traditions, which are unique in their performance, and no other caste would be able to take up its name. Such castes or jatis are further divided into various sub-castes (upjatis) in different linguistic regions. In the case of certain caste groups, there is no marriage link between the different sub-castes. Thus, in the opinion of Beteille,⁵ "How many castes there are in India, will depend on the kind of unit one chooses to count and not everybody always chooses the same kind of unit. These divisions and sub-divisions have distinct styles of life, which were in the past jealously preserved."

There is found no unanimity among the Indian and Western sociologists with regard to the definition of the term 'caste' and its genesis. It is because of the complexity of the phenomenon. In this regard, Taya Zinkin's⁶ remark seems quite apt: "It is much easier to say what caste is not, than what caste is."

4 See N.K. Dutt, Origin and Growth of Caste in India, vol. I. Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta, 1968, pp. 5-7.

5 Andre Beteille, Caste: Old and New, Asia Publishing House, New ~~Bombay~~
York, 1969, p. 231.

6 Taya Zinkin, Caste Today, 1963, p. 1.

On the basis of numerous definitions and theories⁷ advanced by different scholars from both India and outside, the apparent characteristics of the caste system in India may be listed below:

- (1) Members of different castes do not have matrimonial links with any but persons of their own caste groups.
- (2) It is an ascriptive system of status in society. The social status of an individual is determined by his birth in a particular caste.
- (3) Caste system is founded on the basis of a notion of purity and pollution and happens to be one of the most elaborate systems of social organization.
- (4) There are restrictions on members of one caste eating, drinking and interacting with that of a different caste.
- (5) There are fixed hereditary occupations for different caste groups.
- (6) There is hierarchical gradation of the castes according to which the Brahmins occupy the top position while the Harijans are at the bottom.
- (7) The segmental division of society; castes are groups with a well defined life of their own, the membership

7 Important theories of caste are, (a) H. Risley's theory on varna division in his book, The People of India, 1915; (b) E. Senart's theory of caste in the book Caste in India, 1930; (c) Nesfield's functional theory of caste in his book Caste System of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh; (d) Ghurye's modern theory of caste in his book Caste and Class in India, 1957, p. 176.

whereof, unlike that of voluntary associations and of classes, is determined not by vocation or selection but by birth.⁸

- (8) Certain castes have some special privileges while some parts of the town or village are out of bounds to other caste groups. This phenomenon is witnessed in many parts of the country. In some areas in South India even the types of houses of low castes are determined by the twice-born castes in order to have a clear distinction.
- (9) Finally, caste system is a closed system of stratification. Mobility from one caste to subsequently another high caste is not possible. A person born as Harijan has to die as a Harijan. He cannot aspire to be equal to the Brahmins in his present life. However, by merit and hard work he can always move up in the economic hierarchy.

Social Tension

Tension is a state of mind, resulting mainly from deprivation of something, depression or from the threats to individual's personality.⁹ It can be considered as a

8 See G.S. Ghurye, Caste and Race in India, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, p. 2.

9 See K.K. Singh, Patterns of Caste Tension. Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1967, pp. 16-18.

state of restlessness and disequilibrium found universally. Whenever there is a gap in the satisfaction of the expected needs and the actual needs, the state of tension is created. Therefore, fulfillment of the desired needs would pave way for restoration of state of stability.

Ghurye¹⁰ contends that "tensions are both an index and an aftermath of conflict, for they presage an open conflict, whether accompanied by violence, abuse, hot words or more excited argument, and followed by enmity, sabotage, non-cooperation or mere sullenness."

The term tension, which has evolved in the discipline of physiological psychology, has been interpreted differently by different social psychologists, sociologists and the political scientists. Tensions are of two types: individual tension and group or social tension. The former is caused by the factors which only affect the individual, while the latter arises from the factors affecting the entire group. In the group tension we may include linguistic, religious, racial, communal, caste, political, industrial tensions, etc.

Here, we are concerned primarily with social tension, which includes inter-personal as well as inter-group tensions. It is caused when social disequilibrium is

10 G.S. Ghurye, Social Tensions in India.
Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1968, p. 1.

shaken by certain changes in the society.¹¹ It may be due to ethnic, religious, linguistic differences, unequal educational opportunity, unfavourable environmental condition, lack of adaptability to the changed culture and unequal condition of life. Such tensions are often disruptive, if not violent in nature.

Social Conflict

Conflict is an universally significant form of social interaction like other social processes, viz., cooperation, competition, accomodation and assimilation, conflict-situation is prevalent everywhere. Variation in human social interaction gives birth to conflict. In such a situation two or more individuals or groups of people exchange behaviours that symbolize their opposite viewpoints or actions. According to Beals and Siegel,¹² 'conflict must always involve organizationally significant behaviour.'

Conflict does not necessarily refer to fighting or warfare situations which have destructive potential. Conflict has harmful as well as useful effects. It is harmful in the sense that its continuance is costly and

11 M.N. Basu, 'Conflicts and tensions in human society,' in L.P. Vidyarthi (ed) Conflict, Tension and Cultural Trend in India. Punthi Pustak, Calcutta, 1969, pp. 10-11.

12 A.R. Beals and B.J. Siegel, Divisiveness and Social Conflict. Stanford University Press, California, 1966.

may threaten the very existence of society by setting man against man, group against group. However, conflict also serves socially useful functions in that it fosters loyalty within the group and paves way for social change.¹³

Conflict is generally preceded by a state of tension or restlessness on account of deprivation or threat but tension may not be always a necessary condition for conflict situation. State of tension may exist even after the conflict is resolved.¹⁴ Conflict may occur at overt behavioural, verbal, symbolic and emotional levels.

Some writers define conflict in terms of existence of scarce goods in society, while others do not regard scarcity as a necessary condition for generation of social conflict. In the words of MacIver and Page,¹⁵ conflict includes "all activity in which men contend against one another for any objective." Karl Marx can be regarded as the pioneer theorist of social conflict. For Marx, there always exists conflict between owning and non-owning classes in society. People belonging to working class become aware of their exploitation by the owners of the

13 G.R. Leslie, R.F. Larson, B.L. Gorman, Order and Change. Oxford University Press, New York, 1973, pp. 78-80.

14 See Nandu Ram, 'Social mobility and social conflict in rural Uttar Pradesh,' Indian Anthropologist, vol.7, No.2, 1977, p. 112.

15 R.M. MacIver and C.H. Page, Society: An Introductory Analysis. New York, 1950, p. 64.

means of production. This sort of class-consciousness leads to class solidarity and culminates into conflict with the capitalist class. According to Marx, class conflict has two aspects: (1) the unconscious struggle between workers and the capitalists for shares in the productive output, at a time when class-consciousness is not well developed, and (2) the conscious and deliberate struggle between the two classes that takes place at the time when workers become aware of their historic role and act collectively to improve their condition and ultimately to take over the ownership of means of production.

After Marx, George Simmel¹⁶ was the first writer who in the fifties of the present century revived the interest in studying the conflict in terms of a process both internal and external to the individual and to the group. He analysed the various forms of conflict and regarded it "as a form of sociation." He found that "a certain amount of discord, inner divergence and outer controversy is organically tied up with the very elements that ultimately hold the group together." ¹⁷

16 George Simmel, Conflict: The Web of Group Affiliations. Glencoe III: Free Press, New York, 1955.

17 Ibid, pp. 17-18.

Coser, who based his theories on those of Simmel, defined conflict in terms of the existence of scarce goods in society. He says, "if within any social structure, there exists an excess of claimants over opportunities for adequate reward, there arises strain and conflict."¹⁸ Coser was primarily concerned with the functions rather than dysfunctions of social conflict. According to him, conflict frequently helps in revitalizing existing norms and contributes to emergence of new norms. Thus, a flexible society will benefit from conflict because such behaviour, by helping create and modify norms, will assure its continuance under changed conditions.¹⁹

However, Max Gluckman²⁰ who emphasized the role of conflict in the primitive societies, took the position that conflict need not disrupt a social system, rather it may contribute toward the maintenance of society. In his opinion, through a quarrel or conflict, the same social system is re-established.

Further, Dahrendorf, who assumed change and conflict as universal, pointed out that all elements of social structure have to be related to instability and change and unity and coherence have to be understood as a result

18 L.A. Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict. Glencoe III, Free Press, New York, 1956, p. 201.

19 Ibid, p. 154.

20 Max Gluckman, Custom and Conflict in Africa. Oxford: Blackwell, Glencoe III: Free Press, 1956.

of coercion and constraint.²¹ Hence disintegration and change go side by side and in all societies some members are coerced by others. This conflict, according to Dahrendorf, is on account of authority.— The authority relations are always relations of super and sub-ordination. Dahrendorf used the term 'conflict-groups' in place of classes which emerge out of conditions of social structure.

Types of Conflict

Different sociologists have given different types of social conflict. Kimball Young²² lists eight types of social conflict. These are the industrial, racial, religious, political, inter and intra community, inter and intra class, sex and age conflict and conflict of intellectual or moral principles. MacIver²³ talks of mainly two levels of conflict, viz., direct and the indirect. Besides, he also speaks of racial or ethnic conflicts, interest conflict and intra-personal conflicts. Kingsley Davis,²⁴ on the other hand, discusses partial and total conflict, open and internal conflict, and the group conflict.

21 See R. Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1959, p. 237.

22 Kimball Young, An Introductory Sociology, 1934.

23 R.M. MacIver, Society: A Textbook of Sociology, 1937.

24 Kingsley Davis, Human Society. The Macmillan Company, New York, 1949.

Finally, Beals and Siegel²⁵ have applied the criterion of disruption for explaining the varieties of social conflict. According to them, conflict is mainly of two varieties: non-disruptive or beneficial and disruptive or detrimental. The former is pseudo conflict while the latter is divisive conflict. The pseudo conflict includes individual competition and team play both of which can be regarded as beneficial, whereas the divisive conflict is further subdivided into regulated or expected and unregulated or unexpected conflicts. Regulated conflict means any normal dispute such as argument and party conflict and an unregulated conflict includes factionalist disputes involving the pervasive factionalism and schismatic factionalism.

Tensions and Conflicts in India: A Review of Literature

Social tensions and conflicts are all pervading in India since a long time. An enormous amount of literature is available on caste system. However, a very few writers, to date, have endeavoured to highlight the tensions and conflicts undergoing in the society, be they inter and intra caste or class tensions and conflicts. The studies published in the recent past have analysed the tensions and conflicts at the micro level by examining the cases of conflicts which occurred in the states of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, etc.

25 A.R. Beals and B.J. Siegel, op.cit., pp. 20-23.

In sociological explorations, Ghurye's²⁶ work on social tensions in India can be considered as a commendable one, dealing with tensions at the macro level. With the background of theoretical issues concerning tension, conflict and integration (which are inseparable), he analyses the two glaring social problems of Hindu-Muslim hostility and linguistic tensions. As regards communal tensions, he puts forward the view that the causes of such tensions are to be traced in the unfulfilled expectations and consequent frustrations among the Muslims in India. Linguistic tensions are generated, according to him, mainly because of problem of the linguistic minorities in the unilingual states. Such social tensions, in his opinion, can have adverse effect on national integration.

Hardgrave²⁷ has analysed the Dravidian movement in South India which assumed political dimension in the beginning itself and later on became one of the most successful and popular social movements in modern India. 'The movement,' according to the Dravida Kazagham leader, late E.V.R. Naicker, "was against Brahmin dominance under Aryan 'Imperialism.' Politicisation of non-Brahmin castes in Madras (now Tamil Nadu) began with the formation of the Justice Party in 1916 and subsequently with the issuing of

26 G.S. Ghurye, op.cit.

27 R.L. Hardgrave, The Dravidian Movement. Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1965.

"The Non-Brahmin Manifesto." ²⁸ As the Justice Party began to decline, there emerged the 'self-respect movement' of E.V.R. Naicker which was aimed at giving non-Brahmins a sense of pride based on the Dravidian past. In 1944, the Justice Party got reorganised as the 'Dravida Kazagham' and demanded 'Dravidistan' for the non-Brahmins of South India. In 1949, a separate party - the Dravida Munnetra Kazagham - was formed by late Anna Durai and his followers who broke away from the Dravida Kazagham due to autocratic style of functioning of E.V.R. Naicker. The new organization involved all non-Brahmins and worked for their advancement. Consequently, the Brahmins started migrating, in large numbers, to the other states, particularly in North India.

Irschick²⁹ has also studied the non-Brahmin movement and Tamil separatism in Madras during 1916-1929. Like Hardgrave, he gives due weightage to the political aspects of this social movement generating from caste or group tensions and conflicts. He mentions the public services, various reform measures and the reports of the then central government and their relationship with the development of anti-Brahmin sentiment in the then Madras state. Moreover, the Justice Party also received assistance from the British administration, because the latter "wanted to redress the

28 Ibid, p. 13.

29 E. Irschick, Politics and Social Conflict in South India. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1969.

social imbalance in Madras." ³⁰ In due course, the non-Brahmins succeeded in achieving a commanding position in politics in the province leaving many of the Brahmins to take up entrepreneurship, academics, journalism, etc. out of their anguish. Later, the movement concerned with the Tamil Separatism and came to represent a distinct threat to national integration in the years following independence. Nonetheless, the Tamil separatist feeling and social conflict brought about the decay of many traditional values in Madras.

Similarly, Gail Omvedt³¹ dealt with the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra. Her study covers a wide period ranging from the foundation of the Satya Shodhak Samaj (Truth-seekers Society), a social-religious reform organization started by Jotirao Phule in 1873 to the establishment of a political party. There was the period of radicalism and economic insurgence in the 1920's but by 1930's the movement was denounced and its major leaders joined the Congress Party. However, there was a cultural revolt against Brahminism and it had links with the forces of economic and political revolt. Substantively, in the opinion of Omvedt, " It was a peasant-based movement, identifying itself with the Bahujan Samaj (non-Brahman

30 Ibid, p. 353.

31 Gail Omvedt, Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society. Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay, 1976.

masses). " ³² However, the movement did not develop an ideology of 'Maratha Nationalism.'

Henry Orenstein³³ undertook the study of cohesion and conflict in the Gaon (fictitious name), a multi-caste village of Poona district in Maharashtra. He not only discusses the village social system and its Baluta (Jajmani) system but also examines the process of change affecting the relationship between the various caste groups and village solidarity. In Gaon, the Marathas and Rajputs, two high castes, were opposed to each other, while the rope makers and the scavengers were antagonistic to high castes due to their low ritual rank in the caste hierarchy. In the secular domain also their position was quite low. The Rajputs would dominate the village in terms of possession of material goods. However, village unity was maintained on account of "existence of cross-cutting lines of cooperation and conflict," ³⁴ especially during the cycle of village ceremonies. Due to a new set of egalitarian values and improved material conditions, the rope making castes, scavengers and the leather workers (who were economically better off), withdrew their support from the

32 Ibid, p. 268.

33 Henry Orenstein, Gaon: Conflict and Cohesion in an Indian Village. Preinceton University Press, USA, 1966.

34 Ibid, p. 307.

Baluta system, in order to dissociate themselves from their 'highly polluting' traditional occupations. In this way, the trend toward "rationalization" led to gradual change in the existing village solidarity.

Beals and Siegel have done a comparative anthropological study of social conflict in two villages of Taos Puelelo in New Mexico and Namhalli in Mysore state, South India. People in both the villages had a history of approaching their various major problems through "internecine conflict" rather than cooperation which made it much harder to carry out normal problem solving activities. In the opinion of the authors, there were numerous similarities between those two communities. For instance, minor issues of establishing boundary of fields or allocation of irrigation water, generating major 'factionalist disputes,' etc. exhausted the time and energy of the people. In the event of such situation the outside assistance also was sought. These similarities between the two communities helped the authors formulate a preliminary theory concerning the origin and nature of the divisive conflict which states, "factionalist dispute comes from the interaction between internal strains and external stresses. This means that whatever the degree of strain in a community, divisiveness develops only where there is also an appropriate variety of stress." ³⁵

35 A.R. Beals and B.J. Siegel, op.cit., pp. 157-58.



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The phenomenon of social tension and conflict has drawn the attention of the social psychologists also. For instance, K.K. Singh³⁶ has undertaken a study of inter caste tensions in two villages of Uttar Pradesh. With the help of variables relating to caste and socio-psychological attitudes and the personal characteristics of individuals, he explores the nature and amount of caste conflict. He also explains the inter-group and inter-individual differences in the state of tension. In his opinion, conflicts do not stem from discriminatory caste values and beliefs but are arisen because of "control over economic resources, social dominance, self-assertation, or the desire for autonomy." Thus, groups that have developed interdependent and reciprocal relationship with each other, for generations, can resort to fighting for the economic, social and political advantages.

Tensions and conflicts generate out of factional politics too. For instance, Sushila Mehta³⁷ has studied inter caste conflicts in a small village of Rahimabad (pseudonym) of Mehrauli Development Block in Delhi which witnessed numerous conflicts following the Panchayat elections in 1959. She has shown that these conflicts, which are due to rivalry and power struggle between the different caste-

36 K.K. Singh, op.cit.

37 Sushila Mehta, Social Conflict in a Village Community. S. Chand and Co., New Delhi, 1971.

groups, have escalated with the operation of new economic forces and introduction of political democracy. In her opinion, the traditional mechanism for resolving group-conflicts in the village has failed and the traditional social institutions like joint family, village panchayat, and caste system have become dysfunctional. However, instead of withering away, these institutions have assumed new and distorted forms with the introduction of modern form of political democracy at the village level. All this results into development of "widespread stresses and strains leading to eruption of group conflicts."³⁸

Beteille³⁹ also argues that conflicts between classes or castes or strata follow, to a large extent, from the contradictions between the normative and the existential orders. In a harmonic society, these conflicts are likely to be limited and subdued. In a disharmonic society, however, they are likely to be open and endemic. Conflicts take their most acute form in course of the transition from a harmonic order to a disharmonic one.

Nandu Ram⁴⁰ has looked at social conflict in relation to social mobility. He has highlighted the relationship between social mobility of the Scheduled Castes and inter

38 Ibid, p. ix (Preface).

39 A. Beteille, Inequality and Social Change. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1972, pp. 15-16.

40 Nandu Ram, op.cit.

caste conflicts in some villages of western, central and eastern Uttar Pradesh. He has examined the extent to which changes in the status of Scheduled Castes have led to hostile attitudes among caste Hindus and the cases of atrocities on the Harijans. Such a situation is created mainly due to the Scheduled Castes' refusal to follow the age-old customs such as doing traditional filthy jobs, paying respect to high caste people and non-utilisation of public places. However, the economic issues like refusal of bonded labour on nominal wage, dispossession of land and houses of Scheduled Castes etc. too led to atrocities and conflict between the Scheduled and non-Scheduled Castes. The author stresses the role of external forces in suppressing such conflicts but complete resolution is possible only "if a system changes its function pattern vis-a-vis the interaction pattern and social relationship among different members." ⁴¹

Still another study⁴² includes the sociological as well as psychological approaches to conflict and change in rural, industrial and tribal India. It presents a somewhat integrated picture of social conflict and tensions.

Sachchidananda⁴³ examines caste conflict in a multi-caste village in Bihar. According to him, factional alignments at

41 Ibid, p. 121.

42 L.P. Vidyarthi (ed) op.cit.

43 Sachchidanand
in L.P. Vidyarthi (ed), pp. 254-63.

the village level have cut across caste barriers. People belonging to a high caste (Bhumihar) became antagonistic to each other because of elite, non-elite feeling. Some of the Yadavas (a middle range caste) supported the elite upper caste, while others took the side of the non-elites. This was manifest during the village elections. The low castes would extend their support to a person from whom they could get maximum advantages. Such support was not to a caste group but to a person. Hence, the author contends that the concept of dominant caste cannot be relied on to portray the actual state of affairs in all the areas.

Hetukar Jha⁴⁴ has also studied the caste conflict in Bihar with reference to the announcement of reservation policy for the Backward Classes. He has found a clear cut contradiction between the forward and backward castes on one hand and between the elite and the masses in one caste group, on the other. To him, no attempt has been made to reduce these contradictions, rather the elites have exploited them to their own advantage.

The above review of studies pertaining to caste tensions and conflicts gives us a general picture of social tensions and conflicts in some parts of India. In these areas, caste continues to be a major institutional force and is assuming new forms with the passage of time. People of many regions are not only caste-conscious, but also caste-

44 Hetukar Jha, 'Caste conflict in Bihar,'
The Times of India. New Delhi, 5 May, 1978.

centred. The above mentioned studies, however, suffer from certain inadequacies.

Most of these studies deal with conflict situations in rural areas and the conflicts in urban areas have not been given due importance so far by the sociologists. It is interesting to note that inspite of modernization and industrialization, people in towns and cities do maintain caste links, although it may not be manifest in the same fashion as in villages.

Yet, a few studies have highlighted the real issues involving the conflict between the mobile Harijans and the upper castes. Majority of the writers have stressed the 'cultural revolt' on the part of middle ranging castes, and the efforts made by the Harijans to assert themselves in the system have been ignored.

As stated earlier, the existing studies on caste conflict are confined to the states like Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. There is dearth of literature on tension and conflict between the three major caste groups in Bihar. Whatever studies are available on the complex social structure of Bihar, they are a drop in the ocean.

The Present Study

The present study is an attempt to analyse the recent

conflicts between the three major caste groups in rural as well as urban areas in Bihar. We have discussed the position of the various castes and their drives for mobility in the social structure in Bihar. These may be regarded as the root cause of social tensions and conflicts prevailing in the state. We have also analysed the immediate causes like the reservation policy for the Backward Classes and the land reform measures, which too have contributed to the tensions and conflicts. Besides, we have dealt with the new caste and class alignments undergoing in different areas, due to modernization and growth of democratic institutions in the state.

The proposed analysis of the emerging patterns of caste conflicts in Bihar is based on verification of the following hypotheses:

- (1) The Government sponsored mobility of a caste group leads to escalation of conflict between the benefited and the non-benefited castes.
- (2) Changes in the ownership of land and the land reform measures do not necessarily ease the tense rural situation.
- (3) The more the investigations into atrocities, the less the follow-up actions.

Method of Study

We would state at the very outset that the data for this study were gathered from the secondary sources and that no field work was undertaken. Hence, the present study is based mainly on the books, articles published in academic and general periodicals, the newspaper reports etc. Therefore, it has its limitations. Apart from the secondary material, the census reports and the reports of the various committees and commissions concerning the Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes were adequately utilised.

The reason of reliance on the newspaper reports and magazines of the general nature is that no book or standard research work concerning the inter-caste conflicts in the post 1977 period in Bihar, has been published to date. The reports of various newspapers on diverse events were carefully scrutinised. For the purposes of authenticity and genuineness, we undertook the study of the reports of the various newspapers on a particular incident and only after comparing them, arrived at some conclusion.

Moreover, efforts were made to get information from the academicians and the research scholars working in the area of caste conflict. Some of them were interviewed and valuable material and fruitful comments could be

obtained as a result of wide ranging discussions on the problem of study.

Plan of Study

This study is divided into six chapters. In Chapter I, the problem relating to caste conflict in Bihar has been stated and a few hypotheses incorporated. The concept of caste, social tension and social conflict have also been analysed briefly in this chapter. Besides, the available literature on caste conflict in the various parts of the country have been critically reviewed and their inadequacies pointed out.

Chapter II presents a socio-economic profile of Bihar, the location of the present study. The economy of Bihar has been looked at from different angles. Attempts have been made to make the most recent data available. Further, main discussion in this chapter is centred on the three major caste groups, viz., the upper castes, the middle (backward) castes and the Scheduled Castes. Their numerical strength, regional concentration, social composition, educational and social status and their role played in the various spheres of activities have been dealt with at length.

The political and historical background of the inter caste conflict in Bihar forms the subject matter of Chapter

III, wherein we have tried to emphasise that initially the phenomena of tension and conflict involved certain upper castes in the state. They were dominant despite their numerical weakness. Only in the late sixties of the present century, the middle range castes started asserting themselves, when infighting developed among the upper castes for grabbing political leadership in the state.

In Chapter IV, we have analysed one aspect of inter-caste conflict, namely conflict between the upper and the middle range castes on the sensitive issue of reservation for the latter in the state government services. As there was a good deal of confusion about the determinants of backwardness, we have gone deeper into the history of the use of this term and that of the reservation and other facilities extended to the backward castes and classes in different states, by the Government ever since the beginning of this century. The recommendations of the Kaka Kalekar and the Mungeri Lal Commissions have also been discussed in greater detail. Next, discussion is centred on the announcement of the reservation for the Backward Classes and the upper caste reaction to it. The events leading to escalation of tensions and conflicts between the said caste groups and the subsequent developments have been analysed.

The second aspect of conflict, i.e. conflict between the Harijans and the non-Harijans, has been highlighted

in Chapter V. Both the upper and the middle range castes have had conflicts with the Harijans, mainly on account of denial of minimum wages to the latter and the usurption of their land. We have analysed fourteen major incidents of the Harijan-non-Harijan conflicts in this chapter. It has been observed that a very few of such incidents are made public. Even if investigations are carried on into the cases of atrocity, rarely follow-up action is taken.

In the last chapter, a summary of the discussion done in other chapters is presented, besides comparing the nature and magnitude of tensions and conflicts taken place in two different contexts, conflicts between the upper and the middle range castes and between the Harijans and non-Harijans. In the end, the impact of such conflict situations on the present and future society in Bihar has been examined.

Chapter-II

BIHAR: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

Bihar, the ninth largest state in the country in terms of area came into existence on 1st April, 1936. The then British Government in India, through the promulgation of an 'order-in-Council,' divided the old province of Bihar and Orissa into two separate provinces.

Bihar, having an area of 67,202 square miles, lies between the latitude $21^{\circ}58'$ and $27^{\circ}31'$ North and longitude $83^{\circ}20'$ and $88^{\circ}32'$ East. It is bounded on the north by Nepal, and the south by Orissa. West Bengal is on the East, while Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh lie on the western side. About 20 percent of the area in the state is covered by the forests.

The state of Bihar is one of the poorest states in the Indian Union at present, having a per capita income of Rs.735 (against national average of Rs.1,379), although it accounts for 41 percent of the minerals of the country. The society in Bihar, today, is strictly based on caste cleavages, inspite of its rich cultural heritage.

Physical Units

Bihar is divided into three physical units;¹ the North Gangetic plain, South Gangetic plain and the Chhotanagpur plateau.

The North Gangetic plain covers an area of about 22,000 square miles and extends from the base of the Tarai in the north to the river Ganga in the south. It is an alluvial and flat region having elevation of less than 250 feet above the sea level. The general slope of this plain is both from the north to the south towards the Ganga and from the north-west to the south-east. There are many rivers and streams in this plain, viz., Ghaghra, Gandak, Bagmati, Kosi and Mahananda.

The South Gangetic plain comprises an area of about 13,000 square miles. It is wide on the west and the middle, and narrow toward the east. There are some small hills in the region, viz. Barber Hills of Gaya and Kharagpur hills in Monghyr. Here, the slope is not so gradual as it is in the North Gangetic plain. It is built of the alluvium soil brought from the southern hills.

Finally, the Chhtanagpur plateau covers an area of 34 to 35 thousand square miles in the southern half of

1 See Enayat Ahmed, Bihar: A Physical Economic and Regional Geography. Ranchi University, Ranchi, 1965, pp. 19-26; R.R. Diwakar, Bihar through the Ages. Orient Longman, Calcutta, 1958, pp. 23-27.

Bihar. It is an uneven region comprising of series of plateaus, hills and valleys. The plateaus of the region can be divided into four parts; first is the 'Pat' plateau which is composed of the Deccan lava and has a height of 2500 to 3600 feet above the sea level. Second one, the Ranchi plateau, composes of the gneisses and granites, has an elevation of about 2000 feet above the sea level. The third is the lower Chhotanagpur plateau which is 1000 feet above the sea level. Lastly, the outer lower plateau lies between 500 and 1000 feet above the sea level.

Mineral Resources

Bihar is one of the richest states in India in terms of the mineral resources, accounting for 41 percent of the total mineral production in the country, as stated earlier. It has large deposits of copper, Opatite, Kyanite, Coal, Mica, Iron Ore and the China Clay. Other important minerals found in the state are manganese, lime stone, graphite, chromite, asbestos, felspar, columbite, pyrite, glass sands, lead, silver, building stones and radio-active minerals. The state contributes 89 percent, 87 percent, 50 percent, and 25 percent of the total national production of copper, coking coal, mica and iron ore respectively.

Population

According to 1971 census, the total population in the state was 5,63,53,369 as against 46.5 million in

1961. Thus, there was 21.31 percent growth of population during the 1961-1971 period. Further, according to the provisional figures provided in 1981 census, the population of the state has risen upto 69,823,154 and has 10 percent of the total population in the country. The population of Bihar is overwhelmingly rural. It has 67,566 villages and 202 towns.² The density of population is, 324 persons per square kilometre. There are 954 females per 1000 males in the state. In the districts of Siwan, Saran, Gopalganj, Vaishali and Navadah, however, females outnumber the males. According to 1971 census, there were 1077 females per 1000 males in Siwan district, while Gaya district had first 489 females per 1000 males.

Literacy

Bihar lags behind many other states in terms of literacy. The literacy rate in the state in 1971 was 19.9 percent, which is lower than the national average (36.17 percent). However, a large difference is found between the literacy rates among the people living in villages and towns in the state. In the rural areas, it is 16 percent, while in the towns, it comes to about 43 percent. Districts having high rate of literacy are Patna, Dhanbad, and Singhbhum, Ranchi is the leading town

2 See Bihar Statistical Handbook, Directorate of Statistics and Evaluation, Government of Bihar, Patna, 1978, pp. 6-7.

in terms of literacy. The following table shows literacy percentage in seven towns in Bihar in 1961.

Table 2.1: Percentage of literates in different towns in Bihar in 1961.

Name of town	Percentage of literacy		
	Persons	Males	Females
Patna	50.44	62.10	35.32
Jamshedpur	52.12	61.73	39.76
Gaya	44.99	58.44	28.85
Bhagalpur	43.40	54.72	29.55
Ranchi	57.24	66.85	44.99
Muzaffarpur	51.98	61.64	38.13
Darbhanga	39.62	54.31	22.70

Source: P.C. Roychowdhury, Inside Bihar, Calcutta, 1962, p. 30

Agriculture

Bihar is primarily an agricultural state, though it has very sound basis for industrialization. About 85 percent of its population is dependent on agricultural activities for its livelihood. However, agriculture in the state is not very developed as the irrigated areas from only about 26 percent of the total cultivable areas and the modern means of irrigation are also lacking in the state. Thus agriculture in the state is heavily dependent on rainfall. The Gangetic plain forms one of

the richest and most fertile agricultural tracts in India and grows a variety of crops.³ Main food crops are Rice, Wheat, Maize, Ragi and pulses of which Rice is the dominant one. Principal cash crops are sugar cane, oil seeds, tobacco and jute. The total production of foodgrains in the state was about 101 lakh tonnes in 1978-79 as compared to 97 lakh tonnes in 1977-78.⁴

There are three agricultural harvests in Bihar. These are Bhadai (Autumn), Aghani (Winter) and Rabi (Spring). Bhadai harvest includes rice, maize, millets and jute; the Aghani harvest consists essentially of the winter rice crops and sugar cane, and the Rabi harvest comprises of crops like wheat, barley, gram, khesari, peas, arhar, linseed, rapeseed, mustard, etc.

About 64 percent of the landholdings in the state consist of tiny strips of less than one hectare and 15 percent between one and two hectares. Mechanisation of the agricultural operations has been done in very few areas of the state. Yet, the production is not upto mark.

3 R.K. Diwakar, op.cit., p. 38.

4 Employment News, New Delhi, 11th July 1981, p. 3.

Industry

The state occupies an important position in the industrial set up of the country, especially in respect of mineral based industries (because of abundant mineral resources). The large scale industries in Bihar can be divided into five major categories:⁵

- (a) Metallic mineral industries (Iron and Steel, Copper, Aluminium, and engineering industries).
- (b) Non-metallic mineral industries (cements, fertiliser, oil refinery, refractory products, coal washeries, glass and mica industries).
- (c) Agriculture based industries (sugar, jute, cotton, tobacco, leather and shoe, rice-mills, oil-mills, etc.).
- (d) Forest based industries (paper, lac and shellac, and silk industries).
- (e) Miscellaneous industries.

Besides the above mentioned large scale industries, there are numerous small scale and cottage industries (about 18,918 in number) also in the state. These include mica splitting, machine tool, hosiery, metal polish, boat polish, lamp holders, machine spare parts, steel trunks, locks,

⁵ See Enayat Ahmad, op.cit., p. 135.

pottery, cutlery, hardware, khadi, oilpressing, leather-tanning, biri making, basket making, soap-making, etc. The following table shows the number of factories registered factories running throughout the year, submitted returns, and volume of employment during the years 1970-75.

Table 2.2
Factories and workers in Bihar during 1970-75

Year	Number of factories registered	Number of factories worked during the year	Number of factories submitting returns	Average number of workers employed daily
1970	18,718	16,503	16,485	2,78,177
1971	20,441	18,037	18,020	2,84,611
1972	21,763	19,586	19,570	2,89,995
1973	23,028	20,636	20,620	3,04,240
1974	24,347	22,044	22,006	3,17,650
1975	27,290	24,755	24,546	3,33,533

Source: Chief Inspector of Factories, Bihar, cited in Bihar Statistical Handbook, Patna, 1978.

In terms of the location of industries in different parts, Bihar can be divided into a number of zones.⁶

These are:

- (1) Northern part where nearly two-thirds of the rice-mills in the state are located.

6 R.R. Diwakar, op.cit., p.45.

- (ii) Sugar factory zone covering the districts of Saran, Siwan, Champaran, Darbhanga and Muzaffarpur.
- (iii) Industrial centres located mainly on the south bank of the Gaya ; there are oil mills, a tobacco factory, hand made gun factory, silk industry, shoe factory, cycle, electric lamps, glass factories, and jute industry in this zone.
- (iv) Valley of the river zone which includes industries based on forest products, cements factory, sugar factory, chemical industries, etc.
- (v) Mica belt of Hazaribagh and Giridih districts.
- (vi) Damodar valley having a large coal belt and some of the major industries.
- (vii) Singhbhum region having a number of heavy metal industries.

For accelerating the rate of industrial growth in the state, six industrial area development authorities are functioning at Adityapur, Bokaro, Darbhanga, Patna, Ranchi, and Muzaffarpur. Besides, there are twenty industrial estates also located in different parts of the state.

Administrative Divisions

Administratively, the state is divided into seven divisions or commissioners. These are, Patna, Tirhut, Kosi, Bhagalpur, Darbhanga, North Chotanagpur and South Chotanagpur. The Divisions are further divided into

Districts and each District is divided into sub-divisions. Sub-divisions are again divided into blocks. Thus, there are, at present, 32 districts, 72 sub-divisions, and 587 Anchal-cum-Blocks in the state.

Social Structure in Bihar

Indian society is based mainly on the caste system and the society in Bihar is no exception to it. There are numerous castes, sub-castes and sub-sub castes in the state. It is some what difficult to determine their exact number. However, according to one estimate,⁷ total number of caste groups in Bihar is 275 out of which 4 are upper castes, 128 are backward or intermediary castes, and the rest 140 are the Scheduled Castes. Besides, there are numerous Scheduled Tribes also,

One finds it difficult to know the percentage distribution of population of different castes at present on account of the Government's decision to discontinue the caste-wise enumeration from 1951 Census onwards. Hence, one has to go back to 1931 Census which was more elaborate than 1941 Census. It gave a detailed account of different castes found in Bihar and elsewhere in the country. Whereas 1951 Census divided the population into four categories: Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward communities and others (caste Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs,

7 See Amrosh K. Sinha and Anand Verma, 'Behind the Caste Riots,' Mainstream, New Delhi, April 29, 1978, pp. 11-12.

Christians, etc.) the 1961 Census classified the total population into three categories only. These are Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and others.⁸

As regards geographical distribution of the various castes in Bihar, upper and intermediary or middle range castes are mainly concentrated in the plains of the North and the South Bihar. In the recent past, however, many of them have migrated to the plateau regions too. Upper castes have high concentration in the plain areas in South Bihar while the intermediary castes are numerically strong in the plain areas of the districts of North Bihar. The Muslims and the Scheduled Castes are spread throughout the state. The Scheduled Tribes are mainly found in the plateau region of Chotanagpur and their percentage in Ranchi district alone is 60 percent.

An interesting thing about the different castes in Bihar and elsewhere also, is the numerical weakness of the upper castes but their ritual superiority and high social status in the caste hierarchy. The upper castes constitute only 14 percent of the total population in the state but they still dominate in social, economic, political, educational as well as the religious spheres. The following table gives the district-wise percentage distribution of the various castes, tribes and Muslims in Bihar.

8 Shashisekhar Jha, Political Elite in Bihar. Vora and Co., Bombay, 1972, p. 21.

Table 2.3: Districtwise population percentage of different caste groups, tribes and Muslims in Bihar (upto 1961).

Districts	Upper Castes	Lower or middle castes	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	Muslims
Saran	22.65	55.02	10.33	..	12.00
Champaran	11.79	57.75	14.56	0.10	15.80
Muzaffarpur	16.84	59.57	14.89	..	8.70
Darbhanga	15.80	36.33	14.67	..	13.20
Seharsa	10.00	66.08	17.18	0.44	6.30
Purnea	5.27	42.38	12.24	3.91	36.20
Shahabad	26.59	49.81	16.01	0.69	6.90
Patna	15.19	59.47	16.09	0.05	9.20
Gaya	16.10 ^{6A}	49.10	24.54	0.02	9.70
Monghyr	21.28	53.23	15.81	1.38	8.30
Bhagalpur	10.66	62.59	11.58	3.77	11.40
Santhal Parganas	4.18	40.62	7.56	38.24	9.40
Palameu	9.24	36.09	25.93	19.24	9.50
Hazaribagh	7.03	58.12	12.55	11.30	11.00
Ranchi	2.62	25.92	4.55	61.61	5.30
Dhanbad	20.27	41.09	17.86	11.08	9.70
Singhbhum	2.93	43.59	2.97	47.31	3.20
Total (All Bihar)	13.22	52.16	14.07	9.05	11.50

Source: Ramashray Roy, 'Caste and Political Recruitment in Bihar,' in Rajni Kothari (ed) Caste in Indian Politics. Orient Longman Ltd., New Delhi, 1970, p. 228.

The various castes in Bihar can be classified into three broad categories. These are:

- (a) Upper castes,
- (b) Intermediary castes (which are also known as the Backward Castes^{in the state}), and
- (c) The Scheduled Castes or Harijans.

A detailed discussion on these castes now follows.

(a) The Upper Castes

The upper castes in Bihar consist of the Brahmins, Bhumihars, Rajputs and the Kayasthas. They constitute about 14 percent of the total population in the state and dominate in most walks of the life as stated earlier. In ritual matters, the Brahmins enjoy the first position. Then come the Bhumihars and Rajputs. The Kayasthas though low ritually and economically, have been more advanced in the field of education. The Brahmins, Bhumihars and the Rajputs own a major share in land unlike the Kayasthas.

Besides the ritual, economic and educational fields, the upper castes have been dominant in the politics as well in the state. It is clear from the fact that the majority of state legislators and the chief ministers, between 1947 to 1980, belonged to the upper castes. Since independence into 1961, Sri Krishna Singh, a Bhumihar, was the Chief Minister of the State. He was succeeded in

1962 by Binodanand Jha, a Brahmin. Krishna Ballabh Sahay, a Kayastha, became the Chief Minister in 1963. He was succeeded in 1967 by Mahamaya Prasad Sinha, again a fellow Kayastha. Daroga Prasad Rai, a Yadav, was a non-upper caste man to become the Chief Minister of the State in 1970. Bindeshwari Prasad Mandal, another Yadava, was also the Chief Minister earlier, for a brief period. But again in the year 1972, power shifted in favour of the upper castes, when Kedar Pandey, a Brahmin, was sworn in as the Chief Minister though he had to make way for Abdul Gaffoor (the only Muslim Chief Minister of Bihar thus far) in 1973. Jagannath Mishra, another Brahmin was made the Chief Minister in 1975 and was succeeded in 1977 by Karpoori Thakur, again a Backward Caste, who did a lot for upliftment of the Backward Castes in the state. He was succeeded in 1971, by Ram Sundar Das, a Harijan (another Harijan Chief Minister earlier to Das was Bholu Paswan Shastri). However, in the year 1980, the upper castes could assert themselves once again, with the return of Jagannath Mishra as the Chief Minister.

The following table shows the caste composition of the political parties and coalitions in power in Bihar Vidhan Sabha during 1962-1977. (See p.46 for Table.)

The table No.2.4 reveals the dominance of the upper castes in the state politics. Of these, the Rajputs seem

Table 2.4: Caste composition of political parties in different years (figures in percentages).

Groups	1962	1967	1969	1975	1977	State Population
Brahman	14.1	8.6	11.8	16.0	2.8	4.6
Bhumihar	13.6	11.1	10.5	9.3	12.0	2.8
Rajput	14.1	24.1	19.1	14.4	19.4	4.1
Kayastha	6.0	3.1	2.6	1.5	5.1	12.1
Total Forwards	47.8	46.9	44.0	41.2	39.3	12.7
Upper Backwards	23.9	25.9	25.6	22.1	23.5	18.8
Lower Backwards	0.5	3.1	1.3	1.5	2.3	31.2
Muslims	8.2	4.9	8.6	10.3	6.5	12.2
Bengalis	1.1	3.1	0.0	0.5	2.3	2.4
Scheduled Castes	17.4	11.7	12.5	15.5	18.0	13.8
Scheduled Tribes	1.1	4.3	7.9	8.8	8.3	8.9
Grand Total	100.0	99.9	99.9	99.9	100.2	100.0

Source: Harry W. Blair, 'Rising Kulaks and Backward Classes in Bihar,' Economic and Political Weekly. January 12, 1980, p. 68.

to have more consistent record than the other upper castes. At this juncture, a brief sketch of these castes appears necessary.

Brahmins:

The Brahmins, constituting 4.6 percent of the total population in the state, are numerically strongest among upper castes. Ritually, they occupy the top most position. The Brahmins in Bihar can be divided into two groups:⁹ the Maithils (belonging to the Mithila region) and the Pachiaras (those who come from the western side). While the Maithil Brahmins came from the districts of Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Seharsa, Purnea and Monghyr, the Pachiaras hail from the districts of Saran, Champaran, Sahabad, Muzaffarpur, Palamau, and Bhagalpur.

Sub castes of the Pachara Brahmins are Kanyakubj, Sakaldipi, Sarayuparin and Yajurvedi. The language spoken by Maithil Brahmins is Maithili, while the Pachiaras speak a dialect called Bhojpuri (which is spoken in the eastern U.P.). From the point of view of education, the Maithil Brahmins are more advanced than the Pacharas. But the Brahmins as a whole are economically weak in comparison to other upper castes, the Rajputs and the Shumihars. It may be because of the feeling that cultivation work as an occupation is below the rank of their corporate group. However, in the sphere of politics, the Brahmins have been throughout effective (See Table 24). So far, these Brahmins

9 Ibid, p. 73.

have become the state Chief Minister over the representation of the other upper castes to this position.

Bhumihars

The Bhumihars (who consider themselves equal to the Brahmins ⁱⁿ the ritual order), are found mainly in the states of Bihar and U.P. They constitute 2.8 percent of the total population in Bihar. Thus, numerically, they are stronger than the Kayasthas. They have Brahmanical Gotras, titles, and family names. For instance, they use the Brahmanical titles and surnames of Mishra, Pande, Tiwari and Sherma alongwith the Rajput surnames of Rai, Singh and Thakur. They are scattered in the districts of Bhagalpur, Monghyr, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Saran, Gaya and Patna.¹⁰ They are mainly land owning and cultivating caste, hence, they are one of the economically strongest castes in the state.

Educationally, the Bhumihars do not lag behind the other castes. In the political field and in the bureaucracy, competition is generally seen between the Bhumihars and the Rajputs. In fact, there is a long history of conflict between the Rajputs and the Bhumihars in the state. It has manifested, from time to time, in the form of tensions and conflicts concerning the students and teachers of the Bhumihar and Rajput castes in the

10 Ibid, p. 75.

various educational institutions in the state.

Rajputs

The Rajputs in Bihar are numerically stronger than the Bhumihars and the Kayasthas but weaker than the Brahmins. They constitute 4.1 percent of total population in the state. Like the Bhumihars, the Rajputs are land-owning castes. It is difficult to determine whether the Rajputs are economically also ahead of the Bhumihars. However, they are definitely stronger than the Brahmins and the Kayasthas in this respect.

Educationally, they are quite advanced caste. As regards the state politics, the Rajputs are a force to reckon with, though Bihar did not have a Rajput Chief-Minister till 1980. Right from 1937 (when Sri Krishna Sinha, a Bhumihar, became the Chief Minister), they have turned hostile to their Bhumihar counterparts in the state politics which has resulted into occasional fights between them and the Bhumihars.

Kayasthas

The Kayasthas are numerically weakest among the upper castes (with about 1.2 percent of the total population in the state) but are considered the most literate caste in the state. They are the first caste group in the state to receive modern English education. There are twelve subcastes of the Kayasthas. They are

settled mainly in towns, scattered throughout the state. The Kayasthas are not land owning and cultivating castes and they depend primarily on government services in order to earn their livelihood. In 1912, when Bihar was separated from the then Bengal, the Kayasthas could occupy top official positions. Very soon, they faced tough competition from the Bhumihars.

However, the Kayasthas do not have much say in the state politics, though K.B. Sahay and Mahamaya Prasad Sinha, belonging to the Kayastha caste became Chief Minister of the state during the sixties, as stated earlier.

(b) The Intermediary or Middle Range Castes

The castes which are below the upper castes but above the Scheduled Castes in the traditional caste-hierarchy are put in the category of the Intermediary or middle range castes. These are also known as the Backward Castes in the state. They are the numerically strongest caste group, constituting about 52 percent of the total population in the state. Prominent among these are the Yadavas, Kurmis, Koeris, Banias and the Hajjams.

From the point of view of education, they lag far behind the upper castes. For instance, in the year 1931, 372 Kayasthas out of 1000 were literate, whereas literacy among the Kurmis and the Yadavas was only 50 per

thousand.¹¹ However, the Yadavas, Kurmis and the Koeris own a large part of land in the state and, in many villages, they have been able to become the 'dominant castes.' It was facilitated by migration of the upper castes to towns and cities in search of better educational, economic and employment opportunities. The Kurmis and Banias can be considered as some of the affluent castes in the state.

Despite their numerical strength, the middle range castes played a subsidiary role in the state politics till the year 1977. They used to align with one or the other upper caste to achieve their specific ends. On some occasions, the intermediary caste man became the Chief Minister as well. Moreover, in the year 1978, they got a major victory in acceptance and subsequent implementation of the recommendations of the Mungeri Lal Backward Classes Commission, by the state government, headed by a Backward Caste person. With this a new era of caste conflict and tension was heralded in the state. This event undoubtedly brought solidarity among the different intermediary castes and prepared them to challenge the upper caste dominance in the state.

11 See Ramashray Roy, 'Caste and Political Recruitment in Bihar,' in Rajni Kothari (ed) Caste in Indian Politics. Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1970, p. 230.

The intermediary castes have been divided into two groups on the basis of their socio-economic condition: (a) Upper Backwards, and (b) Lower Backwards. The Upper Backward castes include the Banias, Yadavas, Kurmis and the Koeris. The Lower Backward castes comprise of the Barhi, Dhanuk, Hajjan, Kahar, Kandu, Kumhar, Lohar, Mallah, Tatwa, Teli and other Shudras. The following table shows percentage of different backward castes in Bihar.

Table 2.5: Percentage of different backward castes in Bihar, 1961.

Category	Caste (group)	Percentage of total population
(A) Upper Backward:	Bania	0.6
	Yadav	11.0
	Kurmi	3.6
	Koeri	4.1
	Total Upper Backwards	19.3
(B) Lower Backward:	Barhi	1.0
	Dhanuk	1.8
	Hajjam	1.4
	Kahar	1.7
	Kandu	1.6
	Kumhar	1.3
	Lohar	1.3
	Mallah	1.5
	Tatwa	1.6
	Teli	2.8
	Other Shudras	16.0
Total Lower Backwards	32.0	
Total Backwards:		51.3

Source: Harry W. Blair, 'Rising Kulaks and Backward Classes in Bihar,' Economic and Political Weekly, January 12, 1980, p. 65.

It is clear from the table that the Yadavas, with a percentage of 11.3 in the total population in the state, are numerically stronger than the other castes in Bihar. They are socially and politically prominent, and are concentrated mainly in the northern districts of Darbhanga and Saharsa, though they have spread to other parts of the state also. They are the traditional traders of milk and milk products and possess a good deal of landed property.

The Yadavas have had frequent conflicts with the Bhumihars and the Brahmins because they (Yadavas) have tried to identify themselves with the latter and sought the ritual recognition. Besides they have clashed with the Kurmis also, though on some occasions, the Kurmis have joined hands with them in order to combat the Rajputs and the Bhumihars.¹²

The Yadavas are followed by the Koeris and the Kurmis in terms of their numerical strength. They are mainly engaged in cultivation work and in many parts of the state have been successful in becoming dominant castes on account of departure of the upper caste landowners. The Kuris are concentrated in Patna, Samastipur, and

12 In 1934, Triveni Sangh, a union of three castes, the Yadavas, Koeris and the Kurmis, was formed and thus started the mobilisation of the backward castes in Bihar.

Vaishali districts, while the Kurmis are found primarily in Patna, Gaya and Nawadah districts. The Kurmis were the most conscious group among the backward castes and they formed their caste association at the inter-state level much before independence in order to move up in the social hierarchy. With regard to education, the Kurmis are the leading backward caste in the state.

Politically too, the Kurmis have been quite vigilant. As early as in 1937 Gur Sahai Lal, one of the Kurmi leaders, became minister in the interim government headed by Sri Krishna Singh. Another leader, Dev Sharan Singh, became the Speaker of the State Legislative Council. The Kurmis adopted the title of 'Singh', but it was dropped in the late sixties. However, they identify themselves with the Rajputs.

(c) The Scheduled Castes

The Scheduled Castes constitute 14.1 percent (70,59,632) of the total population (5,63,53,369) in the state. They are scattered throughout the state, though their large percentage is in the districts of North Bihar. In Chotanagpur region, they are less than 10 percent. The ratio of the Scheduled Caste population to the total population in the districts is highest in Palamau, closely followed by Gaya.¹³ There are twenty

13 See Sachchidananda, The Harijan Elite, Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 1977, p. 15.

three Scheduled Castes in Bihar, out of which the Chamar, Dusadh, Musahar, Dhobi and Pasi together constitute 80 percent of the total population of the Scheduled Castes in the State.

Educationally and economically, they are quite backward. castes. Their literacy rate¹⁴ has not shown any substantial increase even after the grant of reservation in the educational institutions. The majority of them work as agricultural workers for the upper and intermediary castes and are illtreated most of the times. This sometimes gives rise to conflict situations. Only in a few villages in the state one finds the Scheduled Caste land owners. All this speaks of their miserable life.

Not all the Scheduled Castes are influential in the state politics. Mainly the Pasis, Dusadhs and the Chamars have been making efforts for acquiring political positions. However, the state had two Scheduled Caste Chief Ministers upto 1980.

Chamars

The Chamars are the largest and the most dominant Scheduled Caste group as they form 29 percent of the total Scheduled Caste population in Bihar. Traditionally, they are engaged in leather work and their females work as

14 Literacy rate among the Scheduled Castes in Bihar is only 6 percent which is much lower than that among the Scheduled Tribes.

midwives for the upper and middle castes. Beside leather work, the Chamars are employed also in mining, fishing, construction, trade and commerce sectors.¹⁵ In the field of education they are ahead of other Scheduled Castes. As a result of this, they have been the maximum beneficiaries of the policy of reservation. They play an important role in the state politics as well.

Dusadhs

The Chamars are followed by the Dusadhs in terms of their numerical strength as they constitute 26 percent of the Scheduled Caste population in Bihar. They are concentrated in the districts of Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Patna, Gaya, and Monghyr. They work mainly as agricultural labourers. The Dusadhs have a number of sub-castes, such as Kanaujia, Magahia, Bhojpuria, Silhetia, etc. Literacy rate among them is quite low. They, however, have been politically conscious and have some say in the state politics. Bholu Paswan Shastri, a Dusadh by caste was the Chief Minister of the state thrice and later on served as the Chairman of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commission, appointed by the Government of India.

15 Sachchidananda, op.cit., p. 17.

Musahars

The Musahars form 15 percent of the total Scheduled Caste population in the state. They are mainly in the districts of Darbhanga, Saharsa, and Purnea. Majority of them work as agricultural workers. Educationally they are very backward.

Dhobis

Dhobi or the washerman caste, constitute about 5 percent of the total population of the Scheduled Caste in Bihar. They are scattered throughout the state. Their traditional occupation is washing clothes, hence they are considered as ceremonially unclean.¹⁶ The level of education among the Dhobis is higher than many of the Scheduled Castes, due to which many of them are holding important positions in the state government services as well as in politics.

Pasis

Finally, the Pasis, the traditional toddy-tappers form a 4 percent of the total population of the Scheduled Castes in Bihar. They have spread over all parts of the state but are economically and educationally very backward.

16 Ibid, p. 23.

The Scheduled Tribes

There are twenty-nine major and minor Scheduled Tribes in Bihar and they altogether form about 9 percent of the total population in the state. According to the Census of 1971, their total number was 49,32,767, out of a total state population of 5,63,53,369. Majority of the Scheduled Tribes live in the districts of Ranchi (60 per cent), Hazaribagh (36 percent), Dhanbad, Singhbhum, Palamou and Santhal Parganas (44 percent). These districts are in hilly regions of Chotanagpur and Rajmahal. The tribal communities are also found in certain parts of Sasaram, Bhabna, Champaran, Purnea, Bhagalpur and Monghyr.¹⁷ All these tribes belong to the Proto-Australoid stock, though there are slight physiological differences among them.¹⁸

Important tribes of Bihar are the Mundas, Hos, Santhals, Oraons, Kharias, Birhors, Sauria Paharias, Mal Paharias, Birjias, Asurs, Bhumij, Cheros and Tharus. The Santhals with a population of 1,569,059 are the largest of tribes and are found in Santhal Parganas, Hazaribagh, Singhbhum, Monghyr, Bhagalpur and Purnea. Next come

17 See Narmadeshwar Prasad, Land and People of Tribal Bihar. Bihar Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi, 1961, pp. 16-17.

18 R.R. Diwakar, op.cit., p. 74.

Oraons with a population of 604,485 and are found mainly in Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Palamau and Singhbhum districts. Mundas form the third largest tribe with a population of 5,30,676 and are concentrated in Ranchi, Singhbhum, Hazaribagh and Palamau districts. The table below gives population figures of twenty nine tribes found in Bihar.

**Table 2.6: Population of tribes in Bihar
(1941 Census).**

<u>Name of Scheduled Tribes</u>	<u>Population</u>
1. Asur	4388
2. Baiga	54
3. Banjara	255
4. Bathudi	998 (1931 Census)
5. Bedia	31813
6. Binjhia	5317
7. Birhor	2550
8. Birjia	2075
9. Chero	19337
10. Chik-Baraik	29739 (1931 Census)
11. Gond	27445
12. Gorait	9331
13. Ho	383737
14. Karmali	10549
15. Kharia	87522
16. Kharwar	77589
17. Kisan	15090
18. Korā	13,521
29. Korwa	13021 (1931 Census)
30. Lohara	47368
31. Mahli	56309
22. Mal Paharia	40148
23. Manda	525816
24. Oraon	647444

25. Parahiya	10134
26. Santhal	1392744
27. Sanria Paharia	58654
28. Saver	1645
29. Bhumij	108230
<hr/>	
Total	36,22,823

Source: Narmadeshwar Prasad, Land and People of Tribal Bihar. Bihar Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi, 1961, p. 16.

The tribes in Bihar are no longer in their primitive state. They are undergoing varieties of changes due to benefits derived from the government schemes in general and the role of the Western Christian missionaries in particular. Their economic condition also has recorded improvement with the passage of time. Educationally they are better than the Scheduled Castes, as stated earlier, inspite of the fact that both have been given reservation facility in educational institutions, legislature and the government services. They interact well with other caste groups and a large number of them go to different parts of the state for working in mines, factories, construction sites, etc. The tribal leaders also are making their impact felt in the state politics.

To sum up, Bihar is in a poor state, marked by economic, social and regional diversities. Poverty and casteism can be considered as two major problems of the state. This has given rise to a variety of tensions and conflicts among different sections of population.

Initially, the phenomena of tension and conflict involved the upper castes, but later on two other types of conflict developed: one involving the upper castes and the middle ranging castes on the issues of reservation extended to the latter, and another between the Harijans and the non-Harijans on account of certain land and wage problems. These issues would be analysed at length in the following chapters.

Chapter-III

INTER-CASTE CONFLICT: THE POLITICO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Caste as an institution is attached paramount importance in Bihar, as it is the most important determinant in the patterns of social and political life of the people. The present state of conflict (post 1977 period) dates back to the movement for separation of Bihar from the state of Bengal in the beginning of the present century when a numerically weak but educationally advanced upper caste group of the Kayasthas spearheaded the movement. In this chapter, we shall analyse the developments relating to caste and politics since the turn of the 19th century. We start here with the premise that it is difficult to separate caste from politics in Bihar. However, it is not our intention to record a history of interplay of caste and politics in Bihar, but to highlight the inter-caste relations which have been politicised ever since the upper castes took to Western education and the subsequent developments which culminated into 'caste-riots' all over the state during 1977-1979.

Politics of Caste Associations

The competition between the numerically weak but socially and ritually high castes started with the formation of their respective caste associations towards

the end of the 19th century.¹ These caste associations with the voluntary membership were more widespread than the traditional caste Panchayats and aimed at meeting out most of the needs of their members. Moreover, they mobilised them to enhance their status in the local hierarchy of the caste system.

The Kayasthas, due to their educational advancement, were the first caste to form an association in order to take advantage of the available opportunities. In absence of land property, they had to depend on Government services to earn their livelihood. "All India Kayastha Mahasabha," was formed in U.P. and its branch came up in Bihar as early as 1894. It started helping the fellow Kayasthas in many ways. As a result, the Kayasthas started occupying top positions in the bureaucratic set-up in the state. This proved to be a challenge to the ritually superior castes like the Brahmins, Rajputs and Bhumihars. They too started organising themselves into associations to combat the rising power of the Kayasthas. The Bhumihars took a lead in this direction by forming the "Bhumihar Brahman Sabha" in

1 The intermediary castes formed their associations in the late twenties of the present century and became a force to reckon with only after 1967. We shall later see how, due to infighting among the upper castes, the intermediary castes got an opportunity to move up in the social and political structure in the state.

1899.² The Sabha established many schools, colleges and hostels for the Bhumihar students, with the view to prepare them for competing with their Kayastha counterparts. Thus, the first case of intercaste rivalry involved the Kayasthas and the Bhumihars.

The Brahmins and Rajputs also did not lag behind in this direction. A few educated Rajput landlords organised their castemen. Similarly, the Brahmins also formed an association under the leadership of the Maharaja of Darbhanga by the year 1899. At this stage, the Bhumihars not only developed differences with the Kayasthas but also with the Rajputs and the Brahmins. They claimed, as stated earlier, the status of the Brahmins which was not acceptable either to the Brahmins or to the Rajputs. On the other hand, the Kayasthas were considered as Shudras by other upper castes. In this way, the inter-caste tension built up at the turn of the century.

Movement for a Separate Bihar

The inter-caste tension assumed more importance when political activities began in the state with the movement for separation of Bihar from Bengal. The movement for

2 We have noted in Chapter II that the Bhumihars considered themselves equal to the Brahmins and that they had Brahmanical Gotras, titles and names.

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

The Kayasthas, being educationally better than the other upper castes, were in the forefront of the movement. Another reason of their active participation in the movement was their dependence on the government services for earning their livelihood. The Rajputs, Bhumihars and the Brahmins, on the other hand, were not very much concerned with the Bengali dominance because they had a plenty of landed property and they were not in favour of imparting Western education to their children. Being economically well-off, they did not have to depend on government jobs either. Some Brahmins, however, laid stress on the traditional mode of education, but by and large Western education was not given due importance. Dislike for the Western education led the traditional Brahmins to boycott and declare the Maharaja of Darbhanga as an outcaste after his visit to the U.K.³

3 See Dayadhar Jha, State Legislature in India.
Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1977,
pp. 37-38.

The Kayasthas received support mainly from a few sections of Muslims who had received Western education. The movement began to be bitterly criticised and the leaders like Sachchidananda Sinha (a Kayastha) were ridiculed by the Bengali press. Hence, the participants felt the need of a newspaper to voice their opinion. Consequently, the 'Bihar Times' was started in 1894 by Mahesh Narain and Sachchidanand Sinha. Thus began the 'renaissance' in Bihar.⁴ This newspaper did a great service in highlighting the problems of the Biharis and made an appeal to the then Lt. Governor of Bengal to separate Bihar from the province of Bengal. The movement at this stage, could not gather sufficient momentum, as other upper and lower castes kept themselves out of it. Hence, the leadership was confined to the Kayasthas. Certain upper caste educated persons, even facing the stiff competition from the Bengalis in the job-market, did not extend their cooperation, because they had traditional rivalry with the Kayasthas. On the other hand, the question of survival motivated the Kayasthas to join the movement in large numbers.

The movement for a separate Bihar, was accelerated after the formation of the 'Bihari Students Conference' and the publication of the book entitled "The Partition

4 Ibid, p. 41.

of Bengal or the Separation of Bihar?" by Mahesh Narain and Sachchidanand Sinha. The Conference and the book tried to activate all sections of the people for the creation of a 'Bihar for Biharis.' Towards the concluding phase of the movement educated persons of certain other castes also joined hands with the Kayasthas and the Muslims, on account of their political involvement. Ultimately, in the year 1911, the British Government accepted the demand of separation. The province of Bihar and Orissa was inaugurated in April 1912.

Inter-Caste Rivalry in Separate State

The antagonism between the Kayasthas and other upper castes was manifested, once again, when the race began for capturing the newly created posts in the new province. The Kayasthas, due to their educational advancement and administrative experience, were the top contenders for these posts and became the obvious beneficiaries when the fresh opportunities were offered in the Government offices, Judiciary, University and the Legislature. Besides, the Kayasthas started dominating in the state politics, owing to their experience of the Separation Movement. Important leaders of other upper castes took note of it and made every effort to encourage their castemen to take advantage of new educational opportunities and make themselves competent for the government services.

The Bhumihars were the first to compete with the Kayasthas due to large scale mobilisation of their masses. Rivalry between these two castes was generated for recruitment to the public offices.⁵ The Bhumihars, due to their economic advancement, could easily meet the expenses of modern education and thereby pose a threat to the dominance of the Kayasthas. On the other hand, the Kayasthas, a numerically weak caste, very soon became aware of it and started exploring the possibility of getting support of other upper castes. In the meantime, the Brahmins and the Rajputs also started receiving modern education and taking advantage of the available opportunities. The Maithil Brahmins, for instance, received liberal financial assistance from the Maharaja of Darbhanga for the educational purposes. The Maharaja set up many educational institutions and did a great service to the Maithili language.⁶

In order to face the challenge from the Bhumihars, the Kayasthas aligned with the Rajputs, a numerically strong and wealthy caste group. The Rajputs had grudge

5 See Ramashray Roy, 'Caste and Political Recruitment in Bihar,' in R. Kothari (ed) Caste in Indian Politics. Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1970, pp. 239-40.

6 Shashisokhar Jha, Political Elite in Bihar. Vora and Co. Publishers Private Limited, Bombay, 1972, p. 78.

against the Bhumihars, ever since the latter had claimed for the status of Brahmins. This alliance continued for quite some time and the Bhumihars were provoked by the Rajputs time and again. Thus the casteism which was limited initially to the government services, started entering state politics also. An instance of the Bhumihar-Rajput rivalry was the dismissal of A.N. Sinha (a Rajput) from the chairmanship of the Gaya District Board by Sir Ganesh Dutt Singh (a Bhumihar), the then Minister of Local Self-government. The Rajputs took revenge from the Bhumihars when their leader S.K. Sinha was defeated in the election to the Council of States in 1925 due to partisan manner of campaigning on the part of A.N. Sinha.⁷

With the emergence of the Rajputs on the political scene in the state the dominance of the Kayastha started receding. They could not possibly prevent the emerging social groups from acquiring leadership positions in the state. Therefore, proportion of the Kayasthas in the leadership of Congress Party went on declining.⁸ In spite of the inter-caste rivalry, the Kayasthas, Rajputs and the Bhumihars hold the political power confined to themselves till the thirties of the present century and, thus, other castes were prevented from entering competitive politics in the state.

7 Chatur Jha, 'Caste in Bihar Congress Politics,' in Iqbal Nazim (ed) State Politics in India. Meenakshi, Meerut, 1967, pp. 575-76.

8 Rameshwar Roy, op.cit., p. 244.

Rising Consciousness among the Intermediary Castes

The spread of education, introduction of modern technology and democratic institutions, however, made the lower castes also conscious of their low status in the existing system. They developed an urge to move up in the social hierarchy. For this purpose, many lower castes started organising themselves into associations, taking new names and initiating the behaviour patterns of the upper castes.⁹ Since initiation of behaviour patterns led only to cultural rather than structural change and other avenues of social mobility were virtually closed, politics was considered as a vehicle of social and political aspirations of the lower castes.⁹

The Yadavas among the lower or backward castes ~~themselves~~ were first to organise ^{themselves} ~~h~~ They formed the 'Gope Jatiya Mahasabha' in the year 1912. They decided to do away with the traditional practices which were degrading in the eyes of the upper castes. The upper castes strongly reacted at the activities of the Yadavas. Furthermore, the Yadavas took a decision to educate their children and to wear 'sacred thread,' which was only meant for the 'twice-born' castes. These developments were intolerable for the upper castes and, as a consequence, they clashed with the Yadavas at many places. This was the first case of

9 Ibid, pp. 236-37.

direct confrontation between the upper and the intermediary caste groups.

At the same time, the Kurmis, another intermediary caste, started organising themselves all over the state. In 1910 the 'Akhil Bharatiya Kurmi Kshatriya Mahasabha',¹⁰ was formed mainly with the efforts of Dip Narayan Singh. In 1908 they started publishing a journal entitled, 'Kurmi Kshatriya Kitaishi.'¹¹ The Mahasabha was successful in arousing the consciousness of the Kurmi masses. At this stage, the Yadavas felt the need of uniting the lower castes into one body, in order to fight the upper caste dominance. Thus, the Kurmis and the Koeris were approached ~~and they~~ ^{who showed} their willingness to join hands with the Yadavas. In 1934, the 'Triveni Sangh' (assembly of the three) was set up in Shahabad. It organised the Yadavas, Kurmis, and the Koeris. Gur Sahay Lal, a lawyer, played a major role in its formation. However, the Sangh was not very successful in its working and soon got defunct. Certain upper castes politicians played vital role in bringing about disunity among the members of the Sangh.¹²

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- 10 The Kurmis, thus, started identifying themselves with the Kshatriyas (Rajputs).
- 11 K.K. Verma, Changing Role of Caste Associations (A Study of Kurmi Sabhas), A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna, 1976, pp. 17-18.
- 12 Shashisekhar Jha, op.cit., p. 79.

It is interesting to note that the Brahmins, the numerically strongest upper caste acquired leadership position only after the elections held in 1937. Thus, they were quite late in entering caste-based political structure in the state. The Maithil Brahmins concentrated mainly on educational activities in the twenties of the present century. A very few of the educated Brahmin elites had political leanings. So, their role was secondary in the state politics. Moreover, the Brahmins, unlike the Rajputs and the Bhumihars, maintained good relationship with the other castes.

The 1937 Elections

The elections to the first Legislative Assembly of the state, held in 1937, witnessed the rise of K.B. Sahay, a new Kayastha leader. Sahay, alongwith the other Kayasthas aligned with the Rajputs led by A.N. Sinha. For the state leadership, there was direct contest between A.N. Sinha and S.K. Sinha (Bhumihar) and the latter, inspite of the heavy odds against him, managed to win the Premiership of the state. After the elections, K.B. Sahay alongwith his supporters shifted to S.K. Sinha 'camp' and eventually became his right hand man. This was a blow to the Rajputs. The veteran Kayastha leaders like Sachchidananda Sinha and Rajendra Prasad, however, kept themselves out of the caste based politics in the state and gave the maximum attention to the national freedom struggle.

Gradually, the Kayasthas began losing their importance in the state politics. It is amply clear from the acts of

K.B. Sahay after the 1937 elections. He could not continue for a long time as the right hand man of S.K. Sinha. When S.K. Sinha decided to elevate M.P. Sinha, a fellow casteman, K.B. Sahay's political future appeared to be in dark.

Post-Independence Situation

In 1957 elections, both M.P. Sinha and K.B. Sahay worked actively against each other and, as a consequence, they lost. Once again, there was contest between the Bhumihars and the Rajputs for the state chief ministership. This time, though K.B. Sahay was with A.N. Sinha, but the latter failed to win. A.N. Sinha expired soon after the elections and his son, S.N. Sinha, was asked to lead the Rajput faction. In the changed situation, many trusted men of A.N. Sinha jumped on to S.K. Sinha's faction. K.B. Sahay, however, stayed back.

In the year 1961 after the death of S.K. Sinha, caste motivated politics in the state took a new turn. New factional alliances began to be formed and Binodanand Jha, a Brahmin, ran for the first time for the chief ministership of the state.¹³ The other aspirant was M.P. Sinha, a Bhumihar from the same faction. Since K.B. Sahay and S.N. Sinha did not have any candidate and, moreover, they had grudge against M.P. Sinha, they decided to support Jha who

13 Ibid, pp. 88-89.

ultimately won. After the election, however, Jha developed differences with Sahay. Sahay thus did not have any other option but to join M.P. Sinha group, once again, with his followers.¹⁴ In this way, one time rivals joined hands to check the rising Brahmin influence in the state. By now, it was obvious that K.B. Sahay too wanted to become the chief minister and support of the all groups was needed for that.

Mobilisation of the Lower Castes

B.N. Jha tried to strengthen the position of the Brahmins by making some insignificant Brahmin Congressmen as Cabinet ministers. He was the first upper caste man to woo the support of tribal leaders from South Bihar against the Rajput-Bhumihar-Kayastha faction. Till now, factionalism in the party was confined to the upper castes only. Certain leaders started mobilising the lower castemen also to secure their safe positions. Thus, infighting among the upper castes widened the scope of political participation in the state.

Meanwhile, B.N. Jha was asked by the Congress High Command to step down under the "Kamraj Plan" in 1963. K.B. Sahay was, now, the most suitable candidate for the

14 See Girish Mishra, 'Caste in Bihar politics,' Mainstream, Vol.II, No.14, Dec. 7, 1963, p. 17.

chief ministership on the support of M.P. Sinha and S.N. Sinha¹⁵ (who had parted company with B.N. Jha). Jha tried his level best to prevent K.B. Sahay from becoming the chief minister. A Backward Caste associate of Jha, Birchand Patel (a Kurmi), stood against Sahay, but lost the battle. Thus, a Kayastha became, for the first time, the chief minister of the state. However, the number of the Kayasthas in the Congress Party had declined considerably by 1963. K.B. Sahay played the trick to get the support of the upper as well as lower castes to stay on in office. He also became a caste leader on becoming chief minister. An important Yadav leader, Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav was appointed Cabinet minister, mainly for getting support of the Yadava community. Similarly, Sahay could muster the support of the Kurmis also.

In 1966, M.P. Sinha left the Sahay faction to join the faction led by Jha. Sahay could still manage the unity in his Cabinet. He was even successful in getting the support of a section of M.P. Sinha faction.¹⁶ Very soon, the Rajputs led by S.N. Sinha also deserted the Sahay camp, as the rising influence of the Yadavas in the Cabinet became intolerable for them. There was further crisis in the Congress Party when Kamakshya Narain Singh, an important

15 M.P. Singh, Cohesion in a Predominant Party: The Pradesh Congress and Party Politics in Bihar. S. Chand and Co., New Delhi, 1975, p. 64-

16 Ibid, p. 65.

Rajput leader, left the party on the issue of undue distribution of the Congress Party tickets for the coming 1967 elections. B.N. Jha too, was not satisfied with the ticket distribution mechanism while Kamakshya Narain Singh formed the Jan Kranti Dal (JKD) with the assistance of Mahamaya Prasad Sinha (a Kayastha), B.N. Jha combined with M.P. Sinha and S.N. Sinha in drive for the ouster of K.B. Sahay.¹⁷

The internal squabbles (mainly involving the upper caste leaders) inside the Congress Party had two consequences: (a) opposition parties could strengthen their position and (b) way for emergence of the intermediary castes as a major force was paved. As expected, K.B. Sahay lost the election in two constituencies, much to the pleasure of his opponents both inside and outside the party. Not only this, many opposition candidates won against the important Congress leaders. The election also saw the rise of the Backward Castes. From 1967 onwards, they became a force to reckon with. It may be noted here that although the Backward Castes were numerically stronger than the combined strength of the upper castes, yet they could not make any headway earlier, due to consensus among the upper castes with regard to keeping the leadership confined to themselves. The Backward Castes got importance only when some of the

17 Shashisekhar Jha, op.cit., p. 94.

upper caste leaders like B.N. Jha and K.B. Sahay started wooing their support to consolidate their position against the Bhumihaar-Rajput lobby. R.L.S. Yadav emerged as a powerful Backward Caste leader after the 1967 elections and challenged K.B. Sahay, the man who had patronised Yadav after the death of S.K. Sinha.¹⁸

Period of Political Instability

The period of 1967-72 witnessed numerous caste and political alliances resulting into political instability in the state. K.B. Sahay, on losing election, joined hands with M.P. Sinha who opposed B.N. Jha.- S.N. Sinha camp. M.P. Sinha won the contest against B.N. Jha for the leadership of the state legislature but could not become the chief minister on account of non-cooperative attitude of the latter. As a result, the opposition parties got an opportunity to stake claim of forming government. Mahamaya Prasad Sinha, the J.K.D. leader, headed a United Front Government, consisting of five parties namely the Jan Kranti Dal (JKD), Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP), Communist Party of India (CPI), Jan Sangh and the Praja Socialist Party (PSP).¹⁹ The caste composition of the United Front

18 See M.P. Singh, op.cit., p. 70.

19 R.C. Prasad, 'Bihar: Social polarisation and political instability,' in Iqbal Narain (ed), State Politics in India (Meenakshi, Meerut), 1976, p. 54.

ministry is given in table below.

Table 3.1: Caste-wise ministerial position in the U.F. Government, 1967.

Caste	Cabinet Ministers	Ministers of State	Total
Rajput	3	2	5
Brahmin	1	2	3
Bhumihar	4	-	4
Kayastha	1	-	1
Yadav	1	-	1
Kurmi	1	-	1
Koeri	1	1	2
Dusadh	-	1	1
Muslim	1	-	1
Bengali	1	-	1
Nai (Kajjam)	1	-	1
Total	15	6	21

Source: Dayadhar Jha, State Legislature in India. Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1977, p. 286.

The above table shows that the upper caste leaders continued to hold the leadership positions inspite of the tough competition from the leaders belonging to the Backward Castes in the state. Even the top leaders in the new government happened to be ex-Congressmen. However, a large scale mobilisation of the intermediary castes had

begun, mainly by the efforts of B.P. Mandal (a Yadava) S.S.P. leader and a minister in the Mahamaya Cabinet. The Scheduled Castes also started asserting themselves.

The ambitious designs of B.P. Mandal led to the fall of the Mahamaya ministry in January 1968. Next development was resignation of B.P. Mandal from the S.S.P. and formation of the 'Shoshit Dal.'²⁰ Mandal formed a new government in February 1968 with the assistance of defectors from the various political parties including the Congress. This government, however, could survive only for 47 days, on account of serious differences among the Congressmen on the issue of extending support to the Mandal ministry. In Mandal, the intermediary castes got their first chief minister and he also was successful in proving the worth of these castes in the politics controlled by the upper castes. In the meantime, B.N. Jha and Bhola Paswan Shastri alongwith their supporters resigned from the Congress Party to form the Loktantric Congress Dal (LCD).

The new United Front government was headed by Bhola Paswan Shastri (a Dusadh by caste) in March 1968. Shastri was chosen by B.N. Jha to suppress the feeling that being

20 B.P. Mandal, a SSP Lok Sabha member in 1967, became a Cabinet minister in the Mahamaya ministry, although he was not a member of either of the houses of State Legislature. He continued in this capacity for six months and, on being asked to resign, decided to leave SSP and formed the 'Shoshit Dal' (the party of the exploited).

a Brahmin, he had worked for the ouster of B.P. Mandal, a non-upper caste chief minister. The Shastri government, however, had to resign after about three months on June 25, 1968 under the pressure from one of its constituents - the Janata Party.²¹ On the advice of Shastri, the State Governor dissolved the state assembly and, subsequently, the President's rule was imposed on. In this way, three governments fell in 16 months on account of personal ambition and lust for power on the part of the legislators, their factional rivalry and caste antagonisms.²²

The mid-term election to the state assembly was held in the year 1969 in which ballot and bullet went together and the process of impersonation started.²³ The Congress Party once again emerged as the largest group in the Assembly but could not secure majority. Hence, it had to seek the support of the Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD), Shoshit Dal and Hui Jharkhand Party. A Congress-led coalition under the leadership of Sardar Harihar Singh formed government on 26th February 1969. Sardar Harihar Singh, being an insignificant figure in the Congress Party in the

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- 21 Kamakshya Narain Singh, the leader of Janata Party, wanted some favour from Shastri, the Chief Minister, and also demanded the mines and mineral portfolio. When Shastri did not oblige, Singh decided to leave the U.F. government.
- 22 See Dayadhar Jha, op.cit., p. 306.
- 23 R.C. Prasad, op.cit., p. 57.

state, could be acceptable to the Rajputs, Kayasthas and the Bhumiars. However, the Singh ministry could not remain in power for a shortwhile. It was defeated in the assembly, after the Shoshit Dal, BKD and the Hul Jharkhand withdrew their support.

Bhola Paswan Shastri, the LCD leader and the former Chief Minister, formed his second government in June 1969 with the assistance of the SSP, CPI, Jan Sangh and some of the defectors. The Shastri government could survive for just 11 days, as the Jan Sangh decided to withdraw the 'conditional support' on the issue of inclusion of two Congress defectors into the ministry who happened to be Muslims. Shastri was forced to resign on 1st July 1969. For the first time, the communal feeling overrode the caste feeling in deciding the fate of a government.

After the fall of the second Shastri government, President's rule was imposed in the state which continued for not less than 220 days. During this period, a major split took place in the Congress Party at the national level.²⁴ It led to temporary confusion among the Congress leaders in Bihar. Finally, the big three in the state Congress - K.B. Sahay, M.P. Sinha and S.N. Sinha, decided to go with the Congress(O). Daroga Prasad Rai (a Yadava), a former associate of B.N. Jha was elected leader of the

24 M.P. Singh, op.cit., p. 92.

Congress(R) ^{Or} as the New Congress and Harihar Singh became the leader of Congress(O) in the state assembly. Another important development was shifting of the Brahmins and the Yadavas to the Brahmin led Congress(R) party. The Bhumihars and the Rajputs, however, sided with the Congress(O).

Daroga Prasad Rai, on becoming leader of the Congress(R) party, started negotiations with the CPI, PSP and other parties in a bid to form another Congress-led coalition government in the state. A 32 point programme was agreed upon and Rai was sworn in as the chief minister on February 16, 1970. Thus, a long spell of the President's rule came to an end. But Rai's government could remain in power for merely 306 days mainly on account of a non-cooperative attitude of the Brahmin Congressmen. The government was voted out in the Assembly when new alliances were formed.

It was, now, SSP leader, Karpoori Thakur's turn to lead a non-Congress coalition government in the state. He was supported by the Congress(O), Jan Sangh, Swatantra Party, BKD, Shoshit Dal, etc. In this way, Thakur received assistance from the major non-Congress(R) parties. Being Harijan (barber) by caste, Thakur tried to enhance the status of the Backward Castes in the state. However, his government could not survive for more than 160 days. In the wake of electoral victory of the

Congress(R) in the Lok Sabha elections in February 1971 the defection phenomenon gathered momentum once again, and made the fall of the Karpoori Government imminent.²⁵

After the resignation of the Karpoori ministry, Bholu Paswan Shastri became the state chief minister, for the third time, on the support of the Congress(R), CPI, PSP and Jharkhand (Horo group). Shastri appointed a Backward Classes Commission, under the chairmanship of Mungeri Lal, to look into the condition of the Backward Classes in the state and suggest recommendations for their betterment. It was a major gain for the Backward Classes in the state. They had entered politics in large numbers by now and, on a number of occasions, the Backward and Scheduled Caste leaders had become the chief minister of a state where politics was dominated by numerically weak but spiritually high castes like the Bhumihars, Rajputs, Brahmins and the Kayasthas (By this time, The intermediary castes also started strengthening their position in rural areas in the state). The upper castes were gradually migrating to towns in search of better facilities. It can be stated that the consciousness among the intermediary castes grew as a result of their political involvement which itself was facilitated by the squabbles among the leaders of the upper castes. Still, we do not witness any

25 R.C. Prasad, op.cit., p. 62.

major case of conflict involving the upper castes and the intermediary castes till the year 1972.

The Period 1972-1977

During the 1972-77 period the caste factor was not as important as it used to be during the years of political instability in the state. The upper castes (excluding the Brahmins), by and large, were with the Congress(O) while the Brahmins and the Yadavas continued their allegiance with the Congress(R) party. Minor differences, however, did develop between the Yadavas and the Brahmins at the time of distribution of party tickets for 1972 Assembly polls.²⁶ Kedar Pandey, a Brahmin, became the chief minister of the state, after Congress(R) secured majority in the Assembly and, thus, the era of political instability came to an end. Kedar Pandey, however, had to make way for Abdul Gafoor (the first Muslim to become the chief minister of the state) in 1973, under the pressure of the dissident legislators. Gafoor was replaced by Jagannath Mishra, another Brahmin in 1975. Mishra continued in this capacity till May 1977. During the Mishra's term, the Mungeri Lal Backward Classes Commission, appointed by Bhola Paswan Shastri in 1971, gave its report and recommended reservation for the Backward 'Classes' (consisting

26 N.K. Singh, 'Many faces of caste politics,' Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. VII (15), 8th April 1972, pp. 748-49.

of the middle ranging castes) as per the report of the Commission) in the state government services. But Jagannath Mishra did not pay any heed to these recommendations which frustrated the hopes of a section of the middle caste groups. The middle caste leaders, however, decided to pursue the matter further.

The Turning Point

When the Lok Sabha elections were announced in January 1977, the Backward Caste leaders were successful in getting the promise of 26 percent reservation for the Backward Classes in the government services, included in the Janata Party manifesto. The Janata Party secured absolute majority in the state assembly and, thus, was in position to form a government. Despite the rising consciousness among the middle castes, upper caste legislators were numerically more than the middle caste legislators in the new Assembly.²⁷ However, to the fortune of the middle ranging castes, Karpoori Thakur, defeated S.N. Sinha (Rajput) to become the chief minister of the state, for the second time. With the victory of Karpoori Thakur, implementation of recommendations of the Mungeri Lal Backward Classes Report appeared to be a forgone conclusion. The upper caste leaders began preparing

27 Out of total 218 Janata legislators, 85 belonged to the upper castes, 57 were backward castes, Harijans were 39, Scheduled Tribes 18, Muslims 14 and Bengalis 5.

themselves to face any possible 'threat' from the Backward middle ranging castes. Once again, caste factor became decisive. The contest no longer appeared to be among the upper castes but the state politics came to be articulated in terms of the backward versus the forward castes.²⁸

The tension between the two groups of castes culminated into caste-riots all over the state immediately after Karpoori Thakur made public in December 1977, the government's proposal to give 26 percent reservation to the backward 'classes.' To the upper castes, this proposal was aimed at getting political support to the government from all the chunks of the backward castes, which would, in turn, weaken their (upper caste's) dominance in different spheres. Thus, caste affiliation started overriding any other affiliations in the state. People in general were compelled to think and act on caste lines.

Who constituted the Backward Classes in Bihar?
 What percentage of the Backward Castes were to get
 benefits from the provision of reservation?
 How the upper castes reacted to the reservation extended to the
 Backward Castes?
 How the relationship between the upper
 castes and the middle ranging castes developed bitterness?

28 R.C. Prasad, op.cit., p. 66.

Finally, whether there was any Backward Classes movement in Bihar? These are some of the issues which would be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter-IV

THE ISSUE OF BACKWARD CLASSES RESERVATION AND CASTE CONFLICT

In the foregoing pages we have observed that a series of disagreements and disputes among the four upper castes paved way for the emergence of the middle range castes (especially the Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris) as a major force in Bihar. It is significant to note that while the upper castes began concentrating in the urban areas, the middle range castes worked for strengthening their hold in the villages. With the passage of time they became economically stronger than some of the upper castes which, in turn, made them politically influential. They started waiting for an opportunity to challenge the upper caste dominance in different spheres.

Such an opportunity was provided with the announcement of reservation for the backward classes in the state in the year 1977. There was a temporary unity among all the backward (middle) castes in the state in order to face the upper caste reaction to a sensitive issue like reservation. The gulf between the two caste groups got widened heralding a new era of caste conflict. Main controversy centred around the basis of backwardness determined by the State Government. The upper castes emphasized on the economic criterion to be taken into account for granting the reservation, while the middle range castes (which were declared as the 'other backward classes' by the State Government) pressed for social or the

caste criterion. Before we go deeper into this problem, it will be essential to discuss the constitutional puzzle of the 'Backward Classes,' their major constituents, the provision of the reservation for different backward classes as per the spirit of constitution and the reservation facility extended to 'other backward classes (OBC) by different state governments.

The Term Backward Class

The term Backward Classes was first used in the country in the year 1980 to describe the groups of the people in the old Madras Presidency who were entitled to some allowances for study in the elementary schools.¹ It comprises now of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, other Backward Classes and Denotified Tribes² which are entitled for special treatment under a number of articles of the Constitution of India.

1 Nirmal Mukarji, 'Perspectives of a policy,' Seminars (Reservations), No.268, Dec. 1981, p. 14.

2 Denotified communities were earlier known as 'criminal' or 'ex-criminal tribes.' The term Denotified Communities was suggested by the Kaka Kalelkar Backward Classes Commission in its report in the year 1955 (See pp. 36-37 of the report, vol.I).

3 Articles 14, 15, 16, 17, 29, 30, 38, 39, 45, 46, 161(1), 320, 330, 332, 334, 335, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, and 366(24), (25) - See G.P. Verma, Caste Reservation in India: Law and the Constitution, Chugh Publications, Allahabad, 1980, pp. 145-56.

The origin of the term Scheduled Caste (the ex-untouchables) can be traced back to the Eighteenth century colonial India. Before Independence, the terms like 'Depressed Classes,' 'Exterior Castes,' and 'Backward Classes' were put into use to denote the ex-untouchables. The present term 'Scheduled Castes' was coined by the Government of India Act of 1935.⁴

The term 'Depressed Classes' first used in 1916 included the following: (a) criminal and wandering tribes, (b) Aeoriginal tribes, and (c) Untouchables. In 1917, Sir Henry Sharp, the Education Commissioner of Government of India prepared a fresh list of depressed classes which included the aboriginal or hill tribes, depressed classes and the criminal tribes. Sir Sharp stated, "The Depressed Classes form the unclean castes whose touch or even shadow is pollution. But a wider significance is often attached to the expression, so that it includes communities which though not absolutely outside the pale of caste, all backward and educationally poor and despised and also certain classes of Mohammadians."⁵

The census of 1911 and 1921 also used the term 'Depressed Classes' for enumeration purposes. In 1931, it

4 See Ratna G. Revankar, The Indian Constitution, A Case Study of Backward Classes. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, New Jersey, 1971, pp. 103-4 and Marc Galanter, 'Who are the other Backward Classes,' Economic and Political Weekly, October 22, 1978, pp. 1812-13.

5 Report of the Indian Franchise Committee, Vol. I, 1932, para 279, p. 109, cited in Ratna G. Revankar, op.cit., p. 105.

was replaced by the term Exterior Castes, as suggested by B.R. Ambedkar. The term 'Scheduled Castes' finally replaced the 'Exterior Castes' in the Government of India Act, 1935, and is retained to date. The Article 366(24) of the Constitution defines the Scheduled Castes as castes, race, or tribes or parts of or groups within such castes, races or tribes as are deemed under Article 341, which gives power to the President to specify these castes after consultation with the Governors of the States.

Similarly, the term "Scheduled Tribes" was for the first time coined by the Constitution in 1950. Prior to that these were known as "Aboriginals," "Adivasis," "Forest Tribes," "Hill Tribes" and the primitive tribes. In the 1931 and 1941 censuses, they were termed as 'Primitive Tribes' and 'Tribes' respectively.⁶ According to Article 336(25) of the Constitution, Scheduled Tribe means such tribes or tribal communities or parts^{of} or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342(1) which empowers the President to issue the lists specifying the Scheduled Tribes. According to the Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the common features of tribals in India are their tribal origin, primitive way of life and habitation in remote and less easily accessible areas and general backwardness in all respects.⁷

6 See Ratna G. Rovankar, op.cit., pp. 140-41.

7 Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1951, Publication Division, Government of India, p. 9.

The third constituent of the Backward Classes is the 'Other Backward Class.' Who these groups are and how they are to be selected are debatable issues because the Indian Constitution has not defined them. The Article 340 of the Constitution leaves it to the Commission to be appointed under it. In Article 15(4) and 16(4) the term 'Backward Class,' however, has been used to denote the socially and educationally backward classes of citizens. In the absence of a precise definition in the Constitution the task of defining the 'other Backward Classes' was left to the discretion of different states, subject to a judicial review, if the provision of 'equality of opportunity' was to be violated.

The Denotified Communities consist of certain nomadic 'ex-criminal' castes and tribes such as Sansias, Sonarias, Doms, Nuts, Bhatus, Bedyars, Budubudu Kulas and Kepumaries. Prior to the Independence they were classified as criminal tribes according to the Criminal Tribes Act, 1924. The members of this group, irrespective of their personal commitments, were branded as criminals. After the independence the Government found it irrational to consider the entire community as criminal. The Criminal Tribes Act Enquiry Committee was appointed in 1949, and, as a result of its recommendations, the Criminal Tribes Act, 1924, was repealed throughout India with effect from 31st August 1952 by the Criminal Tribes Laws (Repeal) Act, 1952. After passing of this act, the members of this community ceased to be treated

as criminals and were instead called as 'ex-criminal tribes.'⁸ From 1955 onwards they are being termed as 'Denotified Communities' on the recommendation of Backward Classes Commission headed by Kaka Kalelkar.

Constitutional Provisions for the Backward Classes

Reservation facility is being provided to the backward classes and other minorities ever since the British days. The term 'Backward Classes' first acquired a technical meaning in the Princely State of Mysore.⁹ In 1918, the Maharaja of Mysore appointed a Committee under the chairmanship of Sir Leslie Miller to look into the problem of adequate representation of 'backward communities in the government services. The Committee submitted its report in 1921 and recommended all the non-Brahmin castes (which constituted 94 percent of the total population in the state) to be placed in the backward ^{caste} category and accordingly be given reservation in the government services.¹⁰

In 1919, the Government of India Act (Montagu Chelmsford Reforms) gave representation to the minority communities in the Provincial Legislature and provided safeguards to them in public services by reserving a certain percentage of posts. The benefitted sections were the Sikhs, Muslims, Depressed Classes and other minorities.¹¹ Again,

8. Report of the Backward Classes Commission,
Government of India Press, Simla, 1955, pp. 34-36.

9 See Galanter, *op.cit.*, p. 1813.

10 V. Umesh, A Sociological Study of the Backward Castes Movement in Karnataka with special reference to the post-independence period, Unpublished M.Phil dissertation, CSSS, SSS, JNU, 1980, pp. 34-35.

11 Ratna G. Revankar, *op.cit.*, p. 69.

in 1930, the British Government decided to create 'separate electorate' for the depressed classes like the Muslims, who had separate electorates since 1909. Thus, the British Government, by giving these concessions to the minorities, wanted to strengthen their position.

Gandhiji vehemently opposed the policy of separate electorates, for it would create a division in the Indian society. B.R. Ambedkar, the leader of the 'Depressed Classes' on the other hand, supported the policy. Gandhiji, in order to press his demand, went on "Fast unto death." However, after some rethinking, Ambedkar had an agreement with Gandhiji (Poona Pact 1932) and he gave his consent to the proposed increase in the number of reserved seats for the depressed classes in the legislature.

Consequently, the Government of India Act of 1935 provided reservation to the minorities and the backward classes. But the constitution of Independent India decided to discontinue communal reservation of seats, with the exception of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. However, a time limit of ten years was imposed for discontinuation of reservation facility to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.¹²

In the Constitution, there are some provisions (Articles 16(4) and 335) for the upliftment of the Scheduled

12 Ibid, p. 82.

Castes and Tribes and other Backward Classes by reserving seats for them in Parliament (Lok Sabha only), state assemblies, public services and the educational institutions. Thus, the $12\frac{1}{2}$ percent of the vacancies are to be filled in by the Scheduled Caste candidates through the direct recruitment on all-India basis. This is to be done through an open competition to be conducted either by the Union Public Service Commission or by any other authority. In the event of recruitment through other than open competition, the percentage of reservation for the Scheduled Castes shall be $16\frac{1}{2}$ percent of the total post available at a time. Similarly, for the Scheduled Tribes both for recruitment by open competition and otherwise than by open competition, the reservation shall be 5 percent of the vacancies filled in by direct recruitment.

The reservation order also applies to the vacancies filled in through the limited competitive tests open only to the departmental candidates. Besides, the Scheduled Castes and the tribes are entitled to age relaxation by five years, relaxation in the standard of suitability, preferences in promotion and reduction in fees for any examination.

As regards 'Other Backward Classes,' the constitution does not provide any clear-cut reservation facility for them. Article 340 of the Constitution contains a provision for the 'socially and educationally backward classes' and authorises the President of India to appoint a Commission to investigate and report on their conditions in different parts of the

country. Article 340 reads:

- " (1) The President may by order appoint a Commission consisting of such persons as he thinks fit to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes within the territory of India and the difficulties under which they labour and to make recommendations as to the steps that should be taken by the union or any state to remove such difficulties and to improve their condition and as to the grants that should be made for the purpose by the Union or any state and the conditions subject to which such grants should be made, and the order appointing such commission shall define the procedure to be followed by the commission.
- (2) Commission so appointed shall investigate the matters referred to them and present to the President a report setting out the facts as found by them and making such recommendations as they think proper.
- (3) The President shall cause a copy of the report so presented together with a memorandum explaining the action taken thereon to be laid before each house of parliament."

The Kaka Kalelkar Commission

The President of India on January 22, 1953, appointed a Backward Classes Commission under the chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar with the following terms of reference:¹³

- (a) To determine the criterion to be adopted in considering whether any sections of the people in the territory of India (in addition to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, specified by notification issued under Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution) should be treated as socially and educationally backward classes; and in accordance with such criteria, prepare a list of such classes setting out their approximate numbers and their territorial distribution;

13 Memorandum on the Report of the Backward Classes Commission, 1956, p. 1,

- (b) To investigate the conditions of all such socially and educationally backward classes and the difficulties under which they labour.

The Commission submitted its report on March 30, 1955.

It listed 2399 communities all over the country which were considered socially and educationally backward. The criteria of their backwardness, suggested by the Commission were:

- (1) Low social position in the traditional caste hierarchy of the Hindu society;
- (2) Lack of general educational advancement among the major section of a caste or community;
- (3) Inadequate representation in Government services; and
- (4) Inadequate representation in the field of trade, commerce and industry.¹⁴

However, the report, due to considerable divergence of opinion among its members treated the status of caste as the basis of backwardness.¹⁵ The Commission recommended application of "generous preference" for backward classes in class I and II services and 49 percent reservation for all the backward classes in Class III and Class IV services.¹⁶

The Government of India found the recommendations of the Commission impracticable and decided on 14th August, 1961 not to provide reservation to the backward classes on the basis of caste, as it would perpetuate the existing caste

14 Report of the Backward Classes Commission, op.cit., para 25, p. 46.

15 See G.P. Verma, op.cit., p. 28.

16 Report of the Backward Classes Commission, op.cit., pp. VIII-IX.

distinctions. It, however, directed all the state governments to give all assistance mainly scholarships to the educationally backward people.

As per the direction of the central government, many state governments went ahead with appointing committees and commissions to study the condition of backward classes and fix a definite criteria for identification of their backwardness. Thus, some states decided caste while others considered economic condition as the basis of backwardness. When in some of the Southern states reservation for the backward classes was introduced, the matter was challenged in High Courts and the Supreme Court. In some cases the courts also turned down the government orders. For instance, in 1962 the Supreme Court struck down the Mysore Government order which provided 68 percent reservation to the backward classes on the basis of the recommendations of the Nagan Gowda Committee. Reason the court gave was that the government order violated the fundamental right of the equality of opportunity enshrined in the Constitution.¹⁷ In 1964 also in another case (Devadasan vs. Government of India) the Supreme Court gave the ruling that reservation in government services cannot exceed 50 per cent of the total jobs available.

Reservation for 'Other' Backward Classes in Different States of India.

The other backward classes have been provided with the varieties of reservation facilities in the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala,

¹⁷ M.R. Balaji vs. State of Mysore Case, Supreme Court, See G.P. Verma, op.cit., p. 111.

U.P. etc. The percentage of reservation ranged from 15 to 68 in the various states. But there was no unanimity with regard to the determination of criterion of backwardness. Though the Kaka Kalelkar Commission recommended caste criterion, the central government and several state governments refused to give reservation solely on the basis of caste. The state governments, therefore, applied many tests of backwardness, viz., economic condition, literacy, social position and occupation. It is significant to note at this juncture that whenever reservation was given to the backward classes (excluding the Scheduled Castes and Tribes), the matter has been taken to the courts which sometimes upheld and the other time struck down the Government orders. Hence, criteria to determine the backwardness have differed from region to region and state to state.

Another significant development which has taken place in the past related to flowing of the Supreme Court ruling¹⁸ regarding reservation in public services not exceeding 50 percent. For instance, in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, 68 percent of the seats in government offices and educational institutions have been reserved for the other backward classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

With this background, we proceed on to trace the history of reservation for the other backward classes in Bihar and

18 Devadasan vs. Government of India Case, Supreme Court, 1964.

and thereafter to analyse the controversy in the wake of announcement of the government decision to reserve 26 per cent seats for these classes in public services and educational institutions in the state.

Reservation for Other Backward Classes in Bihar

The history of the backward classes reservation in Bihar can be traced back to the year 1951 when the state government prepared two lists of the economically and socially backward classes comprising of the Hindu as well as Muslim caste groups.¹⁹ The first list (Annexure I) included 78 'more backward' Hindu and Muslim castes like Dhanuk, Hajjam, Kahar and Mullah. The second list (Annexure II) comprised of 30 'less backward' classes like Banias, Koeris, Kurmis, and Yadavas who were economically quite sound but politically not as influential as were the four upper castes.²⁰ Apart from the list prepared by the state government, the Kaka Kalelkar Commission had listed 126 other backward classes for Bihar state.²¹

19 Thakur Prasad, Bihar Arakshan Niyamavli (Hindi) Departmental Publication Sales Centre, New Secretariat, Patna, 1978, p. 25.25

20 Harry W. Blair, 'Rising Kulaks and Backward Classes in Bihar: social change in the late 1970's' Economic and Political Weekly, January 12, 1980, p. 64.

21 Report of the Kaka Kalelkar Commission, vol. II, (lists), Govt. of India Press, New Delhi, 1955, pp. 16-22.

These lists were prepared, keeping in view the need of special assistance, including the educational assistance to be given by the government to the backward classes. Yet no follow up action was taken on the part of the state government for upliftment of such sections.

In 1961 an independent study group headed by late Jaya Prakash Narayan, the Sarvodaya leader, explored the possibility of provision of reservation for educationally and socially backward classes of Bihar. The report of the group favoured reservation and emphasised economic criterion (income of a person) for determination of the backwardness.²²

Meanwhile, the list of the backward classes prepared by the state government in 1951 was challenged in the Patna High Court. After much discussion the court declared in 1964 the list to be unconstitutional, for it had taken into account the caste criterion for determining the backwardness rather than education or income.²³

During the period 1964-1970, the state government did not take any formal step to uplift the backward classes. Certain 'less' backward caste leaders (those belonging to Annexure II) were gradually becoming influential on the

22 See K.K. Katyal, 'Politics of job reservation,' The Hindu, Madras, March 20, 1978.

23 Harry W. Blair, op.cit., p. 65.

political scene but they ignored the matter. The activities of caste associations of the Yadavas, Kurmis and the Koeris went on as usual. The backward castes, as a whole had some expectation from B.P. Mandal, the first backward caste chief-minister of Bihar, but he was unable to do something significant for their welfare due to his short stay (47 days) in power, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

Another reason of disinterestedness on the part of state government was probably the period of political instability which saw the rise and fall of the nine governments between 1967 and 1971.

The Mungeri Lal Commission

In 1971 the state government appointed a Backward Classes Commission under the chairmanship of Mungeri Lal to look into the condition of the backward classes in Bihar and accordingly to recommend measures for their upliftment. The interesting point to note here is that the Commission was appointed by the Congress(R) Government, headed by Bhola Paswan Shastri, who himself comes from a Scheduled Caste (Dusadh).

Besides the chairmen, 20 members were nominated on the Commission. Soon the state government realised that 20 members Commission would be too big. Hence, it was decided on 25th June, 1971, to have a seven member Commission under the chairmanship of Mungeri Lal. Rest

six members were Abdul Qayyum Ansari, Dhanik Lal Mandal, Devsharan Singh, Karam Chand Bhagat, Vaidyanath Das and Yamuna Prasad Singh. The notification of its appointment was done on 23rd December 1971 and the Commission was asked to submit its report by 31st December 1972.

The Commission did an in-depth study of the condition of the backward classes in Bihar. The members toured some of the southern states also to get details of welfare programmes for the upliftment of the backward classes and castes. The Commission submitted its interim report in February 1973 and the final report in February 1976.

Following the recommendations of the Kaka Lalekar Commission, the Mungeri Lal Commission decided caste as the basis of the backwardness. It brought out two lists of the backward castes.²⁴ The first list included 128 'Other Backward Classes' in the state, while the second one comprised of 94 'Most Backward Castes.' Here, it is interesting to note that those included in the first list were declared as the backward 'classes' (although they were castes) and those in the second list were considered as the backward castes.²⁵

The Commission gave a number of recommendations for the welfare of the backward classes in the state. Important among them were a uniform reservation of 33 percent for the socially and educationally backward castes and classes listed in the state government Departments. (It was besides

24 See Thakur Prasad, op.cit., pages ४, ७, १, ५, ६
 25 For a complete list of the Backward Classes in Bihar, see Appendices II and III.

14 percent reservation for the Harijans and 10 percent for the Adivasis in Bihar) and creation of a separate ministry for the backward classes.

Consequently, the 'other' backward classes in the state became quite optimistic about reservation for them in government services but the then Congress government in the state headed by Jagannath Mishra, did not implement the report. Owing to the state of Emergency all over the country, no one from the backward classes dared to raise the matter. Moreover, all important opposition leaders were put in jail during the emergency.

The year 1977 brought a ray of hope for those aspiring for the implementation of the recommendations regarding reservation. In the month of January, the Emergency was relaxed and Lok Sabha elections were announced. Five major opposition parties joined hands to form the Janata Party in order to provide a viable alternative to the Congress(R) party. The Janata Party promised in its manifesto, 25 to 33 percent reservation for the backward classes in government services. This was in keeping with the wishes of late Ram Manohar Lohia²⁶, the Socialist leader, who had demanded 60 percent reservation for the Backward Classes and women in government services.

In 1977 the elections were fought for the first time, not on the basis of caste but the major issue was the

26 Ram Manohar Lohia, The Caste System. Navahind, Hyderabad, 1964.

Emergency. It brought about temporary unity among all caste groups in Bihar which sided with the Janata Party. Still some chunks of the Brahmins and the Yadavas stayed with Mrs Gandhi's Congress Party. The middle range castes played significant role in the victory of the Janata Party in the state. Later the party could sweep the state Assembly polls too. The Rajputs in the Janata Party emerged as the largest caste groups in new state Assembly with 40 members, followed by the Yadaves (30) and Bhumihars (28).

Soon after the swearing-in ceremony of the new members, new caste equations began operating. The middle range or the backward caste groups won the first round of battle for implementation of the provision of reservation, when Karpoozi Thakur (Hajjam by caste) defeated Satya Narayan Sinha (a Rajput) in the contest for the state chief ministership. The upper castes became furious on knowing the result. A new alignment of the upper castes started inside the Janata Party. The middle range castes could sense it and the mobilisation of their legislators also began to tackle the upper caste challenge in coming future. Thus, the same people who had united earlier under the banner of the Janata Party to contest the elections, after giving up caste considerations, started thinking and acting on caste lines.

The upper castes became quite apprehensive about Karpoozi Thakur's pledge to give reservation^{to}/the backward

classes in the state government services. Here, it may be added that none of the upper caste leaders took serious note of the proposed for the backward classes reservation promised in the Janata Party Manifesto. Probably they thought that it was just like any other political gimmick to win the elections and that it would never be fulfilled by the Janata Government.

The plan of the Karpoori Thakur government to reserve the seats for the backward classes in government services on the basis of the Mungeri Lal Commission's report was made public²⁷ on 29th June 1977, when the state Governor made a mention of it in his address to the newly elected legislators.²⁷ With his announcement began a cold war between the upper and the middle range castes. Although swords were not drawn at each other, in the absence of a government order on reservation, yet the upper castes anticipated threat to their dominance in different spheres, if such a policy was to be implemented.

Hence, on 12th November 1977, the state Cabinet met to discuss the proposed reservation for the members of the backward classes.²⁸ After a prolonged discussion, the cabinet authorised the chief minister to take a decision

27 Thakur Prasad, op.cit., p. JT

28 See The Indian Nation, Patna, November 13, 1977.

on the matter. At this stage, however, no percentage was fixed. The chief minister expressed satisfaction and stated that he would meet Jaya Prakash Narayan soon to know his views on the issue. By now, it became crystal clear that the state government would go ahead with the reservation proposal. Gradually, the masses belonging to the upper and middle range castes started developing bitterness towards each other.

Karpoori Thakur encashed his reservation formula finally on the eve of the Phulparas Assembly constituency by-election from where he was seeking election to the State Assembly.²⁹ While campaigning in this constituency in the month of December 1977, he announced the state government's decision to give 26 percent reservation to the backward classes (middle range castes) as recommended by the Mungeri Lal Commission. The constituency had a majority of the middle caste voters who were certain to support Karpoori Thakur and he won the election comfortably as expected.

Public Reaction

So far, only proposal of job reservation was made public and no date of its implementation was announced by the chief minister. The announcement of the proposal was followed by a series of confrontations between the upper and the middle range castes. The state legislators

29 Karpoori Thakur resigned from Lok Sabha after becoming chief minister of the state in June 1977. He sought election to the state assembly from Phulparas constituency to avoid any constitutional crisis.

started uniting on caste lines. Political affiliations were over-riden by the caste affiliations. Street fights involving upper and backward castes began to be witnessed all over the state. The clashes were no longer confined to the urban areas. The rural areas soon came under its grip. Anti reservationists started damaging public and private property to show their protest against 'divide and rule' policy of the state government. Entire educational and administrative system in the state started getting paralysed.

The upper castes protested against the reservation policy because of the fact that their 'share' of government jobs was to be taken away by what they called 'less competent' backward caste men. They argued that under the new scheme reservation benefits would not go to the backward classes (as provided in the Constitution), but to certain affluent classes like the Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris who were economically and numerically stronger than some of the upper castes like the Brahmins and Kayasthas. Such backward castes did not require any governmental assistance or protection in the opinion of the anti-reservationists. Therefore, they put forward the economic criterion for determination of the backwardness.

In the other hand, the pre-reservationists fully supported the government's decision to consider caste for determining the backwardness. They argued that only reservation policy could emancipate millions of the backwards from their centuries-old exploitation by the upper castes.

They opined that the upper caste minority (15 percent of the total population in the state), was occupying 85 percent of the government posts ever since the separation of the state from Bengal. On their view, many of the castes belonging to Annexure I (more backwards) did not have any representation in the state government services and other public institutions. Therefore, it was now their turn to enjoy the fruits of development.

The upper and the middle caste confrontation had its impact also on the politics in the state. The members of the ruling Janata Party started fighting against each other openly, giving rise to the phenomenon of dissidence. Many of the upper caste M.L.A.'s started working for the ouster of Karpoori Thakur. About 80 Janata legislators sent telegrams to the party President on March 14, 1978, threatening to resign, if the government went ahead with the implementation of the reservation proposal.³⁰ All this gave the impression that widespread indiscipline existed in the ruling party.

Tension Situation

The situation, thus, became very tense by March 1978. The upper castes who were opposing reservation, formed the "Forward League" while the backward castes united under the banner of the "Backward Classes Federation." Both the organizations started staging demonstrations and dharnas in support of their respective demands. The latter was bitterly

30 The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, March 15, 1978.

critical of Jaya Prakash Narayan for his reported statement in favour of the economic criterion for reservation. The fact of the matter was that J.P. was misquoted by the press. He clarified it in his interview with HIMMAT, a Bombay weekly. He commented, "Caste alone should not be the criterion of reservation. Alongwith caste, there should also be the economic factor taken into account. It is not right to say that I emphasised only the economic aspect." ³¹

(The Backward Classes Federation under the leadership of Ram Avadhesh Singh, an M.P. (Janata) intensified its action to press the demand of expediting the implementation of reservation scheme for the backward classes. The Federation leaders ensured the full support to the chief minister and held demonstrations on February 21 at sub-divisional level and on February 28 at the district level. The demonstrations by the anti-reservationists too continued. All this put the state government in a dilemma.

The Backward Classes Federation created widespread disturbance in the Amrit Mahotsava Function held on March 12, 1978 in Patna in honour of Jaya Prakash Narayan. Anti-J.P. and pro-Karpoori Thakur slogans were shouted by the militant backward caste youth. George Fernandes and Jagjivan Ram, the senior union ministers were assaulted and

31 See Neerja Choudhury, 'Jole reservation in Bihar shapening the battle lines,' HIMMAT, Bombay, vol. 15, No.21, March 23, 1979, p. 21.

prevented from attending the function.³² Ram Avadhesh Singh went to the extent of considering J.P. as the silent leader of the anti-reservation movement in India. He further stated that if the state government did not accept their demand, they would start Satyagraha all over the state.

The volunteers of the Federation started courting arrest and by the 13th of March more than 300 of them were in the police custody. The tense situation prevailed in many towns like Patna, Arrah, Chapra and Muzaffarpur. Due to violence in the town, Patna University was declared closed. In Muzaffarpur also all the government offices stopped from functioning.³³ To maintain an atmosphere of peace, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the Janata Yuva Morcha and Chhatra Sangharsh Samiti abandoned their plan to demonstrate in front of the state assembly. Meanwhile, Sushila Sahai, a minister in the Karpoori Government, resigned in protest against the disturbance caused at the Amrit Mahotsava function.³⁴

Further, on 14th March 1978, a violent youth rally of the Backward Classes Federation clashed with the police in Patna. Police resorted to lathi charge in which more than 100 persons received injuries. The entire state capital got

³² See Indian Express, New Delhi, March 14, 1978 and The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, March 15, 1978.

³³ Indian Express, New Delhi, March 14, 1978.


³⁴ The Times of India, New Delhi, March 15, 1978.

³⁵ Ibid.

disturbed. The Federation volunteers received full support from Bholu Prasad Singh, another Janata M.P., who defended the state government's stand on reservation.³⁵

The state of tension mounted in Saran, Vaishali, Muzaffarpur, Samastipur and Begusarai. Frequent fights involving the upper and backward castes were witnessed. Train services were disrupted in Samastipur division of the North Eastern railway. In Sindri two groups of students were involved in physical confrontation. A complete 'Bandh' was observed in Chapra town. Patna, Gaya and Aurangabad were in a spate of disturbance. In Ranchi, a huge demonstration was taken out by the students against the reservation policy. In the state capital, the Forward League took out a procession of Patna University students in which the following slogans were shouted: 'Jaya Prakash Narayan Zindabad,' 'Take Back Reservation' and 'Forward-Harijan Unity Zindabad.' As a safety measure, the state government declared closure of the Universities of Patna, Ranchi, Magadh and Bihar on 15th March 1978.³⁶

The state cabinet, took stock of the tense situation in an emergency meeting on March 16. However, no solution was found. The chief minister claimed in a press conference that there was no caste war in Bihar and that there was

36  The Hindustan Times, New Delhi,
March 16, 1978.

no rift between him and J.P. on the issue of reservation.³⁷

On 18th March, the Backward Classes Federation gave a call of the 'Bihar Bundh' to put pressure on the government. Despite large scale mobilisation by them, the Bundh flopped. The life all over the state was normal. All the government offices and shops opened for the day.³⁸ The same day, 'Democratic Socialist Lawyers Forum' of Bihar made a plea to refer the reservation issue to the Supreme Court.

The chief minister, however, did not pay any attention to the demands of the anti-reservationists. Instead, he stuck to the job reservation scheme. On 20th March he announced in Patna that the proposal would be implemented from the next financial year (i.e. from 1st April 1978). The chief minister pointed out also that he was considering a proposal of CPI(M) that a ceiling on income should be fixed in categorising the individuals who might qualify for the benefit of reservation.³⁹

The Modified Reservation Plan

A modified job quota plan⁴⁰ was announced by the Bihar government on 21st March 1978. According to it, 12 per cent of the seats in the government offices will be reserved for individuals belonging to Annexure I (the most backwards) and

37 Ibid.

38 Sunday Standard, New Delhi, March 19, 1978.

39 The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, March 21, 1978.

40 The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, March 22, 1978.

8 percent reservation was to be given to the people from Annexure II (the less backwards like Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris). An income limit of rs.1000 per month was fixed for the beneficiaries. Besides, 3 percent reservation was assured for the economically weaker people from the upper castes.⁴¹ It is interesting to note that in the case of the first two groups, the reservation was on the basis of caste while in the case of the third group it was to be given on the basis of economic condition. By doing so, probably the state government wanted to please all the sections of people.

Further, on 22nd March 1978, the state cabinet in a meeting decided that 'preference' upto 10 percent in 'general list' of selected candidates for the various posts in the government services could be given to the women.⁴²

The Second Phase of Agitation

The announcement of the modified proposal of reservation not only annoyed the general people but differences also developed among the state cabinet members. The flames of casteism began to be fanned, once again, by the supporters and opponents of job reservation. However, this time the caste groups belonging to the Annexure II were not happy with the government, as only 8 percent reservation was to be given to them, while for the backwards in Annexure I, 12 percent seats were to be reserved. Secondly, the leaders of the less

41 The modified formula was contained in the Governor's address to the joint session of the state legislature.

42 The Times of India, New Delhi, 23rd March, 1978.

backward castes were not pleased with the Government's decision to reserve the rest 6 percent seats for the economically weak upper castes (3%) and the women (3%). It was contrary to the promise made by the chief minister in December 1977, for providing 26 percent reservation for the backward classes. These leaders further opined that no reservation be extended to the ritually and educationally advanced upper castes who had been exploiting the lower castes for a long time.

Meanwhile, Karpoori Thakur lost some of his supporters from among the backward castes listed in Annexure II, for he had shown special favour to the backward castes listed in Annexure I (to which he himself belonged), in giving them major share of reservation. Thus, a number of caste based factions started operating within the ruling party. The upper caste M.L.A.s, by and large, agreed to work for the ouster of Karpoori Thakur from the chief ministership. The Forward League led by Lamjatan Sinha, a Janata M.L.A., decided on 27th March to hold an anti-reservation massive rally on 31st March before the state assembly.⁴³

The Holi festival on 27th March brought about temporary respite to the state. People forgot caste feelings for a few hours. J.P., on sensing the tense atmosphere, appealed to all concerned to explore a compromise solution. He stated, "A satisfactory solution is possible in atmosphere of social

peace. Then only we can remove Bihar's poverty and backwardness,"⁴⁴ Ram Avadesh Singh, who had earlier denounced the modification in the reservation scheme, once again opposed J.P.'s stand on the reservation issue. However, the state chief minister gave a serious thought to J.P.'s advice.

Postponment of Implementation of Reservation Scheme

The chief minister declared on 30th March 1978 that "The decision to give reservation to the backward classes from April 1, 1978 would be kept in abeyance for the time being in deference to the wishes of Sri Jaya Prakash Narayan."⁴⁵ He also made it public that the central leadership of the Janata Party also favoured postponment of implementation, for reasons of reconsidering it in a calm and quiet atmosphere. To avoid further trouble both the houses of the state legislature were adjourned sine-die much in advance. Chandrasekhar, the Janata Party president announced that he alongwith Nanaji Deshmukh and Madhu Limaye, the general secretaries of the party, would be coming to Patna to discuss the reservation matter with the partymen and J.P. before taking a final decision.

The volunteers of the Forward League, However, demonstrated outside the state assembly on 31st March, despite the government's

44 See Ishwari Prasad, 'Job reservation for backwards in Bihar,' Janata, April 23, 1978, p. 11.

45 See the Hindustan Times, New Delhi, March 31, 1978.

decision to postpone the implementation of the proposed job reservation. Adequate police arrangements were made by the State Government to control the anti-reservationists. However, in the student-police confrontation outside the state secretariat and in other parts of the state hundreds of students were injured and three persons were killed. In Patna, a post office was put on fire by the angry students. The police did not spare even the M.L.A.'s. Four of them belonging to the ruling party were put in jail for their opposition to the Government's stand on reservation. The Patna High Court advocates Association lodged a strong protest against lathi-charge on the demonstrating students.⁴⁶

Further, on the eve of arrival of the senior Janata leaders in Patna the Congress(I) party put forward twin criteria of reservation. The party leader, Jagannath Mishra pointed out, "Both caste and income should be the bases for giving reservation to the Backward Classes in Bihar."⁴⁷ The Janata Party president accompanied by the general secretaries of the party arrived in Patna on 2nd April to explore the possibility of an amicable solution to the reservation problem. He had detailed meetings with the state chief minister, the party legislators and J.P. but failed to solve the matter. It was decided to discuss the matter at the centre level. He declared that a settlement

46 The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 1st April, 1978.

47 The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 2nd April, 1978.

would be in the offing within ten days and that the job quota scheme might be further modified to make it acceptable to all the sections.⁴⁸ In the meantime, forty backward ^{class} MLAs appealed to Morarji Desai, the Prime Minister, to expel the legislators and party workers who were opposing the proposal of job reservation.⁴⁹

This appeal clearly manifested the extent to which infighting was going on within the ruling party. Caste interests were being served at the cost of party interest, as discussed earlier. The parties in opposition, later on, were to gain from such dissident activity.

The key to resolve the crisis was no longer with the state government. There was a complete deadlock. Such a situation attracted interesting comments from the press. A Delhi based newspaper commented in its Editorial, "The State Government's ill-advised public commitment to reserve 26 percent of jobs for 'Backward Classes' provides a classic example of how to create a problem and then look for a solution. Whatever it may, eventually be in this case, the solution is likely to cause more problems."⁵⁰

While the matter of job reservation was kept pending in the Janata headquarter in New Delhi, Bihar witnessed

48 The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, April 3, 1978.

49 The Statesman, New Delhi, April 3, 1978.

50 Indian Express, New Delhi, April 4, 1978.

fresh disturbance, looting and violence by anti and pro reservationists. Educational institutions reopened on 3rd April 1978 after the Holi holidays to add to the already explosive situation. Disturbances were reported from the places like Patna, Singhwara, Samastipur and Madhubani. In Mokamah there was direct confrontation between the supporters and the opponents of reservation.⁵¹ The Bihar cabinet in a special meeting held in Delhi, endorsed the principle of quota in jobs. This meant that the upper caste cabinet members too gave their consent to the modified proposal of reservation. Thus, it was clear by 5th April 1978 that a committee would be appointed to look into the reservation matter and break the deadlock as soon as possible.

The Shanti Bhushan Committee

The Committee announced on 5th April 1978 was to be headed by Shanti Bhushan, the then Union law minister and six legislators from Bihar were to be duly represented on it. However, the very next day, it was realised that the Committee was very small for a big problem like reservation. The Committee was therefore enlarged to 26 members, including eight cabinet members from Bihar. Members were to have the first meeting on April 17 to re-examine the entire issue.⁵²

51 See The Indian Nation, Patna, April 4, 1978.

52 The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 7th April, 1978.

Consequently, several Janata leaders wrote to the Committee putting forward the following arguments against reservation: (a) announcement of the proposal for job reservation was politically motivated, (b) economic condition rather than caste should be the criterion of backwardness, and (c) fifty percent reservation of government posts would adversely affect, in the long run, the administrative efficiency in the state.⁵³

Before the first meeting of the Committee, violence escalated in the state. Section 144 was imposed in the entire Gaya town on 6th April to contain violence. Patna University and its colleges were closed again after the situation became out of control. Patna Law college office was set on fire. Train and bus services were badly affected all over the state. On 7th April, Bihar University was declared closed and the Intermediate examinations in Magadh University had to be put-off. On 9th April, the MBBS examinations of Patna University were also postponed. Due to frequent attacks on rail property, police patrolling on tracks was resorted to.⁵⁴

The anti-reservation protest took a dramatic turn on 15th April 1978 when a bomb was thrown at pro-reservation demonstration in Samastipur. About 20 persons were hurt in

53 See P.C. Gandhi, 'Job reservation: invitation to anarchy,' *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, Bombay, December 24, 1978, p. 39.

54 See The Indian Nation, Patna, 14th and 15th April 1978.

in the incident. Similarly, about 40 and more persons sustained injuries during the disturbances in the different parts of the state. It was reported in a section of press that the state government, on sensing the seriousness of the situation, was going to impose punitive fines in the caste-riot hit areas. People in the state were eagerly waiting for the outcome of the first meeting of the Shanti Bhushan committee.

The Committee met on 17th April in Delhi and held wide ranging discussion on the reservation quota. A new basis was evolved to resolve the controversy over the job reservation. It had combination of social, educational and economic criteria for determining the backwardness for the purposes of reservation. The Shanti Bhushan formula suggested reservation of 11 percent jobs for the backward castes belonging to the Annexure I, 3 percent for the backward castes listed in Annexure II, 3 percent to the other backwards, 4 percent for the economically backward people (from upper castes) and 5 percent for women.⁵⁵ Altogether, 26 percent jobs were to be reserved, in addition to 14 percent reservation for the Scheduled Castes and 10 percent for the Scheduled Tribes.

The details of the meeting and the report were kept secret by the committee. Hence, the date of handing over the report to the Janata President could not be known. Probably the party leadership wanted to prevent further

55 The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, April 18 and November 2, 1978.

confrontations on the matter. In the meantime, Ramanand Tiwari (a Brahmin), a senior Janata M.P., in a strong and detailed letter to the Prime-Minister considered the situation in Bihar 'explosive' and highlighted the phenomenon of casteism which had weakened the administrative structure all over the state. In order to resolve the crisis, he advocated the twin criteria of income and caste for giving reservation.⁵⁶

While mystery prevailed over the report of the Shanti Bhushan Committee in political circles, street fights involving the upper and middle castes continued. The Janata Party office in Sitamarhi was set on fire by the angry crowd. In Daltonganj, the G.L.A. College building was set on fire by the anti-reservation students. Disturbances were also reported from Bhojpur, Bettiah, Nowadah, Palamau, Darbhanga, Patna, Bikramganj, Bihta, Begusarai, Ranchi, Barahni and Giridh. Many of the districts were under section 144 in order to curb anti-job quota protests.⁵⁷ Those opposing reservation did not spare even the state ministers. For instance, Thakur Prasad Singh, the education minister in the Karpoori Thakur government, was humiliated by the anti-reservation students in Muzaffarpur. The minister on his arrival in the town airport was prevented from using the Government car and was forced to walk on foot.⁵⁸ This showed the

56 National Herald, New Delhi, April 19, 1978.

57 The Indian Nation, Patna, May 4, 1978.

58 The Indian Nation, Patna, May 7, 1978.

hostility of the people who were going to be affected on account of job reservation.

The Backward Castes too were amazed at the silence on the part of state government. The chief minister, on the other hand, wanted to implement the proposal of reservation as soon as possible keeping in view the Panchayat, Assembly and the Lok Sabha bye-elections in which the caste certainly was going to be decisive factor. He was eagerly waiting for a green signal from Chandra Sekhar who did not want to take a hasty decision about a sensitive issue like reservation.

Thus, the Panchayat elections in the summer of 1978 were fought exclusively on the basis of caste. Students, after the closure of educational institutions, took active part in these elections. It was an occasion to 'show strength' and none of the caste groups lagged behind. Hundreds of people lost their lives and more than one thousand sustained injuries. However, the government officials claimed that sixty persons died and 452 received injuries in clashes during the elections.⁵⁹

At this juncture, it seems pertinent to analyse the arguments put forward by the supporters and opponents of the reservation policy, for having still a clear picture of the entire controversy.

Pro-Reservation Arguments

The Backward Classes or middle castes justified the

government's decision to give them reservation on the basis of caste. They considered themselves socially and educationally backward communities and therefore, were in need of the governmental support and protection. They argued that the upper castes were not only ritually superior but they also dominated in all spheres of life. Due to this, the backward castes and classes were subjected to many economic and social hardships. Upper castes, who constituted 15 per cent of the state population, controlled 85 percent of the government jobs, while the backward classes (SCs, STs and OBCs) constituting 85 percent of the population in the state just had 10 percent of the jobs.⁶⁰ It was a clear case of unequal distribution of government jobs, in the opinion of the backward castes. Grabbing of a job in the government office brings dignity and social prestige to a person in Bihar. Therefore, there is always tough competition for it.

Referring to the economically weak upper castes, who demanded reservation on economic grounds, Siyaram Yadav, a Backward Class MLA pointed out, "Sixty percent of the forward castes are below the poverty line in Bihar. But there is an important difference which must be understood. A Brahmin beggar with sandal paste on his forehead, who sits in a temple, will get more money, more importance, he will get respectability and be allowed entry into homes. But a Chamar beggar will hardly be treated in similar fashion."⁶¹

60 National Herald, New Delhi, March 24, 1978.

61 See Neerja Choudhury, op.cit., p. 19.

The middle castes needed protection from government (in form of reservation) against the partisan attitude shown by upper caste men in educational institutions, government offices and the judiciary. They opined that the upper castes always favoured their men, as a result of which they had to suffer. Ram Avadhesh Singh, the chairman of Backward Classes Federation argued, " It is a cobweb of 1000 upper caste families from where the judiciary is selected. Of the 27 judges of Patna High Court, not one belongs to the backward or the Scheduled Castes. Yet today there are about 50 practising advocates belonging to these communities. But instead, those in their late thirties from the upper castes are being appointed judges, they will remain there for the next twenty years. " ⁶²

Reservation facility was to help the 'most' backward sections (of Annexure I) in the state in terms of their representation in educational institutions, professional colleges and government services. As they lagged behind in different spheres, some sort of government sponsored mobility device was needed to uplift them.

According to the backward castes, the argument that the reservation for them would lead to inefficiency in administration and lowering of standard of educational institutions, was baseless. In their opinion, the

administrative efficiency could be ensured only if all the caste groups were adequately represented in it. So far, the backward castes and classes were not given due opportunity by the upper castes, who claimed to be more competent.⁶³

Above all, the job reservation was considered by the backward castes as a means to capture political power, which again, was under the grip of the upper castes. After the abolition of the Zamindari system, the various middle range castes strengthened their hold in rural areas and gradually started posing threat to the supremacy of the upper castes. In the opinion of Ram Avadhesh Singh, very soon entire North India was to come under the wave of the backward castes.

Arguments of Anti-Reservationists

The upper castes who showed their strong opposition to the caste based reservation, put forward the economic criterion for categorising the backward classes. They were not against reservation as such. In their view, the caste based reservation, which was not accepted by the central government in the fifties, would adversely affect the interests of certain upper castes, who depended on the government services for earning their livelihood. They argued that hardly any state had considered only the caste criterion. Alongwith caste, economic, educational and professional backwardness of the people were to be taken into

63 See Ishwari Prasad, op.cit., p. 9.

account for giving reservation. The upper castes, further argued that not all of them were economically well-off. Ritual superiority did not ensure sound economic condition. "A poor Brahmin and a poor Backward have poverty in common and the state would be unfair if a poor backward is helped and a poor Brahmin is ignored, or if a Brahmin is aided and a backward is neglected." ⁶⁴

Next argument given by the upper castes was that under the new scheme, the reservation was not being given to the needy 'most' backward sections in the state. Instead the 'affluent' backward castes like the Yadavas, Koeris, Kurmis, and Banias were to be benefitted. Reservation to such educationally, economically and politically strong castes would amount to gross violation of the constitutional provisions. Vikram Kuer, an M.L.A. and the leader of the Forward League commented, "If reservation is only given to Annexure I backwards, we won't oppose it even if percentage for them is 20 percent. Our opposition is to the 8 percent allotted to those listed in Annexure II." ⁶⁵

The anti-reservationists further stated that unemployment problem was already acute in Bihar and if reservation was extended to the other backward classes also, very few jobs would be available for them and that competition would grow.

64 Ibid.

65 Neerja Choudhury, op.cit., p. 21.

Reservation of 50 percent of jobs in a poor state like Bihar would lead to deterioration of efficiency and quality both in the educational institutions and the government offices. The reserved jobs might also go to less qualified candidates in case the suitable candidates were not available. Thus the more deserving 'general' candidates would be deprived of what was due to them.

Some of the upper castes also opined that the reservation was usually given to those who were in minority, but in the case of Bihar, the middle castes who constituted about 45 to 50 percent of the total population in the state, would be given reservation in government services which was against the general principles of granting reservation.

As regards the income limit of Rs.1000 per month fixed for the beneficiaries of reservation, upper castes pointed out that it was too high for a poor state like Bihar; whose per capita income was quite low in comparison to states like Punjab, Maharashtra, and West Bengal. Hence, a number of well-off backwards would benefit under the new reservation scheme. Secondly, to get a low income certificate in Bihar was quite easy to enjoy the fruits of such policy. Moreover the agricultural income was difficult to be ascertained.⁶⁶

66 See Prem Shanker Jha, 'Jati and jobs,' The Illustrated Weekly of India, April 2, 1978, p. 23.

Another argument was that the announcement of the proposal of job reservation for the backward classes was politically motivated. It was alleged by the upper castes that Karpoori Thakur wanted to be a caste leader by championing the cause of the backward classes.⁶⁷ The reservation was to strengthen his position especially in the coming elections, wherein backward caste votes would count much. In the opinion of S.N. Sinha, the state Janata Party chief, the chief-minister Karpoori Thakur mishandled the whole issue. He was silent because he did not want to bail out the chief minister politically. He was not consulted on the issue and was urged to support the policy afterwards.⁶⁸

Third Phase of Agitation

The implementation of the proposal of reservation which was put-off by the state government in April 1978 was put off by the state government in April 1978 to avoid further confrontations and was accordingly referred to the Janata High Command, was not raised for another five months. Karpoori Thakur wanted to implement it quickly, as stated earlier, but the High Command was not clearing it. Although tension prevailed during May-September 1978, yet a very few acts of disturbance were reported from the different parts of the state. However, the protest by the opponents

67 P.C. Gandhi, op.cit., p. 39.

68 Neerja Chaudhury, op.cit., p. 22.

of reservation started picking up from the month of October. The five month period had given enough time for the dissidents in the Janata Party to work against the chief minister. They now started signature campaign against Karpoori Thakur and held him responsible for the state of chaos.⁶⁹

Another interesting development was the dissatisfaction of the 'less' backward castes like the Yadavas and Kurmis with the performance of the Karpoori government. They had showed their displeasure at the time of announcement of the revised reservation formula, as stated earlier. Now, they started blaming the chief minister of deliberately postponing the implementation of reservation. Accordingly, the Backward Classes Federation, a body dominated by the less backward castes, resumed its agitation for an early settlement of the problem. In order to make it more effective, the Jail Bhare (Fill the jails) campaign was started. This time, some leaders of the D.M.K. Party of Tamil Nadu were also consulted by the Federation leaders. They took out demonstration and held dharna in Patna on 19th October 1978. About two thousand workers of the Federation including 3 M.L.A.s and one retired IAS officer courted arrest.⁷⁰ On the second day of the dharna, another sixty five persons were arrested

69 See Indian Express, New Delhi, oct. 4, 1978.

70 See The Times of India and Indian Express, New Delhi, October 20, 1978.

while violating the Section 144 of the I.P.C. The Federation decided to intensify the stir by launching Satyagrahas at the block level also. In the meantime, the Fedeard League reiterated its demand of economic basis of reservation.

However, an announcement was made by the then Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, in Patna on 24th October that the entire question of reservation to the backward classes would be referred to a Committee. This further discouraged the state chief minister. Still, Karpoori Thakur with the support of the President of the Janata Party was determined to implement the policy.

Implementation of Reservation

On 31st October, 1978 Karpoori Thakur formally announced the revised reservation formula and stated that it was to be implemented from the same day. According to it, 12 percent seats were to be reserved for the 'most' backward classes listed in Annexure I and 8 percent reservation was to be given to the less backward classes like the Yadavas, Koeris and the Kurmis (listed in Annexure II). Further, 3 percent seats were to be reserved for women, while the upper castes whose annual family income did not exceed the income tax exemption limit were to be given the rest 3 percent reservation. Thus, 50 percent of the seats in public services and educational institutions were declared

reserved (24 percent seats were already reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the state in 1950).

Further, according to the revised formula, the seats were to be revised for the backward classes in state government services, district boards, municipalities, semi-government concerns, colleges and universities and state government undertakings. We can also have a clear idea from the following table, about the number of vacancies in public services in Bihar.

Table 4.1

Name of agencies	No. of jobs every year
State government undertakings Departments	2,000
State public sector undertakings Local Bodies	4,000 2,000
Central government undertakings	15,000
Total	23,000

Source: Ishwari Prasad, 'Job reservation for backwards in Bihar,' Janata, New Delhi, April 23, 1978, p. 10.

The reservation procedures for the backward classes were to be same as in the case of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. Similarly, the reservation for them was not to be in force for an unlimited period. Instead, it was to be denied to those who would become advanced. Moreover,

the policy itself was subject to re-evaluation and re-examination from time to time. It was also announced that the reservation would not be given at the time of promotion. The formula showed a clear tilt toward the 'less' backward classes.

It was further stated that in case the posts meant for people belonging to Annexure I were not filled in, the government would wait for three years. After the expiry of this period, such posts would be given to the eligible candidates from the Annexure II.⁷¹ Probably the government know that within a short period of three years the 'most' backward classes could not possibly develop educationally and economically. Another benefit given to the backward classes listed in Annexure II was the imposition of a ceiling of an annual income of Rs.8000. Thus, children of the 'affluent' backward castes and classes were ^{also} to get the benefit. Moreover, getting a low income certificate was not a problem in a backward state like Bihar, as stated earlier.

The above mentioned formula was announced by Karpoori Thakur on the eve of the Samastipur parliamentary bye-election, without the formal approval of the state cabinet. However, on November 1, 1978, the chief minister stated that the draft resolution was still incomplete. After completion, it was to be sent to the Law Department. Then only it could be placed before the state cabinet for its ratification.⁷²

71 Thakur Prasad, op.cit., p. 2.

72 See The Statesman, New Delhi, November 2, 1978

Subsequently, the chief minister brought the resolution before the cabinet on November 8 and it was duly passed. A notification to this effect was issued by the chief secretary of the government on 10th November. Three separate notices giving the guidelines of implementation of reservation policy were issued. These concerned the backward classes (Annexure I and II), women and the economically weaker sections.⁷³ With regard to reservation for the backward classes in the High Court and the state legislature, it was stated in the notice that a decision would be taken soon after consultations with the chief justice of the Patna High Court and the speakers of both the houses of legislature.

The Fourth Phase of Agitation

Soon after the announcement regarding implementation of the reservation from 31st October 1978, a fresh wave of violence rocked the state. Although some of the leaders of the 'less' backward castes were not happy with the revised formula, yet the backward classes Federation did not adopt any protest measure. That gave the impression that the backward castes, by and large, were satisfied with the new reservation formula. Contrarily, the implementation of the reservation was a serious blow to these upper castes who were economically not sound and had to depend on government services for earning their livelihood. The upper caste legislators started working day and night for the ouster of Karpoori Thakur. Divisions on

73 Thakur Prasad, op.cit., pp.1-8.

the basis of caste began to be created in the government offices and educational institutions. This was all on account of a few hundred government jobs to be reserved for some sections of the people in the state.

Four Janata M.L.A.s warned the chief minister that if the caste based reservation was not withdrawn by November 15, the Satyagrahas would be launched all over the state. Vikram Kuer, an MLA and the leader of the Forward League demanded implementation of the Shanti Bhushan formula which gave equal weightage to all the backward people.⁷⁴ In his opinion and that of others also reservation to the economically well-off middle castes like the Yadavas and Banias was unjustifiable.

Once again, the public and private property started to be damaged. Train and bus services were disrupted by the opponents of reservation. Disturbances were reported from Muzaffarpur, Gaya, Arah, Patna and Buxar. On the eve of the Samastipur Parliamentary bye-election, tension between the upper and the middle castes prevailed. The Janata Party had put up a backward caste candidate, while the Congress(I) candidate belonged to the Bhumiher (upper) castes. People of the constituency forgot all political affiliations and ideologies and exercised their franchise on the basis of caste. As the constituency had the majority of the middle caste votes, the Janata Party candidate managed a win. It was a major victory for Karpoori Thakur and, thus, he was in a position to

74 The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, November 2, 1978.

silence his opponents both inside and outside the party.

The dissident activity, however, got accelerated after the Samastipur bye election. The upper caste legislators appealed to the party high command to make a change in the leadership of the state legislature party. They were surprisingly supported by some backward caste leaders like B.P. Mandal. It may be recalled that the backward castes listed in the Annexure II were not satisfied with the revised reservation formula. B.P. Mandal (Yadava) went to the extent of saying that there was no administration in the state and that lawlessness prevailed every where. (S.N. Sinha, an upper caste Janata M.P. expressed his desire to support Mandal for the leadership of the State Legislature Party, if the latter desired so.⁷⁵)

Thus, by February 1979, the Janata Party High Command also was convinced that peace could be brought back to Bihar only after change of chief minister. Karpoori Thakur was asked to seek the vote of confidence from the Janata legislatures on 19th April 1979. Consequently, he started mobilising his supporters for the 'Trial of strength'. He received a setback when the Jan Sangh and the Congress(O) (combined strength of 100 MLAs) constituents of the Janata Party, withdrew their support. Thus not only the upper castes wanted his ouster, but the constituents of the ruling party also favoured a change.

Further, in an expected move, 18 ministers of the Thakur's cabinet tendered their resignation on the eve of the 'Trial of Strength.' Their opposition to the chief minister became explicit now. The chief minister resigned on 19th April 1979, after losing the vote of confidence by 30 odd votes. It marked the end of his 22 month old government.⁷⁶ For the upper caste leaders like Ramanand Tiwari and S.N. Sinha, it was an occasion to celebrate and to play their cards freely. Then, the search began for a suitable candidate for the post of chief minister who could be acceptable to all castes and the constituents of the ruling party. An upper caste man was ruled out for that would aggravate the already tense situation. After lengthy discussions, S.N. Sinha, the state Janata Party chief decided to put up Ram Sundar Das, a Harijan candidate, as the Harijans were the most non-controversial group in the political circles. Hence, it was presumed that a Harijan chief minister would be acceptable to all.

The New Government

Ram Sundar Das was elected unanimously as the leader of the Janata Legislature Party on 21st April 1979.⁷⁷ The Karpoori Thakur group boycotted the meeting. Election of Ram Sundar Das was a major victory for the upper castes for they were back into reckoning and the middle range castes had everything to lose. However, the new government was not going to revoke the implementation of the reservation for

76. See the Statesman, New Delhi, April 20, 1979.
77 The Times of India, New Delhi, April 22, 1979.

77 The Times of India, New Delhi, April 22, 1979.

the backward classes.

Karpoori Thakur started uniting his supporters in order to give a tough time to the Das government backed by the upper caste legislators. When a major split in the party took place, leading to the formation of the Janata(S) party by the breakaway group, Karpoori Thakur sided with the Janata (S) alongwith his backward caste supporters. With this, he became absolutely free to carry on moves for the ouster of the Das ministry and to settle scores with the upper castes.

In July 1979, a no confidence motion against the Das ministry was tabled by the six opposition parties, led by the Communist Party of India and supported by Karpoori Thakur with his splinter group. Thus, Thakur was quite hopeful of the fall of the government. But in a dramatic move, the Congress(I) supported the government and thus the no confidence motion got defeated by 42 votes.⁷⁸ Ram Sundar Das heaved a sigh of relief but at the same time he became aware of the clouds of uncertainties in future. How long he would have remained in office, with the support of an opposition party, the Congress(I)?

Meanwhile certain upper caste leaders were not satisfied with the performance of the Das government. Some of them wanted revocation of reservation for the backward classes but the chief minister would not oblige them. Although Das was lucky enough to remain in power till February 1980, yet

78 Indian Express, New Delhi, July 31, 1979.

most of his time was killed in maintaining unity in the party and facing the opposition challenges spearheaded by Karpoori Thakur.

During the Lok Sabha elections in January 1980, the new caste equations worked in Bihar. Mrs Gandhi's Congress(I) could sweep the polls due to realignment of the Brahmins, Muslims and the Harijans.⁷⁹ Some of the non-Yadava backward castes also extended their support to her party. This election once again relegated the backward castes to the background of state politics. However, their leaders were happy because they could win reservation provision for their masses.

In June 1980, Jagannath Mishra's taking over as the Congress(I) chief minister neither led to the withdrawal of the reservation granted to the backward castes nor it symbolised the return of power to the upper castes because mainly the Brahmins could get importance and other upper castes were almost ignored in the formation of his cabinet.

Conclusion

The conflict between the upper and the middle range castes escalated after the announcement of reservation for the latter. The issue of reservation became sensitive on account of expected erosion of the dominance of the upper castes and a staggering unemployment problem in the state.

79 N.K. Thakur, 'New caste equations in Bihar,'
The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, January 15, 1930.

Instead of providing new job opportunities for the people, the politicians in power decided in a way to widen the cleavages between the two caste groups for serving their vested interests. Emotions of the innocent people were aroused for fulfilling certain political ends. A state of tension and suspicion was created which blocked the development of a poor state like Bihar. The masses became caste centred and started coming closer to each other on the basis of caste. The caste consciousness gave rise to a number of conflict situations often accompanied by violence. Caste began to play havoc with the life of the general people. It was attached paramount importance in all the spheres of social life. Neither the governing elite nor the non-governing elite had anything to lose. It was the common man who had to undergo a series of sufferings.

The upper caste middle caste division could clearly be witnessed and experienced in politics, government offices and the educational institutions. In the government offices, employees got divided on the caste basis. The appointments, promotions and transfers started getting carried out on the caste lines. Often confrontations took place between the two caste groups in the corridors of offices. Similarly, in the educational institutions, the students who were supposed to develop modern rational values, stuck to alignments on the basis of the traditional caste loyalty for the reasons of safety and security. In many institutions, interaction between the students of the two caste groups virtually got

stopped. Besides, the relationship among the teachers and students began to be guided also by caste and community considerations. The university campuses became the breeding grounds for the future caste leaders. The students from the backward castes who were wholeheartedly following Jaya Prakash Narayan in 1974-75, started burning his books after the announcement of the proposal of reservation.

The entire controversy centred around a few hundred government jobs which were to be reserved for the backward classes. Out of a total number of ^{23,000} jobs available every year in the state, only 20 percent were to be reserved for the backward classes. In this way, 1600 backward class persons would be accommodated in the various state government department and the local bodies all over the state. (There is no provision for reservation for the backward classes in the central government undertakings.) This was not sufficient for the people who constituted about 45 percent of the total population in the state, in the opinion of the backward caste leaders.

Even though the benefit was not much for the backward classes under the new scheme, there was controversy all around. Another thing to be noted in this context is that the real backward caste people might not avail the reservation facility. Instead, the backward castes listed in the Annexure II, who are already economically as well as

educationally quite advanced, would grab the limited job opportunities and the youth from the 'most' backward caste groups would find it difficult to compete with them in the job market on account of their limited education and lack of interaction with their 'less' backward brethren.

Moreover, in the office order announcing implementation of the reservation it was clearly mentioned that if the posts reserved for the most backward caste people (of Annexure I) were not filled in, the government would wait for three years. After the expiry of this period, such posts could be filled in from amongst the 'less' backward castes (of Annexure II).

It can be inferred here that the reservation scheme was mainly aimed at serving the economically advanced and politically dominant middle castes. Had it aimed at uplifting the real backward castes, there would not have been any bitter and tense situation. Even the leaders of the Forward League had agreed for reservation for the most backward castes together with the economically weaker sections in the state.

Thus, it is our contention that there was no backward classes movement in Bihar on the lines of the Backward Caste movement in some of the southern states for the various reasons. There was no unanimity among all the backward castes in the state. There existed a clear cut contradiction between the three dominant backward

castes - the Yadavas, Koeris and the Kummis, and the 'most' backward castes. It was quite obvious from the way reservation formula was announced. In southern states, however, all the non-Brahmins formed the backward caste category and, thus, were very effective in their endeavour. But in Bihar there were other three upper castes, besides the Brahmins, and they were not expected to support the backward castes on any issue.

Further, in Bihar, the agitation by the backward classes was just for a few material gains and it did not have any orientation to bring about social change. Although they spoke against the caste system dominated by the Brahmins and other upper castes, yet they themselves were agitating for certain privileges on the caste ground. Each backward caste wanted to maintain its identity and distance from the fellow backward caste. In the absence of an organisation and central leadership, the measures of protest differed from region to region and district to district. The Backward Classes Federation was formed at a quite late stage and its activities were confined mainly to the Patna region. Moreover, the Federation composed of the elite from the 'less' backward castes due to which the large scale mobilization of the backward castes as a whole could not be done.

To sum up, it can be stated that the backward castes came in conflict with the upper castes mainly because the

latter reacted against the reservation facility provided for the former. The Backward Classes protested to tackle the upper caste protest against the job reservation. Besides this, they did not have any other plan of action. Had it been so, the backward caste protest would have not been over after the implementation of the reservation scheme. The leaders of the backward classes could have continued working for the really backward masses, so that the latter would have availed the facilities extended to them by the state government. Probably the leaders had different designs in mind. Whether the reservation issue brought unity among the numerous middle castes or not, it did bring about a theoretical unity among the four upper castes in Bihar whose dominance in different spheres seemed to be threatened on account of the reservation policy evolved in favour of the former.

Chapter-V

THE HARIJAN-NON HARIJAN CONFLICT

We have examined, in Chapter IV, one aspect of caste conflict, i.e. the conflict between the middle range and the upper castes on the issue of reservation. In this chapter, we will discuss the conflicts between the Harijans and the non-Harijans. The non-Harijans comprise of the four upper castes and the numerous middle range castes which have had frequent conflicts with the Harijans in the recent past. Such conflicts or the cases of atrocities have arisen on account of denial of minimum wages to the Harijan labourers and confiscation of their land and other properties by the land owners of the upper and the middle castes.

In order to analyse the nature and incidents of such conflicts a description of provision of the Harijans, land patterns and reforms, the legislations against untouchability, and the nature of relationship between different castes in the countryside in Bihar is of vital importance. The discussion of land patterns and land reforms would enable us to have a clear understanding of the miserable condition of the landless Harijan labourers who live in a state of constant fear and intimidation in the absence of proper governmental protection.

The Harijans or the Scheduled Castes constitute about 15 percent of the total population in the country. However,

they are scattered in the different parts. According to Hindu varna frame of reference, they are out of the varna system, and have been termed later as 'exterior castes.' Even after 34 years of Independence and passing of legislations against the practices of untouchability, the Harijans have not been able to enjoy the fruits of development. They are still economically, educationally, socially and politically backward and are considered as 'out castes' by caste Hindus on account of certain polluting occupations, They are engaged in. Whereas the Harijans ^{are} regarded as untouchables and unapproachable, their services are essential for the upper and middle range castes. This is the tragic story of our caste-based society.

Under Article 17 of the Indian Constitution, 'untouchability' has legally been abolished and its practice, in any form is forbidden. Certain protective legislations have also been enacted for safeguarding the social and economic interests of Scheduled Castes. Punishment is to be meted out to those violating these legislations. The Untouchability (Offences) Act was enacted in 1955 under the Article 35(a)(ii) of the Constitution.¹ It came into force on 8th May 1955. The Act was reviewed further, after ten years by a committee appointed by the Government of India, as many of its objectives remained unfulfilled. On the basis of the recommendations of the committee, a Bill called

¹ Report of the Commissioner for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Part I, 1978-79, page 182, para 7-3.

Untouchability (Offences) Amendment and Miscellaneous provisions was introduced in the Parliament in 1972. After prolonged discussions certain changes were made and the bill was renamed as Protection of the Civil Rights Act, 1976.

However, the practice of untouchability goes on unabated and atrocities on the Harijans are being perpetrated year after year. Jagjivan Ram has rightly pointed out, "Every one speaks of removal of discrimination in Indian society, but the reality of the matter is that even those who publicly denounce caste, practice it in many subtle forms in their day to day life."²

The Harijans in Bihar

According to 1971 Census, population of the Harijans in Bihar was 79,50,652 which was 14.11 percent of the total population in the state. In all, 23 castes have been scheduled by an order of the State Government in 1956.³ They are scattered in all the districts of the state and their maximum concentration is in the Gaya district. The Chamars, the Dusadhs and the Musahars together constitute about 71 percent of the total population of the Harijans in the state.

The Harijans of Bihar are still educationally and economically very backward. Rate of literacy among them is just six percent inspite of the reservation facility extended to them in the educational institutions. Majority of the

² Jagjivan Ram, Caste Challenge in India.
Vision Books, New Delhi, 1980, p. 51.

³ A complete list of the scheduled castes is given in the appendix I

working class in Bihar comes from the Scheduled Castes. Most of them are landless agricultural labourers and live under the condition much below the poverty line. The following tables gives details about the percentage of the Scheduled Caste cultivators and agricultural labourers in Bihar in 1971.

Table 5.1: Percentage of cultivators and agricultural labourers in Bihar in 1971.

Occupation	% among total labourers	% among total Scheduled Caste workers
Cultivators	43.3	11.49
Agricultural labourers	38.9	77.15
Total	82.2	88.60

Source: First report of the Backward Classes Commission concerning the Scheduled Castes, Govt. of Bihar, Patna, 1975, p. 39.

The above table speaks of the miserable condition of the Scheduled Castes in Bihar. Majority of them are forced to depend on the upper and middle level landed castes for earning their livelihood. They are not ^{well} paid also for the services they render. The plots of land allotted to them by the government, in many cases, have been captured by the musclemen of the caste Hindu landowners.

The Harijans in the Chotanagpur region are mainly peasants and agricultural labourers. Some of them are

engaged in weaving, fishing, drum beating, basket making and leather works. But their counterparts in the North Bihar work mainly as agricultural labourers, leather workers and perform certain other services for the upper castes.⁴

Agrarian Situation

Bihar is predominantly an agricultural state, as stated earlier. About 85 percent of the population in the state is dependent on agricultural sector. The average size of the land holding comes to less than 3.65 acres. A large part of the uncultivable land is held by the government. There are 53 cultivators, 22 agricultural labourers and 39 working cattle ^{per hundred acres of sown area in Bihar,} against the corresponding figures of 31, 10 and 24 respectively for all India.⁵

During the Zamindari system, there used to be five classes in rural Bihar. These were the Zamindars, tenant-landlords, tenants, sub-tenants and agricultural labourers.⁶ The Zamindars and the tenant landlords were mainly from the upper castes; the tenants and the sub tenants were from the middle castes and the Scheduled Castes worked as the agricultural labourers. After abolition of the Zamindari system, there has been change in the pattern of ownership

4 See L.P. Vidyarthi and N. Mishra, Harijan Today, Classical Publications, New Delhi, pp. 29-30 and 125-26.

5 Gyaneshwar Ojha, Land, Problems and Land Reforms (A study with reference to Bihar), Sultan Chand and Co., New Delhi, 1977, p. 23.

6 See Pradhan H. Prasad, 'Caste and class in Bihar,' Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number, Feb. 1979, p. 481.

of land. The middle range castes have gradually taken over the upper castes who had either to forego the surplus land or had to dispose it off to the middle caste tenants, before migrating to the urban areas. Now, in the changed situation the following four classes are found in rural areas: (1) landowners (rich peasants), (2) owner cultivators (middle peasants), (3) tenants and sharecroppers, and (4) landless labourers.

The landowners or rich peasants are those people who themselves do not work on land. Instead, the labourers are hired to carry on cultivation work for them. Owner-cultivators, apart from employing agricultural workers, do the cultivation work themselves. The tenants and share croppers work on the land belonging to the top two classes and pay fifty per cent of the total produce to the owner of land. All the expenses on cultivation work are also borne by the share croppers. The lowest position in the rural areas is held by the agricultural labourers who do not own land but work as daily wage workers for the land owners. Many of such labourers are the Harijans. Only in a few villages the persons belonging to the middle range castes are also landless agricultural labourers.

The agricultural labourers are the most poorly paid class of people as the majority of them are not paid even the maximum wage (Rs.6) fixed by the government of India first in 1948 and then revised twice in 1966-67 and 1974-75.

7 Arun Sinha, 'Class war, not atrocities against Harijans,' Economic and Political Weekly, Dec. 10, 1977, p. 2037.

What is found in most of the villages in Bihar is that the landless Harijan labourers are given just one and a half kg. of coarse food grains which is much less than the rate fixed by the government (4 kg. of food grains).

However, due to low wages and economic exploitation, the labourer cannot come out of the vicious circle of poverty. They do not have any option but to take loan from the professional moneylenders and the landowners who charge exorbitant rates of interest. From the date of advancement of loans, the bondage of labourers begins. In many cases, the amount of interest exceeds even the principal sum. On failure to repay the loan with interest, the labourers are forced to work as bonded labourers for generations. Though the institution of the bonded labour was banned by law much before independence and certain strict measures were adopted during the Emergency period as well, but in reality the practice continues and the custodians of law are fully aware of it.

In 1974, the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and the backward class labourers were given debt redemption and relief by the government. Certain steps were also taken to exercise some check over the activities of moneylenders as well. The Bihar Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes and Denotified Tribes Debt Relief Act and the Bihar Moneylenders Act were enacted for this purpose.⁸ The land owners strongly reacted to these acts and resisted to the attempts of the government officials in implementing them

8. Ibid, p. 2037 & p. 2039

Similarly, whenever the landless labourers have been given land grants by the government, the upper and middle caste landowners have raised objection and resistance. This is so, as the prosperity of the landowners is attributable to the poverty and sufferings of the agricultural workers. If the latter are drawn out of their present condition, supremacy of the former would be threatened. Hence, attempts are made to continue with the existing system of land relations rather than introducing modifications therein for the welfare of the downtrodden.

Land Reforms in Bihar

Bihar is one of the leading states in the country in introducing the land reforms measures but lags much behind others when it comes to their implementation. The Zamindari system was introduced in 1793 which provided ownership rights to the Zamindars.⁹ They were required to collect rent from the tenants and hand that over to the government. Thus the Zamindars acted as an intermediary between the tenants and the government. However, this system was abolished through passing of an act in 1948. Consequently, the direct contact could be established between the farmers and the government and the latter assumed the direct responsibility of collecting the land revenue. In the changed situation, many of the tenants and sub-tenants were expected to get plots of land but the ex-zamindars continued their nefarious practices of

9 Gyaneshwar Ojha, op.cit., p. 32.

grabbing land by terrorising the tenants. They even usurped a lot of common land.¹⁰ Hence, attempts were needed for breaking the concentration of land into a few hands.

In 1950, the Bihar Land Reforms Act was passed to supplement the Abolition of the Zamindari Act, 1948. The Act provided for (i) the vesting of estates and tenures, (ii) rights of intermediary to retain land, and (iii) land commission, and (iv) compensation to the ex-zamindars.¹¹ The ^{se} measures ^{formed} the first stage of land reforms in Bihar after independence and mainly the middle peasant castes, one time tenants, received the benefits of transfer of land. Thus, the grip of the high caste landowners got loosened over the rural areas and the middle range castes began strengthening their position.

In the second phase of the land reforms in Bihar the Tenancy Act of 1885 was amended and the following Acts were passed: (1) Consolidation of Holdings Act. (2) Fixation of Land Ceiling and Acquisition of Surplus Land Act 1961 (3) Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act and (4) Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act. The common aim of these legislations was to impose a ceiling on land and acquire and distribute the surplus land among the landless; to regulate the tenancy on land and safeguard the interest of the tenants and share croppers.

10 See M.P. Pandey, Land Records and Agrarian Situation in Bihar. Naya Prakash, Calcutta, 1980, pp. 10-11.

11 Gyaneshwar Ojha, op.cit., p. 50.

Further, in order to impose a ceiling on land holding, the government passed the Bihar Land Reforms (Fixation of Ceiling Area and Acquisition of Surplus Land) Act 1961. It was amended twice in 1972 and 1973. The Tenancy Act is another legislation adopted for ^{levelling} leasing land reforms. It was enacted in the year 1885 and has also been amended twice in 1965 and 1970. This act classified the tenants into three classes: (1) The occupancy Raiyats, (2) Non Occupancy Raiyats and (3) Under Raiyats. The Act, however, does not apply in the district of Santhal Pargana and Chotanagpur division which are governed by the Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act of 1949 and the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 respectively.¹³

Agrarian reforms have been carried on in the state with the help of certain other schemes also. During the Emergency period (1975-⁷⁶~~80~~) thousands of acres of land were acquired and distributed among the landless. The state government introduced the 'voluntary land surrender scheme' through which about 20,000 acres of land were acquired. Many indebted labourers were given debt redemption besides the land grants.¹⁴

An appraisal of the above mentioned land reform measures would show that much was promised to the landless but less was placed at their disposal. At the first instance, they were prevented by the influential land owners from the grant of land and then from its occupation as mentioned earlier. This may be so as the implementation machinery has not

13 Ibid, p. 76.

14 Arun Sinha, op.cit., p. 2039.

functioned properly. Either the concerned officials have been corrupt or they could be easily impressed upon by the landowners and certain politicians who depended on the land owning classes for the political support. Further, ceilings on land have not always been enforced effectively, and the tenancies not regulated properly. Thus, the attempts to redistribute land and emancipate the landless labourers from the bondage and indebtedness in the villages have been strongly opposed by the land owners. Probably, the prosperity of the agricultural workers and the share croppers is unbearable and intolerable for the land owners. Not only the gifted plots of land (during the Bhoodan movement) have been taken back, the land distributed to the landless Harijans and the common land in villages have also been confiscated by the ambitious landowners. All these factors are responsible for the recent Harijan-Non Harijan conflicts in Bihar.

As stated earlier, the issues involved in such conflict situations have been related to wages, land occupancy rights and the bondage of the Harijan labourers. The various reform measures have been adopted to diffuse the heavy concentration of the privileged owners on land and its transfer to the actual tillers. But what has actually happened is that the middle peasantry which once replaced the upper caste land owners, has contributed, further, to the process of exploitation of the landless Harijan labourers. In the changed situation, the Harijans have lost the patronage of the

upper caste landowners which they enjoyed during the pre-reform^{era} and now they are at the losing end.

In the forthcoming pages we shall see that whenever the Harijan landless agricultural workers have demanded their due wages and whenever they have raised voice against the tyrannical attitude of the land owners, they have been silenced, assaulted and even murdered the henchmen of the landowners have not taken revenge from one or two individuals who have arguments with them but all their castemen in a particular village have been subjected to the most inhuman sufferings. This is why numerous innocent persons have been killed in most of the incidents of atrocities in the recent past.

Incidents of Atrocities on the Harijans in the Post 1977 Period.

Atrocities on the Harijans have been committed ever since the formation of the Bihar state. But after 1977, there has been a marked rise in the number ^{and} ~~of~~ intensity of such incidents. According to the report of the Commissioner for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for the year 1978-79, the total number of cases of atrocities registered in Bihar was 681 in the year 1977 and 1911 in the year 1978. A crime-wise break up of the incidents of the atrocities on the Harijans in Bihar in 1978 is given below.

Table 5.2: Incidents of atrocities on the Harijans in Bihar in 1978.

<u>Nature of crime</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
Murder	63
Violence	146
Rape	76
Arson	260
Others	1366
Total	1911

Source: Report of the Commissioner for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Twenty sixth Report), 1978-79, Part-I, p. 232.

From the above table, it is clear that the number of atrocities in 1978 was three times more than that in 1977. Moreover, there has been rise in the cases of rape of Harijan women, grievous injuries and arson and damage of the houses and other property. The following table records the details of such cases.

Table 5.3: Atrocities committed on the Harijans during 1977-80.

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<u>Year</u>	<u>Rape of women</u>	<u>Grievous injuries done to labourers</u>	<u>Setting fire to houses</u>	<u>Victims of misc. cases</u>	<u>Murder</u>
1977	76	128	123	605	.#..
1978	76	142	252	951	63
1979	78	148	321	1455	45
1980	.#..	.#..	.#..	.#..	63
Total	230	418	696	3011	171

* Indicates not known.

Source: Based on Janak Singh, 'Plight of Harijans in Bihar, Victims of Unbridled Repression. The Times of India, New Delhi, May 5, 1980.

It is pertinent at this stage to list and analyse some of the major incidents of Harijan-non-Harijan conflicts which took place between 1977 and 1980.

(1) Belchi Incident

On May 27, 1977, eight Harijans and three Sonars (goldsmiths) were brutally beaten up and burnt to death in the Belchi village under the Barh Policestation of Patna district. The village is situated at a distance of 85 kms. from the state capital (Patna). The culprits were the men of Mahavir Mahto, a Kurmi zamindar in the village owning 20 Bighas¹⁵ of land. In the village there were 25 households of Kurmis, 40 of the Musshars, 30 of Doodhs, 10 of the Chamars, 2 of the Sonars and 1 Brahmin.¹⁶

The carnage took place on account of the low wages paid to the Harijan labourers and disputes over ownership of land. Mahavir Mahto, the leader of the Kurmis was notorious for his tyrannical way of functioning. He had occupied many acres of land belonging to the Harijans and the government waste land, and had a solid backing of Indradeo Chaudhary, the local Kurmi MLA. Mahto used to terrorise the Harijan labourers working on his land. They were not paid due wages for their hard work. Instead, they were paid just one seer of maize per day (the prevailing rate was 3 seers).

15 One bigha of land is equal to 3/4th of an acre.

16 Shashi Bhushan, 'The Belchi killings,' Economic and Political Weekly, 1977, June 18, p. 974.

Then, Singheshwar Paswan, a Dusadh by caste, started organising the Harijan workers of the village to resist the tyranny of Mahavir Mahto. Singheshwar had come to the village in 1973 and was working on the land belonging to his father-in-law. The lone Brahmin of Belchi, on being impressed the services of Singheswar, offered him the 'sacred thread'. It was intolerable for Mahavir Mahto, who in retaliation, assailed the Brahmin and his wife. The Brahmin gave his one acre of land free of cost to Singheswar and left the village in disgust.¹⁷

Mahavir Mahto started waiting for an opportunity to trap Singheswar Paswan. When Dhanpat Paswan, another Dusadh was found murdered in January 1976, Singheshwar was accused by the Kurmis. He was later named in another murder case. The Kurmis, thus, aimed at branding Singheswar as criminal. On the unfortunate night of May 27, 1977, scores of armed men led by Mahavir Mahto attacked the Harijan households. Singheswar and other Harijans were brought out of their houses, tied and taken to a nearby maize field. Cowdung cakes were assembled in the field and the kerosene oil was sprinkled on the body of the Harijans. One by one they were shot at and thrown into the burning pyre. A child relative of Singheswar too was not spared. He leaped out of the pyre many times but every time was thrown back. Another victim came out of the flames and caught hold of

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See Arun Sinha, 'Belchi Revivisted,' Economic and Political Weekly, August 6, 1977, p. 1244.

one of the culprits by neck. This time his head was chopped-off and thrown into the burning pyre. All eleven bodies were burnt in the presence of the culprits. They roasted the bodies with the help of bamboo sticks to make identification difficult.¹⁸

The culprits left the village quickly at 5.30 A.M. next morning. The village chowkidar had to walk 22 km. to reach the nearest Barh police station. The Assistant Sub-Inspector at the police station demanded a bribe of Rs.500 for coming to Belchi. After much persuasion, the policeman finally arrived in the village at 2.30 P.M. next day. Out of 62 absconding culprits only 22 were chargesheeted.

Belchi incident was a clear case of collusion between the police, landlords and the politicians. The incident was brought to the public notice only after four days. The administration, on the pressure from the politicians in the state, tried to regard the incident as mere clash between two rival gangs of criminals led by Mahavir Mahto and Singheswar Paswan respectively. It was also reported that the incident did not have any political, agrarian or caste overtones.¹⁹ Similar version was given by Charan Singh, the then Central Home Minister. Only after a month or so, the real picture of the carnage was brought before the people, when an M.P.'s delegation led by Ram Dhan (Janata)

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18 Report of the M.P.'s panel on Belchi, National Herald, New Delhi, July 13, 1977.

19 See The Indian Nation, Patna, June 6, 1977.

made an on the spot study of the situation.

Belchi soon became a place of political pilgrimage. Politicians were busy in making political capital out of it. Crocodiles tears were shed before the family of the deceased. Police started patrolling the dinzy lanes of the village but no permanent solution to the problem could be evolved. Stress from all sections was on publicising the event rather than helping the poor and suffering Harijans. They received treats from Mahavir Mahto, even after his arrest. Many of them were unemployed after the incident and the employed ones used to get the usual meagre wages for their hard work. Very soon, the Belchi incident faded away from public memory like any other case of atrocity on Harijans.

(2) Pathada Incident

Another incident of atrocities on Harijans took place on June 19, 1977 in Pathada village of Bhagalpur district, which is 91 kms. away from the Banka town.²⁰ The Harijans were mercilessly beaten up, their properties damaged, and their womenfolk raped by the Yadava landowners. The reason, once again, was the low wages paid to the Harijan labourers. The Harijans were demanding minimum wages at the Government rates for a long time but their demands were not met by the middle caste rich landowners. An effort to mobilise and unite the labourers was strongly resisted by the landowners and resulted into this outrage.

20 See Sachchidananda, 'Bihar's experience,' Seminar, No.243, November 1979, p. 32.

and *The Indian Nation*, Patna, July 24, 1978

(3) Dharampura Incident

The Pathada incident was followed by the Dharampura incident in Bhojpur district (October 20, 1977), in which four Harijans were killed and three were injured seriously. The attack was made by the associates of the Mahant (priest) landlord in the village. It was due to the long standing dispute over the payment of minimum wages to the Harijans and the share cropping.²¹

In Dharampura, out of a total 80 households, 20 were of the Brahmins and 24 of the Harijans. Ramanuj Acharya, the Mahant of the Thakurbari (temple) owned 125 bighas of land out of which 80 bighas were under dispute, and a case was going on in the nearby court. The dispute involved the Harijans of the village. On 18th October 1977, the Mahant alongwith his men organised a talk with the Harijans on the matters in the house of Kedar Mishra, a fellow Brahmin. The Harijans were asked to come for the final talks on 20th October in which a decision was to be taken. On ^{receiving} ~~reaching~~ the message from the Mahant, five of the Harijans, Sheo Muni, ^{Laban} Labu-Rai, Sri Nayak, Rohit Kamkar and Sidhnath Kamkar came for the talk. As they entered the temple, they were fired at with guns. Four of them died on the spot while Rohit Kamkar managed to escape. The Mahant, the chief culprit tried to give a different colour to the whole episode. In a statement to the police,

21 Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 1978-79, op.cit., p. 133.

~~colour to the whole incident. In a statement to the police~~ he said that the deceased had come to commit dacoity in the temple. Hence, they were shot dead. He also tried to persuade the police to hush up the case.²² It was very unfortunate that the Harijans, after losing their land and being denied proper wages, lost their lives as the branded criminals.

(4) Rupetha Incident

One Harijan was burnt alive, in the broad day light on February 15, 1978 in the Rupetha village, situated at a distance of 20 kms. from Sasaran town. The village comes under the constituency of Jagjivan Ram, the Harijan leader. For quite some time tension had prevailed in the village. The High caste landowners had warned the Harijans not to enter a particular part of the village.²³ On 15th January, when Vashisht Dusadh, a Harijan entered the 'prohibited area,' he was caught, beaten and set on fire. Many people witnessed the incident but no one dared to rescue him. No solid reason of this crime could be established.

(5) Bishrampur Incident

On 25th March 1978 four Harijans were murdered in Bishrampur village of Rohtas district. The assailants were hired by the local Kuzmi landowners.²⁴ It was a revenge of

22 R. Aizimbadi, 'Harijans burnt and shot in Bihar,' Blitz, Bombay, November 19, 1977, p. 1.

23 See The Times of India, New Delhi, Feb. 18, 1978.

24 Arun Sinha, 'The Bishrampur carnage,' Economic and Political Weekly, April 1, 1978, p. 568.

murder of Hira Kurmi, their leader and economically well-off landowners owning about 100 bighas of land. Hira himself exploited, for quite some time, the poor Harijan labourers, who used to work on his land. They were not paid even the minimum prescribed wages and whenever a Harijan labourer raised voice against his repression, he was either seriously wounded or murdered by Hira Kurmi. In this way, three Harijans had already lost their lives. The police was aware of Hira's involvement in these murders but no action was taken against him on account of his being an influential person.

However, Bansropan, a Harijan, started organising the labourers against the 'reign of terror' created by Hira Kurmi. One day Hira Kurmi, while taking bath in the river, was killed by Nagina Sah, Bansropan's brother. Bansropan, himself was away from the village at the time of Hira's murder. As a result, about one thousand Kurmis encircled the village in order to take revenge of Hira's murder. They ransacked the houses of the Yadavas, Dusadhs, Kahars, Telis and the Harijans. Although a police party led by an A.S.I. had arrived on the scene, yet they could not prevent the brutal murder of four Harijans. Ramashray, a fourteen year old student of Class X, who was to get married in a day or two, was dragged out of his house, shot at and burnt in presence of everyone. Bhukhan Dusadh, a 70 year old labourer met the same fate. After these two murders, the Kurmis marched on to Bansropan's house and brutally killed his father and mother²⁵ (both of them were aged over 70 years).

(6) Pipri Incident

Another incident took place in Pipri village under the Marghar police station of Rohtas district on August 28, 1978 in which two Harijans were murdered by the henchmen of the Kurmi landowners. The incident took place over the disputes on ownership of land and demand for raising the wages. The village was dominated by the rich Kurmi landowners in whose fields the Harijans used to work for meagre wages. The trouble had begun in 1976 when Sukhvilas and Jamuna Ram, two Harijans, were allotted 0.7 hectares of land by the Government. Rich Kurmi landowners objected to it and accordingly filed a case in the court. This led to escalation of tension in the village. However, the immediate cause of carnage was blocking a channel (dug up by the land owners for irrigation purposes) by the Harijans, for, it was passing by the very foundations of their houses. It resulted into the brutal murder of Saryu Ram and Ram Kirat Ram, the relatives of Sukhvilas. They were chased, murdered and their heads were chopped-off when they were going to collect their wages for the day. It may be noted here that the deceased Saryu Ram, being a communist worker, was a threat to the landowners.²⁶

(7) Bajitpur Incident

In Bajitpur village of Begusarai district, one Harijan was killed, 18 were injured, 3 women were raped and

26 Hemendra Narayan, 'The Pipri killings,' Economic and Political Weekly, September 16, 1978, p. 1580. See also, The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, September 2, 1978.

and many received inhuman treatment on 15th November 1978. The attack was made by the henchmen of Durga Prasad Singh, a Bhumihaar landlord of Nayanagar, a nearby village. The cause of dispute was occupation of the land given by the landlord to the Harijans of Bajitpur.

The Bajitpur village has a majority of backward castes and the Harijan landless labourers. Only 11 households have small holdings of land. There are 22 Harijans, 30 Telis (oil crushers), 50 weavers, 34 carpenters, 6 Brokers (Kanu), 5 Nais and 15 Goalas (Yadavas) in the village.²⁷ Durga Prasad Singh owned more than 400 acres of land spread in different villages. Thus, it exceeded the land ceilings imposed by the Government. In 1976, when an attempt was made by the district administration to take over the surplus land of the landowners and distribute it ^{among} among the landless people, Durga Prasad Singh got a stay order from the Patna High Court and, thus, allotment was postponed. After some time he agreed, under the voluntary surrender scheme of the government, to donate 45 acres of land in Bajitpur. Later on only twenty acres of land was given to the landless. Although the labourers started cultivating the land, yet their ownership was not ascertained.²⁸ As Durga Prasad Singh was forced to donate the land under the government pressure, he began waiting for an opportunity to grab it back. The Harijans, on their parts, resisted the landlord's attempt to illegally reoccupy the land allotted to them by the government.

27 See P.C. Gandhi, 'Butchery at Bajitpur,' The Times of India, New Delhi, Dec. 3, 1978.

28 Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, op.cit., pp. 248-49.

All this culminated into attack on the village on 15th November 1978. About 400 henchmen of Durga Prasad Singh razed the village to the ground, killing a person, raping three women and injuring many. Altogether 162 families were affected. Police had prior information about the massacre but did not intervene on account of the influence, the landlord had over the local politicians and the bureaucracy. However, police arrived at the place of crime only next day. The horrified villagers began coming back to village (on November 19) only after they got message about the arrival of police. The State Inspector General of Police visited the village after fifteen days and then the whole country came to know about the tragedy.²⁹ The Bajitpur incident speaks of how alert all the district officials and the police in protecting the down-tordden people.

(8) Kaila Incident

Another carnage took place on account of allotment of land to the Harijans in Kaila village of Malanda district on November 9, 1978 in which three persons were murdered by the musclemen of the Kurmi landowners.³⁰ In Kaila village, there were 70 Harijan and 30 Kurmi families. A few years ago, 15 acres of Gairmezurwa (land belonging to the Government) land was allotted to the landless Harijans. While Ramji Mahto, a Kurmi landowner, claimed for ownership of land by stating that the land belonged to him under a "Hukunnama" from an employee of the late landlord. He

29 P.C. Gandhi, op.cit.

30 Biswanath Lal, 'Kaila is worse than the Belchi and Bajitpur,' New Age, December 24, 1978.

was ably supported by Munna Mahto and Vijay Mahto, the fellow Kurmis. The Harijans, on the other hand, were mobilised and united by Khaira Paswan, Yadu Paswan and Brahmadeo Paswan. Keeping in view the tense situation, a police party was posted in the village.

The Harijans were attacked first on November 7 when one person got the bullet injury. A Harijan woman went to lodge the complaint to the superintendent of police, Nalanda district, but she was told that the honourable S.P. did not meet the members of public. The next day, Ramji Mahto with the assistance of about 200 persons occupied the land allotted to the Harijans. In the resistance shown by the Harijans many sustained injuries. Once again, the police refused to register the case. Thus, on 9th November, three persons were brutally murdered with sharp weapons. The heads of two deceased were chopped off by the landowners. As usual, police party arrived after the culprits had absconded. Round the clock police patrolling started but it was of no use for the suffering Harijans.

(9) Mahuli Incident

In the Mahuli village of Patna district, the inhabitants of Harijan toli were attacked on January 1, 1979 by the gun^{men} of the village landlords. It was due to dispute between the Harijans and the landlords over the rights regarding fishing on a public tank. For quite some time, the Harijans were prevented by the landlords from fishing on the tank though they tried their best to resist the efforts of the landlords.

As a result, the attack took place in which many Harijans sustained injuries and their huts were set on fire by the hoodlums.³¹ The Mahuli incident was of somewhat different nature. There was no ownership of land or wage dispute involved. Instead, it was dispute over fishing which caused confrontation.

(10) Shahpurpatti Incident

Seven days after the Mahuli incident, two Harijans were found murdered in the fields in Shahpurpatti village in Bhojpur district. It was discovered on January 8, 1979. Reasons of this heinous murder could not be known. It was, however, reported that the deceased Harijans were shot at a by some unidentified gunmen.³²

(11) Panchpura Incident

Three Harijans were killed in two separate incidents in Panchpura village of Siwan district on 5th March 1979.³³ The culprits, thus time, were not landowners and their henchmen, but a Mukhia and a police constable, who were supported protectors of the Harijans, were involved in the murders. Ironically, this incident took place at a time when the State Government had announced the formation of 'Bihar Harijan Force' to protect the Harijans from attacks of the landowners.

32 The Indian Nation, Patna, January 9, 1979.

33 The Indian Nation, Patna, March 6, 1979.

(12) Parasbigha Incident

Twelve Harijans were murdered and eight wounded by the Bhumihars in Parasbigha village of Gaya district on Feb. 6, 1980. It was worse than the incident taken place in Belchi village in 1977. The attack was in a retaliation to the murder of Ram Niranjan Sharma, a Bhumihar landowner in the village, three months ago. Sharma was murdered on account of his occupation of the Harijan's and the government land.

In Parasbigha there were hundred backward class and scheduled caste families. Ram Niranjan Sharma was the only upper caste man, owning 52 acres of land. Sharma came to village in 1937 to occupy forcibly the land from the sharecroppers and evict them. In fact, the land belonged to one Ganesh Lal who sought Sharma's help in evicting the share croppers and asked him to carry on cultivation. Lal asked for the entire produce from only the five bighas to which Sharma agreed.³⁴ Very soon, Sharma occupied the entire land and stopped giving produce of five bighas to Ganesh Lal. Seeing no other option, Lal sold the land to Jatti Singh, who filed a case against Sharma and won it finally in the Supreme Court. Still Sharma did not move out and, once again, he evicted the share-croppers and labourers employed by Jatti Singh. Since then, tension started between Sharma and the sharecroppers who were mostly the Yadavas.

34 Saumitra Banerjee and Arun Ranjan, 'Parasbigha, Dohiya - A cry of terror,' Sunday, Calcutta, Feb. 7, 1980, p. 9.

Sharma began terrorising the backward classes and the Harijans in the village. He was involved in many murders and assault incidents. His next venture was to occupy the land allotted to the Harijans by the government and the Government waste land used as Pasture by the Gareriyas (shepherds).³⁵ Then, Sukhdev Bhagat, a Gareriya, organized the backward castes and the Harijans against the tyranny of Sharma. Sharma himself was instructed by the police not to indulge in such acts. But violating the police instructions, he opened fire at the Harijans quite frequently. Before some legal action could be taken against him, he was found beheaded in his own field on October 28, 1979. Some Harijans of the village were accused by the relatives of Sharma for the murder. His children took vow to finish off the culprits.

The attack at the mid night on February 6, 1980 was allegedly led by Madan Mohan, Sharma's son, who was the security man of a state cabinet minister. The assailants encircled the village, bolted the door of all houses and set them on fire. Whoever came out of burning huts, was shot at. In all, twelve persons were murdered and many of them were Garriyas. Sukhdevo Bhagat, the leader of the share-croppers and the labours could survive but lost five of his family members. While leaving the village, the attackers had the

35 Seo Arun Sinha, 'Land grab, caste rift behind violence,' Sunday Standard, Feb. 10, 1980.

audacity to say "This time we were merely playing. Next time we shall be serious." The police came to the spot only after the culprits had safely disappeared.

The police protection was sought by the Harijans immediately after the murder of Sharma, but it was turned down, when the villagers expressed their inability to provide rations for the police force to be posted in the village.³⁶ It clearly shows how concerned were the protectors of the people.

(13) Dohiya Incident

The Dohiya incident was a retaliation to the attack on the backward castes and the Harijans by the Bhumihars in Parasbigha. In Dohiya, the attackers were the Yadavas and on the receiving end were the females and children of the Bhumihars. It took place in the broad daylight after two days of the Parasbigha incident.

Dohiya had 13 Bhumihars, 4 Yadava, 15 Musahar and 4 Muslim households. A few Bhumihars of the village also had taken part in the Parasbigha carnage. Some of them were arrested by police on 8th morning and the rest absconded. Hence, at the time of attack, only two old men were left in the village. Immediately after the Parasbigha incident the police had started patrolling the region and were in position to sense an act of revenge by the affected persons of Parasbigha. In fact, the Yadavas tried to attack the house of Ram Niranjan Sharma (the landlord, whose murder led to Parasbigha incident)

36 Janak Singh, 'Yadavas on rampage to settle Gaya score,' The Times of India, New Delhi, Feb. 9, 1980.

first, but their attempt was foiled by the timely intervention of the police personnel. Then, the Yadavas marched in groups towards Dohiya, one km. away from Parasbigha.

By the time, the decision to protect the villagers of Dohiya was taken by the officials and the policemen, the ransacking, looting and setting fire to Bhumihar households in Dohiya had started. Hundreds of youth attacked houses, stripped naked over a dozen Bhumihar women and took away their jewellery and other personal belongings. It continued for three hours. In the attack, Bhumihar woman died after being thrown from the roof of her two-storeyed house. Two old men, besides 13 women, received injuries.³⁷ The police met the attackers on the way when they were coming back with their 'loot.' Four of them were subsequently arrested.

Police inefficiency was crystal clear from the fact that although they had prior knowledge of both these confrontations, yet no precautionary step was taken. Dohiya incident can be rightly regarded as having taken place in the presence of police.

(14) Pipra Incident

The Pipra incident, in which fourteen Harijans were slaughtered by the Kurmis, was of different nature. In other incidents, either there was some resistance from the side of the Harijans or it was completely lacking. But in Pipra, we not only find an act of opposition and resistance shown by

Harijans against the landowners, but they after being influenced by some Naxalite elements, also, indulged in acts of murder of the landowners. It can be stated that both the parties were waiting since long for a 'show of strength.' Moreover the Pipra incident took the maximum death toll, majority of the deceased were not engaged in farming, only their birth in a Harijan community cost their lives.

In Pipra carnage, no dispute over land ownership was involved. It was the result of a long movement launched by the Harijans of the village for the payment of minimum wages. The Harijan agricultural labourers demanded that the farm wages should be in accordance with the rates fixed by the government. (Minimum Rs.6 per day or 4 kg. of food grains). But the landowners paid them just one kg. of wheat or Khesari and 1/2 kg. of Sattu (grinded gram or other food grains) per day. The labourers further demanded that if the landowners could not pay them the minimum wages, the quantity of food grains given to them should at least be doubled.³⁸ The Kurmi landowners of the nearby Kalyan Chuk village, who owned land in Pipra, did not meet these demands. It led to generation of tension in the village and the relationship between the landowners and the labourers started developing bitterness.

38 Janak Singh, '14 Harijans killed as Kulak wrath rocks Bihar village,' The Times of India, New Delhi, Feb. 27, 1980.

Another cause of tension was the marriage of Radhika Singh (a Kurmi by caste) with Taramuni (a Harijan woman). Radhika Singh, the cousin of Bhola Singh, leader of the Kurmi landowners, had taken away the Harijan girl twenty years ago to Kalyan Chuk village and later on she began working as an informer of the Kurmis. The Harijans, on being annoyed with her behaviour, expelled her from the village. Radhika Singh threatened the Harijans with dire consequences. The Harijans formed a 'patrol party' to protect themselves from any possible attack by the landowners.

In the meanwhile some of the militant Harijans of Pipra started troubling the Kurmi landowners of Kalyan Cuk village. Quite often the cases of loot of foodgrains were reported. One Kurmi landowner was forced to give several maunds of rice in the form of 'donation' to a group of aggressive Harijan youth.³⁹ The Kurmi landowners too formed the 'Kishan Swaraksha Samiti' (save landowners committee), under the leadership of Bhola Singh to protect themselves. Large donations were collected in a bid to check the militancy of the Harijans. According to an unofficial report, about Rs.60,000 was collected for this purpose.

The situation worsened on July 28, 1979 when Dwarka Singh, a Kurmi landowner, was found shot dead at Dekuli village near Poonpoo. Some Harijans were accused for the murder. Next victim was Bhola Singh whose head was chopped off in a

39 S.P. Singh, 'The night Pipra 1 became a gravehard,' Sunday, Calcutta, March 2, 1980, vol.7, No.35, p. 32.

field on December 6, 1979. His brother named four Harijans who, according to the police, were known to be Naxalites. But none of them belonged to Popra. Again, on January 31, 1980, Deonandan Singh, the treasurer of the 'Kishan Suraksha Saniti' was also murdered.

Murder of the three landowners within a period of six months made the Kurmis of the area very furious. They started preparation to attack the Harijans. The Harijans, on sensing it, intensified the patrolling in Pipra. On February 25, 1980, the Kurmi landowners sent about 400 people, fully armed, to attack the Harijans of Pipra. The attack began at 10 P.M. in the night when the Harijan patrol party was doing its usual rounds of the village. Party tried to resist the attackers but, for want of arms and enough manpower, had to flee for safety. The hired men of the Kurmis first set fire to 26 huts of the Harijans by sprinkling kerosene oil. Whoever came out to know the reason of fire was shot at. The dead bodies were hacked to pieces and then everything was thrown into the leaping flames. Nine members of the family of Kishan, a bandmaster, who did not have any quarrel with the Kurmis, were murdered. The total death toll was 14. Some of the villagers resorted to brick batting but it was no answer to the bullets. The massacre of the Harijans continued for six hours.

The police party came at dawn and began investigations. Fifty persons were named in the First Information Sheet, out

of which fourteen were arrested. Usual rituals were performed by the police, press, politicians and the district officials but tense situation prevailing in Pipra could not be defused. Several innocent persons, who had no differences with the Kurmis and who were not at all engaged in cultivation work, were butchered. True, the target of attack were not the people who demanded minimum wages but the entire Harijan community of the village.

Analysis of the Incidents

An analysis of the above mentioned incidents of conflicts would show that Patna and Rohtas were the leading districts. In Patna two major incidents took place in which not less than twenty five Harijans were killed by the middle caste Kurmi landowners. Maximum number of incidents were reported during the year 1978 when the Government machinery promised to adopt all the possible steps to ensure safety to the Harijans.

The reasons responsible for these conflicts can be classified as follows:

- (a) Denial of minimum wages to the Harijan labourers and the resistance shown against it.
- (b) Usurption of land, originally owned by the Harijans, by the upper and middle caste landowners.
- (c) Forcible occupation of the land, allotted to the landless agricultural labourers under the various governmental schemes, by the landowners

- (d) Landowners' resistance to abolition of practices of the bonded labour, debt redemption schemes for the Harijan labourers and checking of nefarious practices of moneylenders.
- (e) Other reasons.

The carnage took place in Beldhi on account of denial of minimum wages to the Harijan labourers and forcible occupation of their land by the Kurmi landowners. The Harijans were tied, beaten up badly and then thrown into the burning pyre after chopping the heads of some victims off. The Kurmi culprits were so fearless that they roasted the dead bodies in their presense.

In Pathada, the Yadavas were the culprits and the Harijans were the sufferers. It was also due to demand of minimum wages by the Harijan labourers. They were assaulted and their womenfolk raped by the attackers. Similarly, the Dharampura incident was due to the dispute over wage and the ownership of land. Before the case of land dispute between the Harijans and the Mahant of the villages was decided, four Harijans were shot dead by gunmen of the Mahant. The oppressors in this case were the Brahmins. But in the Rupetha incident the entry into a 'prohibited area' led to the burning of a poor Harijan in the broad day light. The assailants were again the men of the upper castes.

Further, in Bishempur, four Harijans were brutally murdered by the henchmen of the Kurmi landowners. The relatives of the deceased had raised voice against the payment

of meagre wages and tyrannical way of functioning of a Kurmi landowner. Similarly, the Pipri incident was caused due to displeasure of the Kurmi landowners at the allotment of land to the Harijans by the government. Two relatives of one of the allottees of the government land were murdered and their heads were chopped off.

The resistance against the grabbing of land allotted to the Harijans by a Bhumihar landowner resulted into the Bajitpur incident. One Harijan was killed, eighteen were injured, three Harijan women were raped. The properties of 162 Harijan and backward class families were ransacked when henchmen of the Bhumihar landowner attacked the village.

Similarly, allotment of the government land to the Harijans in Kaila village became a bone of contention between the Harijan landless labourers and the Kurmi landowners. The Harijans were forcibly evicted and, in the process, three of them lost their lives. Heads of the two Harijans were chopped off.

In Mahuli, however, there was no land or wage dispute involved. The Harijans were attacked by the landowners on account of dispute over the rights regarding fishing on a public tank. Such a minor issue also could lead to the conflict situation.

The reasons of murder of two Harijans in Shapurpatti village could not be known. They were shot dead by some unidentified gunmen and their bodies were thrown in a field

near the village. Further, three Harijans lost their lives in two separate incidents in Pachpura area. Their murder was not on account of any issue related to land. The culprits in this case were not the landowners but the Mukhia and a police constable whose duty was to protect the people of their areas. Instead, they resorted to the killings.

In Parasbigha, once again, the attackers were the Bhumihars and at the receiving end were mainly the Gareriyas who were supported by the Yadavas. The reason of the carnage, in which 12 Harijans were slaughtered, was forcible eviction of the share croppers and workers by the Bhumihar landowners. Doors of huts of the Harijans were bolted from outside, before they were set on fire and people were prevented from coming out. Whoever was found outside, received the bullet shots.

The Dohiya incident was a retaliation to the attack on Parasbigha. The Yadavas of Parasbigha ransacked the houses of Dohiya Bhumihars, killed one, injured thirteen, stripped some women and looted their property.

Finally, the Pipra incident was caused by dispute over the payment of wages and exploitation of Harijans in several ways, by the Kurmi landowners of a nearby village. In Pipra, the Harijans were creating problems for the land owners for a long time. A number of confrontations had already taken place in the past in which both the sides

were the losers. Here, the Harijans were reportedly influenced by some Naxal elements who instigated the murder of these Kurmi landowners before the carnage of 25th Feb. 1980. Unfortunately, several innocent people fell prey to the violence by men hired by the Kurmi landowners. It can be stated that in Pipra the resistance by the exploited sections was stronger than that by people in other villages which witnessed atrocities.

Who are Oppressors?

After having analysed the causes of the atrocities and the methods adopted to suppress, assault and murder the Harijans in different incidents, let us examine the involvement of the upper and middle castes over the years in oppression of the Harijans.

In majority of the cases of atrocities on the Harijans, the oppressors and attackers were the people belonging to the middle castes. In seven out of the fourteen incidents, the middle castes have been found guilty. Further, among the middle castes, the Kurmis have taken a leading part in the murders of the Harijans. The Yadavas, the other middle caste, were involved in two incidents discussed above. Moreover, the Kurmis have resorted to the most heinous methods of killing. This may be so because they are numerically and economically strongest caste group in the affected villages. The Kurmi landowners maintain positive links with the politicians and the police to cover up their acts of repression and exploitation.

As regards the upper castes, their involvement was found in four out of fourteen incidents discussed above. The Brahmins were responsible for one carnage (Dharampura), while in two incidents, the Bhumihars assaulted and murdered the Harijan labourers. In the case of the fourth incident, involving the upper castes, it could not be known as to which upper caste formed the attacking group.

The middle castes, who formed the tenant and middle peasant class in the zamindari system became owners of land mainly after the system was abolished, as discussed earlier. In the new arrangement, the ownership of land was shifted from the upper caste zamindars to the actual tillers of land - the people from mainly the middle castes. Secondly, with the growth of education, the upper castes started migrating to the towns and cities in search of better opportunities after selling their land to the middle range castes as the latter had better paying capacity. The middle caste landowners became very aggressive in dealing with the Harijan agricultural workers. The degree of their aggression now is more than that of their acts of tackling the upper castes in the past. The labourers are treated more harshly than before.

Moreover, unlike the upper castes, the middle castes themselves work on their fields. Hence, they are in better position to strengthen their grip in rural areas and can exercise maximum checks over the Harijan labourers. However, they do not provide any kind of patronage to the Harijans who

work for them. On the contrary, the upper caste landlords, in the zamindari system, used to extend patronage to their low caste workers. The workers felt some what secure in the Zamindari era. Whenever an offence was committed, only the offender was punished, not the whole caste group to which he belonged.

In the changed situation, however, one finds that a mistake committed by one or two Harijans leads to assault and murder of the entire community, living in a particular village. In many cases, the individuals who are the target of attack either escape or are saved otherwise. But the innocent people, who are engaged in works other than cultivation and who do not have any hostility with the attacking party, are subjected to inhuman treatment by the henchmen of the landowners. Their only 'fault' is that they are not born either in upper or middle caste households. Hence, they are destined to be oppressed.

Acts of Resistance by the Harijans

In the recent past, the resistance by the Harijans to a number of atrocities inflicted on them have been witnessed in some villages in the state. They have gradually become aware of their miserable condition in the countryside and their overall low status in the Hindu society. The educated and politically conscious Harijans have organised the labourers against their exploitation by the upper and middle caste landowners. They have raised their voice also

from time to time, against denial of the minimum wages, forcible occupation of their land by the landowners and other related matters. But, any agitation for their justified demands is taken, by the land owners, as an act of vengeance. Consequently, they are either silenced or branded as criminal and, if possible, murdered also.

When the resistance is to be shown to the upper caste landowners, the middle castes never miss the opportunity to support the Harijan labourers. But when a middle caste landowner especially a Kurmi exploits the Harijans and the voice is raised against it, the Yadavas and the Koeris, the fellow middle castes, do not support the Harijans. Due to all this, the Harijans are isolated and are always on receiving ends.

Further, the Naxalites bands are active in the districts of Bhojpur, Rohtas, Patna, Nalanda and Gaya where wages paid to the Harijan labourers are quite low and they are subjected to a series of sufferings. The Naxal elements organise the landless Harijan labourers against all kinds of exploitation. Sometimes, they terrorise also the land owners by looting their property, giving them threats and committing the acts of murder as is quite evident from the incident taken place in Pipra village. But such militant Harijans are very few in number and that their resources are limited. Majority of the Harijans still suffer in the villages at the hands of

the ambitious and mighty landowners. Facing starvation, they are not in the position to migrate to towns and cities either.

Protection to Harijans; Role of Police and the Government

In the caste ridden state of Bihar, the atrocities on the Harijans take place almost every day. Most of them go on unreported, uninvestigated and unchecked. The world comes to know about the incidents only if they are highlighted either by the press or the politicians who have their own vested interests in doing so. For instance, the basic aim of the politicians remains to expose the loopholes of the party in power which, in turn, might bring some good to them. NO one seems to be interested in understanding the real issues involved in a conflict situation and everyone is aware only of the seemider side of it. Hence, even after massacres and carnages, tensions persist between the affected lots and the culprits. The Harijans, whose lives are spared, continue to live in a state of fear and intimidation.

Role of the Police

In this context, let us analyse the role of police in providing security to the Harijans. One has no hesitation in stating that the role of police has not been upto the expectation. While analysing the various incidents of atrocities we have seen that the police has either been late in arriving on the scene or have failed to, if present, prevent the carnages. There could be two reasons of late

arrival of the police, either there is delay in receiving the message or they deliberately delay their arrival. The latter is possible if the leader of the culprits is an influential person or there is some collusion between them and the police. Often such collusion is on the instructions of the politicians.

Attempts have been made by the party in power to suppress and deny the reports about atrocities, known to some sections of the population. Every attempt is made not to make an incident public. Once it leaks out, all attempts are made to give it a different colour. The police usually terms the incidents of atrocity, as an act of encounter between the two rival gangs of criminals. It was glaringly evident in the case of Belchi incident. First of all, the incident was reported in the press after four days of actual occurrence. Then after ten days or so the detailed account of the incident was available. In between a lot of misleading statements were given, both by the police officials and by the men in administration.

The Assistant sub-inspector of Barh police station, under which comes the Belchi village, first refused to go to the spot, unless he was paid Rs.500 as bribe. Later, the gravity of the situation was realised and the police party reached the spot through a long route hours after the incident had taken place. Probably the police were afraid of growing influence of the Kurmi land owner and the MLA involved in the incident.

In Bishampur, the police was silent spectator to the reign of terror created by Hira Kurmi who murdered three Harijans before losing his own life. When the Kurmis killed another four children and old persons in retaliation to Hira's murder, the police party led by an Assistant sub-inspector of Police was very much present in the village but failed in checking the carnage.

Similarly, the police party was aware of the brutal attack on the Harijans in Bajitpur village but no precautionary measure was taken to prevent it. The Inspector General of Police visited the village after fifteen days to find the main culprits absconding. The incident was reported in the press only after I.G.P.'s visit. The police had prior knowledge of the Kaila incident also. This is clear from the fact that when an old woman of the village went to report about the murder of a Harijan, the senior Superintendent of Police of Nalanda refused to meet her. In the Pachpura incident, one police constable himself was found guilty of having murdered a Harijan.

Further, the Parasbigha and Dohiya incidents also speak of negligence and inefficiency on the part of police. In Parasbigha, the request of the Harijans to post a police party in the village was turned down, When the villagers expressed their inability to provide rations for the policemen. It was an improper demand by the police, considering the fact that the Harijans themselves were leading a miserable

life. Similarly, the police party was just one km. away when the incident took place in Dohiya village. They reached the spot only after houses were ransacked, females stripped naked and the attackers had decamped with their loots.

In the same way, vigilance on the part of the police could have averted the Pipra carnage. Pipra was surrounded by the police posts and the police officials had knowledge about the planned confrontation between the Kummis and the Harijans. Still the innocent nine members of the family of a bandmaster, alongwith five others, were butchered in the village.

There is need, therefore, to overhaul and gear up the police administration in Bihar. Not only the attitudinal but certain structured changes are also needed in the police organization. The policemen should actually protect the weaker sections rather than only pretending to do so. Increase in number of police personnel is also required. This is so because the strength of the police, at present, is very inadequate (only 58,000) to manage the vast, densely populated and problem-ridden state like Bihar where the number of villages alone comes to about 65,000. Many of these villages are not easily approachable. Hence, modern communication networks should be provided to the police party posted in such areas.

Role of the Government

With regard to providing security to the Harijans,

a discrepancy is found between what government promises and what it actually does. A very few of the cases of atrocities on Harijans are reported. Every attempt is made to ignore and suppress them. Investigation is done only in those cases which hit the headlines of the national newspapers. Before the investigation begins, misleading and sometimes contradictory statements are made by the government officials and the politicians in power. Many a time the exploited Harijans who raise their voice against the landowners are branded as criminals and are trapped in the cases of arson and murder. The real caste and class conflicts are, on many occasions, regarded as encounters between the rival gangs of the criminals. Thus, the root causes behind such conflicts are rarely highlighted and the outside world gets a very gloomy picture of them.

The police party is posted in the affected areas for a limited period. The collusion between the landowners, politicians, government officials and the police comes in the way of granting justice to the Harijans. No steps are taken by the government to remedy the malady permanently, merely temporary respite is given to the victims. This is why, their exploitation continues even after the massacres of their brethren.

The state government in the past has promised publicly to adopt several measures to protect the Harijans. The measures announced ^{are} all-special courts for the Harijan

victims, provision of mobile court, arms to the Harijans, formation of Bihar Harijan force and Harijan Thanas (police stations). Some of these have been implemented, while others have not been found 'feasible.' For instance, only the Harijan Thanas were started in a few areas in the state. These were manned by the Harijan police personnel but they have not made much headway with regard to securing the position of Harijans in the countryside. The Janata Party government had decided to arm the Harijans but the proposal remained only on paper. When the Congress government came to power, the proposal was subjected to review but no decision could be taken due to divergence of opinion among the politicians. Moreover, the police and the district officials have shown their opposition to such a proposal, for they think that arming the Harijans would aggravate further the already tense situation in the state. Another argument ^{given is} that arms are in inadequate supply even for the policemen.

The decision to form the Bihar Harijan force to protect the Harijan victims was taken in February 1979 but so far no follow up action has been taken in this regard. Similarly, the announcement was made to institute the special courts for speedy trials of the cases involving the Harijans but it was hardly implemented. Mainly those cases are decided fast which involve certain non-Harijan influential persons. The mobile courts too remain a dream

for the suffering sections.

To sum up, the state government comes out with wonderful schemes to protect the Harijans, after a carnage takes place but soon everything is forgotten. Whatever is promised is rarely implemented. The place of atrocities loses its significance after the process of formation of political capital is over and everything fades away from the people's memory. Only the surviving Harijans can feel that they have miles to go before they get social and economic justice.

Chapter-VI

CONCLUSION

Caste reigns supreme in a semi-feudal state like Bihar. It determines the patterns of everyday life of the people in the state. Not only are people caste-conscious, they also have a tendency to be caste-centred. Even those interested seriously in bringing about the attitudinal changes, get discouraged and depressed soon, on account of the complex nature of the prevailing circumstances. Atime comes when they have to do compromise with the same norms of the system which in their view, required modification earlier. Generations come and generations go and ills of the system go on perpetuating. No permanent solution appears in sight. Exploitation of the individual goes on unabated in the name of ritual ascribed statuses. None of the fields are untouched, unaffected by the caste feeling. All this results into a series of tensions, rivalries and conflicts involving the three major caste groups in the state.

Inter caste conflict in Bihar is mainly observed at three levels:

- (a) Between the upper and the middle ranging castes;
- (b) Between the upper castes and the Harijans; and
- (c) Between the Harijans and the middle ranging castes.

We have observed in Chapter III that till the sixties of the present century, conflict involved mainly the upper castes. First case of rivalry was between the Kayasthas and the Bhumihars, who formed ⁱⁿ this respective caste associations to unite their masses and to work for their development. Later on, the Bhumihars met with tough resistance from the Rajputs. The Brahmins, however, remained relegated to the background for quite some time.

In the thirties of the present century some of the middle ranging castes too organised themselves in a bid to compete with the upper castes. But they could ^{assert} ~~arrest~~ themselves in the sixties only when infighting among the upper castes registered a rise. As a result, the middle caste became a force to reckon with, especially with regard to the politics in the state. They strengthened their position in the countryside as well.

As discussed in Chapter IV, the appointment of a Backward Classes Commission and its subsequent recommendations for reservation for the middle castes in the state, spoke of their rising influence. Owing to the reservation facility extended to the middle castes (or the Backward Classes in the opinion of the said Commission), the conflict between them and the upper castes became manifest. Both sides drew swords at each other. The resistance from the upper castes was out of the fear that their share in government jobs would be taken away by

the middle castes. While in the opinion of the middle caste leaders, it was a step in the right direction, for the numerically weaker upper castes had dominated every sphere of Bihar society, for a long time. Whatever may be the arguments and the counter arguments of the two caste groups, it is true that the conflict between them grew to alarming proportions in the post 1977 period and its impact would be felt in many years to come.

The second level of conflict concerns the upper castes and the Harijans or the Scheduled Castes. As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, the majority of the landless labourers in rural areas are the Harijans and therefore, have been the traditional sufferers. The conflict between the Harijans and the upper castes is on account of the issues related to land, viz. usurption of land of the Harijans and denial of even the minimum wages to the Harijan labourers. The attempts to unite the Harijans to ensure them a reasonable living are usually suppressed. However, it can be stated that the upper castes, apart from exploiting the Harijan fold, extended patronage to them at the times of crisis.

The third level of caste conflict is with regard to the middle ranging castes and the Harijans. The issues giving rise to such conflict are similar to that involved in the second level of conflict but the method of atrocities by the middle castes on the Harijans have been somewhat

different in nature. After independence, the Harijans expected some improvement in their condition, if not, the similar treatment they received prior to the transfer of ownership of land from the upper castes to the middle castes. But contrary to their expectations, they lost the patronage of the landowners and have been subjected to more inhuman treatment in the changed situation. On top of it, the police and the government machinery have proved to be quite non-cooperative towards them.

Apart from the three explicit levels of caste conflict analysed above, there also exist the implicit levels of conflicts among certain upper, middle and the Scheduled Castes. The contradiction is found between the Rajputs and the Bhumi-hars, in all walks of life. It is manifested in rural as well as urban areas, especially during the election times. Such type of conflict can be traced back to the 1930's when the two caste groups began competing with each other for grabbing the leadership positions in the state.

In the same way, the cleavages have emerged between the upper and the lower middle castes. The upper middle castes have been virtually ignoring their lower caste brethren, who, inspite of their numerical superiority over the former, have been unsuccessful in asserting themselves, to date. Moreover, the feeling of superiority and inferiority has also contributed to the disunity among the different Scheduled Castes. For instance, the Chamars and the Dusadhs are not on equal footing, according

to each other. Some of the Dusadhs would not accept even water from the hands of a Chamar. The differences also exist between the Bhogtas, Chamars and the Ghasis.

Keeping in view the analysis of caste conflict done thus far, one cannot hesitate in coming out with the statement that behind most of the happenings, drawing attention of the conscious masses in Bihar, there exists the caste factor. The caste has shown equally its true colour in rural areas and in the cities. The elections held at the different levels have been decided by the element of caste. The leaders, mobilising the electorate on the basis of caste considerations, come out with flying colours, while those working in the opposite direction get vanquished. In villages, the land owning castes have been able to wield the governmental support and, thus, the cases of atrocities inflicted on the Harijans have cumulated over the years.

In many educational institutions also, the caste factor is decisive. The interaction among the students, between the teaching and the non-teaching staff and sometimes between the teachers and students, ^{ib}_h governed by the caste considerations. Admissions in several educational institutions are conducted mainly on the caste lines. The elections to the students unions, teachers and the staff associations are fought on the caste basis. Thus the caste feeling is manifest in the interaction among those constituting the educational institutions. It is

an unfortunate development altogether. The institutions which were to develop modern, rational and egalitarian values among the students are rather providing a helping hand in perpetuation of the traditional ills of the system. If the illiterate persons act in this manner, could we expect a better outlook on the part of the illiterate, tradition bound and the religion-fearing masses?

The state government offices are not untouched either by the caste factor. The appointments, promotions and transfers are carried mostly on the caste lines. The new recruits to the various positions in the government offices are already trained in the art of distinguishing people according to the caste considerations. Their knowledge of this art is supplemented by their conversations with the experienced senior employees. The ministers choose the officials of their own caste, setting aside the experience, knowledge and efficiency criteria. Rationality is no match to the loyalty on traditional lines. The Scheduled Caste government employees, irrespective of their grade, invariably receive step motherly treatment from the fellow employees of other castes. No doubt such caste considerations give rise to conflict situations.

What steps should be taken for reduction of importance attached to caste in Bihar, which overrides every thing, is a million dollar question. No satisfactory reply would be ascertained, if the literate masses stick

to the traditional institutions in the same way as the illiterate masses do. As long as the governing elites continue to encash the caste factor vis-a-vis the primordial loyalties to serve their vested interests, no substantive change is foreseen in the social structure in Bihar. As a matter of fact, the governing elites, especially the politicians, do not have any caste in most of the times. Instead, they belong to the same 'interest group.' Their interest lies in following a divide and rule policy with regard to the poor non-elite masses. Thus, they possess the dual identity of being and at the same time, not being the members of a caste.

To sum up, the society in Bihar may not be free from the clutches of caste demon and thereby caste conflict in the near future. Any soothsaying would be futile in this regard. History would take its own course to arrive at evolution of a rational, egalitarian and conflict free society in the state. ✓

APPENDIX-IPOPULATION OF SCHEDULED CASTES IN BIHAR, 1971

<u>Sl. No.</u>	<u>Name of Caste</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Sl. No.</u>	<u>Name of Caste</u>	<u>Population</u>
1	Chamar	2,383,440	13	Ghasi	73,611
2	Dusadh	2,105,413	14	Bantar	53,264
3	Musahar	1,168,447	15	Pan	27,531
4	Bhuiya	438,196	16	Nat	17,431
5	Dhobi	433,317	17	Chaupal	24,114
6	Pasi	333,765	18	Halalkhor	5,267
7	Dom	165,228	19	Dabgar	3,971
8	Rajwar	193,686	20	Bhumij	2,139
9	Turi	103,434	21	Kanjar	3,152
10	Hari	114,456	22	Lalbegi	759
11	Bhogta	104,790	23	Kurariar	1,711
12	Bauri	95,260	24	Unclassified	98,770
				TOTAL	7,950,652

Source: L.P. Vidyarthi & N. Mishra, Harijan Today,
Classical Publications, New Delhi, 1977,
p.1-2.

APPENDIX-IILIST OF OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES IN BIHAR
PREPARED BY THE MUNGERI LAL COMMISSION, 1976

<u>Sl. No.</u>	<u>Caste/Class</u>	<u>Sl. No.</u>	<u>Caste/Class</u>
1	Abdal	33	Gangai (Nagesh)
2	Agrariya	34	Gangota
3	Aghori	35	Ger or God (Saran & Rohtas)
4	Amat	36	Gulgalia
5	Kasab (Muslim)	37	Gaur
6	Kawut	38	Ghatwar
7	Kadar	39	Cheek (Muslim)
8	Kewat	40	Chanye
9	Kalander	41	Chapota
10	Kaura	42	Chandravansha (Kahar)
11	Kavar	43	Churihar (Muslim)
12	Koch	44	Chansu
13	Korku	45	Jadupatia
14	Kumar Bhag Pabaria	46	Jogi (Jugi)
15	Kurmi (Mahto)	47	Fikulshar
16	Kagji	48	Dafali (Muslim)
17	Karu	49	Dhekaru
18	Kakar (Lohar & Karmkar)	50	Tanti (Tatwa)
19	Kushwaha (Koeri)	51	Turba
20	Kaparia	52	Tamaria
21	Kosta	53	Tiyar
22	Khatik	54	Tamoli
23	Khengar	55	Teli
24	Khatwa	56	Tharu
25	Khatwe	57	Deohar
26	Kharwar (Siwan & Rohtas)	58	Dhanuk
27	Khatori	59	Dhobi (Muslim)
28	Khalta	60	Dhunia (Muslim)
29	Khond	61	Dhamin
30	Gorhi (Chavi)	62	Dhankar
31	Gaddi	63	Dheemar
32	Gandharbh	64	Nai

contd....

65	Nat (Muslim)	97	Miriyasin (Muslim)
66	Nunian	98	Majhwar
67	Namsudra	99	Malar (Malhor)
68	Naiya	100	Manger
69	Nalband (Muslim)	101	Markandey
70	Pamriya (Muslim)	102	Maulik
71	Prajapati (Kumhar)	103	Mukri
72	Pando	104	Madar
73	Pingania	105	Mauriyari
74	Partha	106	Mirsikar (Muslim)
75	Pradhan	107	Momin (Muslim)
76	Pahira	108	Yadav (Gwala, Ahir, Goura, Ghasi & Mehar)
77	Pal (Bherihar-Gareri)	109	Rajbhar
78	Bekhara	110	Rajdhobi
79	Bagdi	111	Ravanshi (Risya & Polia)
80	Banjara	112	Rangwa
81	Bari	113	Rangraj (Muslim)
82	Beldar	114	Rauttiya
83	Bind	115	Rain or Kunjara (Muslim)
84	Barhi	116	Laheri
85	Barai	117	Vedia
86	Bania*	118	Banpar
87	Bhatiyara (Muslim)	119	Shivhari
88	Bhar	120	Saunta (Sota)
89	Bhaskar	121	Sai (Muslim)
90	Bhuihar	122	Sonar
91	Bhuiyam	123	Sutradhar
92	Bhat	124	Sangatras
93	Mali (Malakar)	125	Sukiar
94	Mallah (Surahia)	126	Idrasi or Darji (Muslim)
95	Madari (Muslim)	127	Christian Harijans
96	Mehtar, Lalbegi, Halalkhor & Bhangi	128	Christian other backward classes

*Bania category includes Sudi, Malwai, Rauniar, Pansari, Modi, Kacera, Kesarwani, Thathera, Kalwar, Patwa, Komplapuri, Vaishya, Sinduria Bania, Mahuri Vaishya, Awadh Bania, Bangiya Vaishya, Varnawal, Agrahari Vaishya, and Poddar.

Source: Thakur Prasad, Bihar Arakshan Niyamavali,
Departmental Publication Sales Centre, New
Secretariat, Patna, 1978, pp. 6-7

APPENDIX-III

LIST OF MOST BACKWARD CASTES OF OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES

Sl. No.	Caste	Sl. No.	Caste
1	Kaparia	47	Pal (Bherihar, Gareri)
2	Kanu	48	Pradhan
3	Kapar	49	Pingania
4	Kalandar	50	Pahira
5	Koch	51	Bari
6	Kurmi (Mahato) only for Chhotanagpur Div.	52	Beldar
7	Kewar	53	Bind
8	Kadar	54	Banjara
9	Keura	55	Bekhara
10	Korku	56	Bagdi
11	Kewart	57	Bhuiyar
12	Kumarbhag Paharia	58	Bhar
13	Khatwa	59	Bhuiya
14	Kharwar (only for Siwan & Rohtas)	60	Bhaskar
15	Khatauri	61	Nali (Malakar)
16	Khanger	62	Kanger (Mager)
17	Khatik	63	Nadar
18	Khelta	64	Mallah (Surahia)
19	Khatwe	65	Majhwar
20	Khond	66	Markand
21	Gorhi (Chabi)	67	Moriyari
22	Gangai (Ganesh)	68	Malar (Malhor)
23	Gangota	69	Moulik
24	Gor or Gond (Saran & Rohtas)	70	Rajdholi
25	Gandharbh	71	Rajbhar
26	Gulgulia	72	Rangwa
27	Gor	73	Banpar
28	Chayen	74	Vediya
29	Chapota	75	Sota
30	Chandravanshi (kahar)	76	Sangatras (only KawaGa)
31	Tikulahar	77	Agaria
32	Dhekaru	78	Aghori
33	Tanti (Tatwa)	79	Abdal
34	Tamaria	80	Kasai (Muslim)
35	Turha	81	Cheek (Muslim)
36	Tiyar	82	Dafali (Muslim)
37	Tharu	83	Dhuniya (Muslim)
38	Dhanuk	84	Dhobi (Muslim)
39	Dhamin	85	Nat (Muslim)
40	Dheemar	86	Pamaria (Muslim)
41	Dhanwar	87	Bhatiyara (Muslim)
42	Konia	88	Bhat (Muslim)
43	Naiya	89	Mehtar, Lalbegia, Halalkhor, Bhangl
44	Nai		
45	Namsudra	90	Miriyasin (Muslim)
46	Pando	91	Nadari (Muslim)
		92	Norchikar (Muslim)
		93	Sai (Muslim)

Source: Thakur Prasad, Bihar Arakshan Niyama-vii, Departmental Publication Sales Centre, New Secretariat, Patna, 1978, pp. ५-६

APPENDIX-IV

RESERVATION OF SEATS IN BIHAR (as in 1979)

<u>Caste/Group</u>	<u>%age of Reservation</u>
Scheduled Castes	14
Scheduled Tribes	10
Lower Backward Classes (Annexure-I)	12
Upper Backward Classes (Annexure-II)	8
Women	3
Economically Weaker Sections	3
TOTAL	50

APPENDIX-V

CASTE COMPOSITION OF JANATA PARTY M.L.A.s in 1979

<u>Caste/Group</u>	<u>Number</u>
<u>Upper Castes -</u>	
Rajputs	40
Bhumihars	28
Kayasthas	9
Brahmins	8
<u>Middle & Backward Castes -</u>	
Yadavas	33
Kurmis	5
Banias	4
Marwari	3
Koeri	1
Others	13
<u>Scheduled Castes</u>	39
<u>Scheduled Tribes</u>	18
<u>Muslims</u>	14
<u>Bengalis</u>	5
TOTAL	220

Source: The Times of India, New Delhi, 19th Feb. 1979.

APPENDIX-VI

CASTE COMPOSITION OF MAJOR CABINET MINISTERS, 1962-1979
(Figures are in %ages)

Category	B.N. Jha Min. 1962	K.B. Sahay Min. 1963	Maha- maya P. Si- nha Min. 1967	Daroga P. Rai Min. 1970	Kedar Pandey Min. 1972	Abdul Gaffo- or Min. 1973	Jagan- nath Mishra Min. 1975	Karpo- ori Thakur Min. 1977	Ram Sunder Das Min. 1979	State Population
Forwards	58	40	67	33	38	38	40	29	50	13
Upper Backwards	8	20	20	20	23	23	20	38	20	19
Lower Backwards	0	0	7	0	0	5	0	4	0	31
Muslims & Bengalis	8	20	7	13	15	10	13	13	15	15
Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes	25	20	0	33	23	24	27	17	15	22
TOTAL	99	100	101	99	99	101	100	101	100	100

'Min.' denotes 'Ministry'.

Source: Harry W. Blair, "Rising Kulaks & Backward Classes in Bihar" Economic and Political Weekly, vol.XV, No.2, January 12, 1980, p.69.

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