

**CASTE DYNAMICS IN BHOJPUR REGION: A CASE STUDY  
OF CPI ML (LIBERATION) AND RANVIR SENA**

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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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### Declaration

I declare that the dissertation entitled, **CASTE DYNAMICS IN BHOJPUR REGION: A CASE STUDY of CPI ML(LIBERATION) AND RANVIR SENA**, submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy from Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.



**ASHUTOSH KUMAR ROY**

### Certificate


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



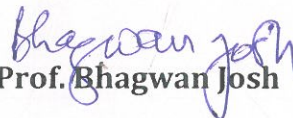
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Dedicated to  
My Parents

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## **Introduction**

In nineties, Central Bihar attracted world-wide attention for its gruesome caste- violence. Children, women and men all became victim of the caste violence. MCC, PWG, CPI ML(Liberation) and various other faction of Naxalites were active in the region, and all of them participated in merciless killings of innocent people. In Dalelchak Bhagaura massacre (1987), MCC killed fifty four innocent Rajput peasants while in Bara Massacre(1992) it killed thirty four Bhumihaar peasants. Mostly, these ultra-left wing organisations massacred innocent people belonging to upper castes. In retaliation, upper caste peasants also organised their private armies and perpetrated heinous crime against lower caste men, women and children. After the formation of Ranvir Sena, in 1994, the caste-violence increased on an unprecedented scale. According to official sources, within a decade Ranvir Sena massacred more than three hundred people belonging to lower castes. In the coming chapters we will see that the number of people killed in everyday violence was higher than those killed in massacres.

The question always haunts why people suddenly became so violent, why they crossed all limits of madness. Was it reversal of morality or transgression of ethical norms? Or, were the seeds of fascism and violence deeply embedded in culture which became palpable in nineties? Why did Naxalites, who claim that they are fighting for revolution, killed innocent children, women and men? Many other questions remain to be answered. One wonders why poor peasants of upper caste not supported various factions of Naxalites. Why Naxalites did not address the question of gender and sexuality in a proper way? To answer these questions one needs to look back at socio-cultural history of the region. One also needs a proper understanding of the complex interplay between identity, politics and culture.

In this dissertation my focus remains on Bhojpur region. In an M.Phil. Dissertation, it was not possible for me to include history of the whole of Central Bihar where different factions of Naxalites have been active for a long time. However, an analysis of events which unfolded in the twentieth century in the erstwhile Shahabad district will help to understand the politics of “Central Bihar.” The history of Bhojpur region is important for many reasons. It was the place where caste organisations were active since the early twentieth century. In the influence of

Arya Samaj, backward castes started *Janev* movement and in 1933 they formed Triveni Sangh to promote political interests of Yadav, Koeri and Kurmi castes. During the same period, Sahjanand Sarswati, a veteran peasant leader, was also active in the region. In seventies socialist politics was also successful to make its base in the region. The political wisdom of people belonging to the region is also manifested in this fact that at one time they were influenced by Manvendra Nath Roy and supported his Radical Democratic Party.

The political choice of different groups was decided by their caste identities. In Marxist literature caste has always been relegated to the part of superstructure which is founded on the base of economy. This archaeological metaphor is not able to capture the pervasive character of caste in our social life. Caste works at more nuanced level and it is manifested in religious practices, household rituals, myths, narratives, folklores, music, rumours, gender-relation, sexuality and everyday violence. The history of Bhojpur shows that caste behaves like a non-human actor in this rural district of Bihar. It brings different type of stigmas and put constraints on individual mobility. It shapes ones view on gender and sexuality and limits his/ her sexual and marital choices. However, we must acknowledge this fact that there were people who tried to transgress their caste identity. Sahjananad was one such personality who started his political journey from a caste organisation and later became a communist. In seventies Naxalite movement which started from Ekvari village also claimed that it believed in the ideology of class-struggle. However, in praxis it could mobilise only Dalits and some agricultural labourers of middle castes. The question arises here why it could not bring poor upper caste peasants in its ideological fold.

The Naxalite movement in Bhojpur region is an underresearched topic when compared to the vast corpus of work existing on the same topic in West Bengal. There has been a general tendency among scholars and academicians to view the conflict in Bhojpur as an extension of Naxalbari movement. To treat Naxalbari as centre and Bhojpur as periphery has created much confusion and historical misunderstandings. In this representation a lot of narratives like caste oppressions and the role of “illiterate” populace are suppressed and other accounts like class consciousness, ideological debates and the role of intellectuals are overemphasized. The movement in Bhojpur had its own socio-cultural contexts with its aims and ambitions

differing from that of the Naxalbari. The movement can still be traced alive in the region in mutated forms.

Although the Naxalite movement had spread across the whole of South Bihar, my focus remains on the Bhojpur region. Earlier Bhojpur was a part of the erstwhile Shahabad District, later from which four districts emerged. Although in local language the entire erstwhile Shahabad district is still known as Bhojpur as they bear cultural and linguistic similarities. Despite this my research will be focused on the present day Bhojpur district as the movement was stronger there, as compared to the other neighbouring districts. However, it will inevitably transcend the linguistic and administrative boundaries as villages situated across the Sone river in Bhojpur and Jahanabad have much cultural and linguistic similarities when compared to the villages of the same districts that are situated at some distance.

The village of Ekvari in Bhojpur witnessed violent caste struggle which went to engulf whole of the central Bihar aftermath of which it was termed as the Naxalite movement. The history of the Naxalite movement is the history of dominance and hierarchy, of oppression and resistance, of violence and counter violence. It is also the history of successes and failures of the state and its institutions, of conflict and co-operation between caste and class and of contradictions and similarities between ideology and praxis.

In the name of emancipation, the region witnessed an unprecedented scale of violence. In a single event in Bahuara village 120 jawans of the police, the paramilitary force and the Jat regiment were killed by Naxalites, and equal number of casualties happened on the other side as well. However, the news was censored in the period of Emergency that India was witnessing. Ordinary women and men crossed all confines of brutality. In a single village, Ekvari, more than 200 peasants and labourers were killed in day-to-day violence. Even children and women were not left; new born babies were also butchered. Bhojpur and adjoining districts saw a phenomenal increase in number of legal and illegal weapons. Proximity with Munger made the availability of arms and ammunition convenient. The violence was carried together along with serious debates and discussions which were going on in the region. Surprisingly, many poets, writers and thinkers defended the use of violence in a democratic state.



The cult of violence which was started gave birth to another cult of violence that was carried forward. Peasants, who were extremely religious and preferred to refrain from violence at all cost, became the supporter of Ranvir Sena. Experiencing more than two decades of brutality of Naxalites, Bhumihars violently retaliated. In a brief period of five to six years they perpetrated thirty massacres and killed many Naxalites and their supporters in their routine violence. The rise of Ranvir Sena is commonly viewed as class struggle between landlords and agricultural labourers. However, the social base of Ranvir Sena was poor peasantry which mainly consisted of marginal Bhumihar and rajput peasants.

The violence perpetrated by CPI ML cadres has often been justified as the fight against “feudal mentality” which in their writings is called “samanti dabdaba”. But nobody has taken the pain to study the culture(s) of the region and decode the violence deeply embedded in it. The rumour of extreme gender violence was circulated by Naxalites and terms like Dola-Pratha taken from some other cultures became a common vocabulary of academia. This reduction of culture to negativity suppressed many other progressive things of culture. Regardless of gender hierarchy in Bhojpur women are treated with respect although this respect many a times transcend as constraints on their life. In my research I would try to explore the complex story of changing gender relations due to different factors like the Naxalite Movement, impact of education, the role of Panchayati Raj System etc.

### **Literature Review:**

For thousands of people the Naxalite movement and caste violence that it perpetuated is a lived experience rather than “history”. These people still have memories about the moement which are inseparable part of their lives. Historical facts and events have quite different meaning to them. Any historical narrative cannot fully capture the emotional attachments/trauma connected with these events at personal level. Therefore history writing inevitably does violence with experiences, emotions and memories of people. The *punctum* is left only *studium* is foregrounded.

Party documents are rich sources for history writing. However, Party documents cannot discuss its strategies, tactic and ideology openly on account of its long history of underground

movement. Very few instances of internal debates and discussions are found, instead of having a critical approach, such history writing is often indulged in self-narcissism. Adherence to Marxist pedagogy also makes it difficult to analyze events from different perspectives. Despite this, *Selected Writings Of Vinod Mishra* provides us with a lot of information about the party, its ideologies, tactics and its stand on different issues. The stand of the party on caste, class, gender, religion and nationalism has been well discussed in Vinod Mishra's writings. His speeches and writings belong to different time and therefore one advantage of this collection is that one can easily see a gradual change in stand of the party on different issues. For example, earlier the party supported ULFA's nationalism but later it condemned it and said that ULFA's nationalism was close to fascism. The richness of these sources cannot be denied but problems with using these sources are that they often reduce people to the party and a large population is always stereotyped as class enemy.

A report published in 1986 *The flaming fields of Bihar* by C P I(ML) discusses a whole range of issues like land reform, caste atrocities, private armies and failure of the state at different fronts. The issue of violence has also been debated at length. The report also discusses an alternative model of struggle that was going on against Bodh Gaya Math which possessed nearly eight thousands acres of land. Bodh Gaya Model of struggle supported by Jai Prakash Narayan was often highlighted in media on account of its democratic and peaceful nature. The report draws attention on the drawbacks and failures of this kind of peaceful struggle.

Party sympathisers have written on the Naxalite movement but their writings are coloured by their ideology *Bhojpur: Naxalism in the plains of Bihar* written by Kalyan Mukherjee and Rajendra Singh Yadav belongs to this category. For writers every event was directed towards revolution. This type of teleological writing justifies all violence and brutalities done by the oppressed groups. The binary of the oppressor and the oppressed is also notorious, indiscriminate killings of poor peasants belonging to upper castes have been depicted as successes rather than failures of the movement. The trope of oppression has been deliberately chosen to spread their propaganda where every upper caste peasant is a sexual offender. Writers fail to understand the complex construction of gender in a religious society. Sometimes the religious people are more gender sensitive than atheist and secular comrades. The politics of sexuality reached at the worst level in CPI ML's propagandistic writings.

Inspired by these writings the rumour of Doli-Pratha was extended by sympathisers of Naxalite movement to justify their annihilation tactic.

Bela Bhatia in her article *The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar* argues that the movement has empowered labouring and oppressed classes. She also thinks that it is a fight against feudal mentality (Samanti Dabdaba). No doubt she has borrowed this terminology from the Naxalite literature. If the prime reason for this large scale violence is oppressive feudal mentality, it is ones responsibility to show how these mentalities are manifested in day-to-day practices. However, understanding these structures of violence and humiliation requires a long and complex process of association and dissociation with the villagers. Outsiders staying for few days in villages have their own limitations, they cannot understand structures of dominance and hierarchies, nor do they understand the local language which humiliates and brings deep mental injuries to the marginalised people. In another article *After Bathe Massacre* Bhatia shows how police was harassing and destroying the property of poor people. Here again she is not able to capture the pervasiveness of violence done by the state. At every step from judicial trial to imprisonment innocent people are harassed by the state.

Although Urmilesh is not a trained historian, despite this his book, “Bihar Ka Sach” provides abundant information on agrarian unrest, caste violence and the naxalite movement. Journalistic writing has its own limitations. The dearth of footnotes is disturbing from a researcher’s point of view and it becomes difficult to draw a line between sach(truth) and jhuth(false). “Bihar ka sach” relies more on rhetoric rather than criticizing the government policies and analyzing socio-economic conditions. In his uni -dimensional narrative state and upper castes are always the oppressors. In addition to this, the book was published in 1991 and therefore the reader does not get any information about the nineties. The book is a good example of journalism *against* journalism. Urmilesh has shown the biasness of media reporting. He informs that the rallies of labourers and poor peasants were often reported as armed demonstration of the Naxalites in mainstream newspapers.

Ashwini Kumar in his book ‘Community Warriors’ tries to understand the complex power matrix in which state , caste, class and other factors play their roles. He rejects Marxist view which looks at the Naxalite movement as outcome of class consciousness; he also repudiates

the liberal and statist view which understands Naxalism as agrarian crisis. He also analyzes the character of Ranvir Sena, he thinks that it was a surrogate arm of the state.

Scarcely any autobiography has been written by the labourers and the peasants. In this regard we cannot make any comparison with the Naxalite movement in West Bengal where autobiographies have proved helpful in understanding the Naxalite movement through various lenses. The absence of autobiographical mode of narration does not mean that women and men have not performed their duty of memory. They have done it in a quiet different mode of narration-the poetic mode of narration. After reading Suresh Kantak's long poem *Raktim Tara* one gets amazed that how deliberately the poet has tried to capture events and names even at the cost of his poetry. These poems and songs should not be reduced to epistemic materials for discursive production. Emotional language used in these songs and poems can capture humiliation and day-to-day violence which goes unnoticed in discourses which use the language of reason. The role of language is not only descriptive and analytical it is also ascriptive and constitutive. The poetic mode of narration is so powerful that it can easily de-territorialize signifiers from its signified; it can change the meaning of the word. In labourers' songs we can easily find how symbols of power and domination lose its aura.

## **Chapterization:**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **Economy, Society, Culture and Reconstruction of Identities:**

In absence of adequate understanding of culture we often produce unhistorical understanding of past. Sometimes Cultural practices distort and erase past. Silences in history can also be attributed to various cultural practices. For example, in Bhojpur scarcely any autobiography has been written while many songs have been composed regarding historical events. These songs often leave spaces for ambiguities and erase many things to save their lyrical qualities. Folk songs, ballads and theatre celebrate ordinary lives and in this celebration they turn ordinary and momentary into special and eternal and sometimes they also do the opposite. Songs sometimes erase the voices of marginalised people at the other times they give speakability to marginalised groups. In Bhojpuri songs one can easily find instances of a

woman ridiculing and lamenting on practices of child marriage. The legendary figure of Bhojpri theatre Bhikhari Thakur has shown the plights and sufferings of poor girls who were sold by their fathers in the name of marriage. He has also widely written on the adverse impact of migration on women and children. The complex construction of gender and caste is also reflected in ballads like Sorathi, Bihula and Raja Bharthari. A short discussion on various type of stigmas and reconstruction of identities would also be included in the chapter.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Origin, Growth and Expansion of the Naxalite movement:**

In this chapter I will argue that the origin of the Naxalite movement was deeply rooted in the cultural and economic domination of upper castes. Social exclusion along with political marginalization left no option before the Dalits than to adopt radical path. The example of Bhojpur also shows that democracy cannot co-exist with extremely oppressive primordial socio-economic and cultural formations. This chapter would also try to capture the interesting story of the interplay between old and new, tradition and modernity, indigenous and exotic where each one tries to influence, appropriate and dominate the other.

The chapter will also try to explore the challenges before a newly emerging democratic state where pre-modern oppressive structures were still strong. The lack of communication, transportation, logistics efficiencies and technological expertise retarded the process of state crafting. Bhojpur, in seventies, did not have the slightest features of a panopticon state .In rainy seasons many areas remained disconnected with district headquarters and was completely inaccessible for police personals and government officials. A large section of lower castes were denied their most basic right of practicing universal franchise by dominant castes. Jagdish master the founder member of Naxalite movement was assaulted by Bhumihar landlords in Ekvari village when he tried to stop bogus voting in assembly election of 1967. It is after this incidence Jagdish Master along with Rameshvar Ahir and Ramnaresh Ram started a violent struggle which attracted thousands of women and men of oppressed classes. When the menace of Naxalite violence increased government invoked many draconian laws and curtailed fundamental rights of its own citizens. The nation postponed itself. It was

undermining its own constitutional ideals and was challenging its own legality. The story of the Naxalite movement is also the story of autoimmunization of Indian state when the nation

## Chapter-2

### **Bhojpur: Economy, Society, Culture and Reconstruction of Identities**

Social hierarchy in Indian society predates the colonial period. Myths, Purans, Smrities and other secular texts legitimized as well as challenged these hierarchies in different ways. Generally, it is thought that Census started the process of categorization and consequently people became self-conscious about their identities. Contrary to this popular view, we find different type of social categorization mentioned in *Manusmriti*, *Yajnyaybalakya smriti*, *Arthashastra*, *Mahabharat* and other texts. A fourteenth century poet from Mithila, Jyotirishvar Thakur mentioned 205 communities in his book and categorized them in eight fold divisions-Bhadra, Mand, Rajsevak, Vanvasi, Pahari, Apradhi, Vanikputra and Rajputra<sup>1</sup>. Along with these normative texts there were also many sects and cults who challenged existing hierarchies in Indian society. Eighth century Bihar witnessed Sarhappa, Dombipa, Chamrippa, Kanhippa and many other Siddhas challenging Brhminical hegemony by invoking Budhhist philosophy<sup>2</sup>. Later Naths carried forward this tradion of Siddhas and *Ulatbansi* used by Gorakhnath was not only for linguistic pleasure. Instead it tried to subvert exising social norms. In Kabir we find the influence of both Naths and Siddhas<sup>3</sup>. The influence of Kabir can still be felt on non-literate people of Bhojpur.

Study of the Naxalite movement in Bhojpur requires a deeper understanding of social processes which started decades before the origin of the Naxalite movement. In this chapter cultural and political dimensions of identity formation, which started in the first half of the twentieth century, among different groups would be discussed briefly. The complex interplay between economy, society, culture and identity during later half of the twentieth century would also be discussed.

### **Upper Castes: Socio-economic condition and contestation for identity**

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<sup>1</sup> Prasann Kumar Chaudhary, *Bihar Me Samajik Parivartan Ke Kuchh Aayam*, New Delhi, Vani Prakashan, 2001, pp. 95-96.

<sup>2</sup> Bachhan Singh, *Hindi Sahity Ka Doosra Itihas*, New Delhi, Radha Krishna Prakashan, 2006, pp. 27-32.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 83-84.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Census initiated social mobility on an unprecedented scale. The printing press also helped to develop diverse kind of publics which were responsible for constitution and reconstitution of newer forms of identities. Printing and circulation of magazines, pamphlets and books belonging to caste organizations became easy and soon these organizations emerged as strong platform for socio-political transformation. In the first quarter of the twentieth century large number of caste magazines came in circulation. *Kayastha-Kaumudi*, *Teli Samachar*, *Bhumihar Brahman Patrika*, *Kshatriya Samachar*, *Kaivart Kaumudi*, *Vanik Patrika*, *Vaishya Bandhu*, *Tailik Prabhakar*, *Kesri Sandesh*, *Yadvesh* and many other caste magazines were used for mobilizing caste identity for different purposes<sup>4</sup>. Almost every caste had one and more organizations. These caste organizations never talked about annihilation of caste. Most of them claimed Brahman or Kshatriya status and constructed different types of myths to legitimize their claim to superior status.

History shows that Brahman and Kshatriya are contested identities and different groups have claimed these status through discursive formations, legal battles and many other non-discursive practices like adoption and rejection of rituals. The claim of Brahman or Kshatriya identity by one group is always contested by other groups. Brahmans and Kshatriya themselves are not homogenous categories. In Bhojpur there are many Brahmans who are considered more untouchable than shudras. Mahapatra Brahmans who perform death rituals are generally not allowed to enter into upper caste villages except during the time of the performance of death rituals<sup>5</sup>. His appearance is regarded as an ill omen. People do not want to see his face and if they mistakenly meet him they abuse and humiliate him. Villagers never take the name of villages in which these Mahapatra Brahmans live. These villages are called *Badka Gaon*. Mahapatra Brahmans are also called Kantaha Brahmans and sometimes other poor Brahmans are also stereotyped as Kantaha Brahmans by villagers. Tikulihar Brahmans whose main profession is to sell bangles in villages are also considered untouchable by other castes<sup>6</sup>. Shakdwipies Brahmans are considered as Malechhs by other Brahmans<sup>7</sup>. Bhat, a caste whose main profession is to sing ballads in villages, also claim that they are Brahmans

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<sup>4</sup> Prasann Kumar Chaudhary, *Bihar Me Samajik Parivartan Ke Kuchh Aayam*, p. 280.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Ranjit Chaubey on 10-12-2015.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Prabhu Narayan, *The King of Banaras to Butler*, Government of Bengal, General Department, Miscellaneous, File no-10-C/ 54 K. W.-A Proceedings for October 1911, No-42



and call themselves Brahmabhat. Brahmans are also divided into different groups based on their gotra, clans and the origin place(Dih)<sup>8</sup>.

Like Brahmans Rajputs are also not homogenous community and rich Rajputs claim that they are descendents of King Bhoj and call themselves Ujjani Rajput. Landlords of Dumraon, Jagdishpur and Buxar also claimed that they were Ujjaini Rajputs. The heroic struggle of Kuar Singh against colonial power has become a legend in Bihar and it has helped to upgrade the status of Ujjaini Rajputs in the region. Contrary to the claim made by Ujjaini Rajputs, Bhumihars always maintain that Rajputs are not Kshatriys because all Kshatriyas were massacred by lord Parshuram. Along with Ujjaini Rajputs many other clans of rajputs also reside in Bhojpur. However, Ujjaini Rajputs always stereotype them as *Dhekha- Bhutha*. *Dhekha Bhutha* word is used to emphasize the lower origin of poor Rajputs<sup>9</sup>. Some lower castes also claim that they are Kshatriya. Dusadh, a dalit caste claims that they are only Kshatriya who survived the massacre by lord Parshuram. Dusadh Vanshiya Kshatriya Mahasabha was formed in 1891 and in its yearly conference 2000 to 3000 people used to gather<sup>10</sup>.

Kayasth and Bhumihar also claimed Kshatriya and Brahman status respectively. In 1884 Calcutta High Court denied Kshatriya status to Kaysths and maintained that they were Shudras. Later Allahabd high court acknowledged Kshatriya status of Kayasths belonging to Avadh region. Soon Patna High Court also accepted their claim of Kshatriya status. Social status of Kaysths was also higher than any lower caste and in 1901 nearly ten thousand Kayasths were *Jamindars*. The number was very high considering their small share in total population of Bihar. Their proportion was also very high in Government jobs and legal profession compared to Bhumihars and Rajputs<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup>For the discussion on Dih see, Sahjanand Saraswati, *Brahmarshi Vans Vistar*, www.hindisamay.com

<sup>9</sup> In my visit to Shivpur village(Rohtas) and Budhaila village(Buxar) I came to know that the term Dhekha – Bhutaha connotes the lower origin of a Rajput family.

<sup>10</sup> Prasann Kumar Chaudhary, *Bihar Me Samajik Parivartan Ke Kuchh Aayam*, p. 55

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, Parisisht, pp.278-279.

Table-1

Percentage of Upper Castes in Bihar

Upper Caste	Percentage
Brahman	4.7
Rajput	4.2
Bhumihar	2.9
Kayasth	1.2

Source: 1921 Census

Table-2

Number of Jamindars in Patna Pramandal

Ahir	1217	Kayasth	9738
Brahman	19670	Koeri	70
Babhan(Bhumihar)	35841	Kurmi	4302
Chamar	110	Rajput	23121
Dusadh	210	Santhal	7

Source: 1901 Census report

Unlike Kaysths, Babhans(Bhumihars) never claimed kshatriya status. At first glance it seems like an enigma because every peasant caste claimed Kshatriya status. However, if we look at socio-economic condition of Bhumihars this riddle easily gets solved. Bhumihars possessed more Jamindaries than Rajputs, and kings(Jamindars) of many old riyasats like Betiya,

Hathua and Tikari were Bhumihars. The king of Banaras was also a Bhumihar and his prestige was like a semi-god. Amava, Bharatpura and many other smaller states also belonged to Bhumihar Jamindaries. Bhumihars were more powerful than Rajputs and rivalry between these two castes was an old one. Bhumihars often invoke story of Parshuram massacring Kshatriya twenty one times to claim their superiority over Rajputs. In Bhojpur's villages these two upper castes did hardly resided together in the same village and for canal water they often fought with each other. Nonetheless, in villages some of them had learnt to live together with harmony and Rajputs acknowledged the ritual superiority of Bhumihars. Whenever a Bhumihar visited in his Rajput friend's house he was always served with pakka food by his Rajput friend.

Bhumihars were earlier known as Babhans. Still in the Magadh region they are called Babhans which seems to be Apbhans of Brahmans. Later Pradhan Bhumihar Brahman Sabha, which was formed in 1889 in Patna and was headed by the king of Banaras, insisted that Babhan should call them Bhumihar Brahmans<sup>12</sup>. Apart from the king of Banaras, the king of Hathua, the king of Shivhar, the king of Amanva and the king of Allahabad were also member of Pradhan Bhumihar Sabha. On 15 August 1911 the king of Banaras wrote a letter to a Government officer Mr. Butler and expressed his anger on the issue of categorizing Bhumihars as non-Brahmans in government schools<sup>13</sup>. He also argued that at many places the line between Bhumihars and Brahmans were blurred and inter-marriage was being practised between these two castes<sup>14</sup>. The king also lamented on this fact that Shakhdwips, decedents of Shaks, Kushans, were being classified as Brahmans by British government only on account of being them beggars<sup>15</sup>.

When Bhumihar landlords came to know that a Dandi-Swami of their own caste was a great scholar of Sanskrit texts and was living in Banaras, they invited Swami Sahjanand Saraswati to share the platform of their caste organization in 1914<sup>16</sup>. Sahjanand got his secondary

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<sup>12</sup> Prasann Kumar Chaudhary, Bihar Me Samajik Parivartan Ke Kuchh Aayam, p.48

<sup>13</sup> Prabhu Narayan to Butler, a letter dated 15 August 1911 in Prasann Kumar Chaudhary, Bihar Me Samajik Parivartan, Appendix,p.281

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Rahul Sankrityayan, 'Swami Sahjanand Saraswati' in Suryabhan Rai(ed.) *Swadhinta Andolan Me Kisano Ki Bhumika*, New Delhi, Swami Sahjanand Vichar Manch, 2013,p. 18.

education in German Mission School and after leaving school he became a sanyasi and wandered many years in search of mystic Yoga-gurus<sup>17</sup>. Finally he returned to Banaras and his intellectual journey started in 1909 from Apar Nath Math where he read Siddhant Kaumudi, Nyay, Mimansa and Vedant<sup>18</sup>. He also read *Manorma, Shekhar and Mahabhasya*. Jivannath Mishra taught him *Pakshata, Samanya Nirukti, Sidhant Lakshan* and many other texts of Nyay Philosophy<sup>19</sup>. Pandit Achyut Tripathi taught him *Khandnakhand Khadya, Sanchhipta Sharirik, Advait Sidhi* and other texts of Vedant. Sahjanand had already read Mimansa-text Nyay Ratnamala but he went to Mithila in the search of Mimansaks and finally the great scholar of Mimansa Chitradhar Mishra taught him many texts on Mimansa. Chitradhar also taught him Duputika, a rare text written by Kumaril<sup>20</sup>. Mentioning these details is of some worth because it shows the prestige of Indian Philosophy in the early twentieth century and to some extent claim of Brahman and Kshatriya identities by different groups was also inspired by the prestige enjoyed by these vibrant philosophical schools which were still alive in Varanasi, Mithila and other places. The relationship between Temples, Philosophy, agriculture, Brahminical hegemony and Jamindari system in the first half of the Twentieth Century remains to be explored.

On the request of big landlords, in 1914 Sahjanand wrote a book *Bhumihar Brahman Parichay* in which he claimed that at many places Bhumihars perform rituals like Brahmans and in Mithila they marry with Brahman girls<sup>21</sup>. The next year he collected further materials and changed the name of his book from *Bhumihar Brahman Parichay* to *Bramarshi Vans Vistar*. In this text he established this fact that different religious texts and *smrities* acknowledge the division of *Ayachak* and *Yachak* Brahmans and Bhumihars belonged to the former category<sup>22</sup>. Inspired by Sahjanand's scholarly argument many Bhumihars started claiming *Ayachak Brahman* identity. By quoting some references from Aain-e-akbari he showed that many Brahman Mansabdars mentioned in the text were Bhumihars<sup>23</sup>. To prove

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<sup>17</sup> Swami Sahjanand Saraswati, *Sanyas Se Purva*, Sahjanand Rachnavali, www.hindisamay.com.

<sup>18</sup> Swami Sahjanand Saraswati, *Sanyas Se Purva*, Sahjanand Rachnavali, www.hindisamay.com.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Rahul Sankrityayan, *Swami Sahjanand Sarswati*, p.19.

<sup>21</sup> See. Swami Sahjanand, *Bramarshi Vans Vistar*, www.hindisamay.com.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

his claims he also provided references from historical texts written by English authors and showed inconsistencies and contemporaneity of those texts which claimed backward identity for Bhumihars<sup>24</sup>.

However Sahjanand soon transcended caste consciousness and became a champion of the peasant movement. A brief discussion on Sahjanand Saraswati is necessary to understand the complex relationship between caste and class in the twentieth century Bihar. The First World War attracted his attention towards political activities and he started reading *Pratap* and other news papers<sup>25</sup>. He was shocked by the death of Bal Gangadhar Tilak after which he joined Congress and became the follower of Mahatma Gandhi<sup>26</sup>. In the coming years his inclination for socialist and communist ideology increased and he read many texts on Marxism. Once he said that if peasants could produce rice, vegetables and pulses then why they could not produce their intellectuals. In his essay *Maharudra ka Mahatandav* (The great dance of lord Shiva) he expressed his solidarity with depressed classes and declared that only landless labourers and marginal farmers are peasants for him<sup>27</sup>. Sahjanand also criticized caste organizations functioning as puppets of landlords and kings. In 1936 Sahjanand was elected as the chairperson of Akhil Bhartiya Kisan Sabha. Before this in November 1935, a resolution for Jamindari abolition had been passed by provincial conference of Kisan Sabha at Hajipur on his advice. He fought many struggles against Jamindars of his own caste and supported lower caste peasants. In 1921 council election he supported a person belonging to Dhobi caste who contested against Hathua Maharaj<sup>28</sup>. Along with Rahul Sankrityayan he led many struggles against Jamindars. In a caste ridden society Sahjanand used new cultural idioms and envisioned a new egalitarian society free of caste and class oppressions. Later Naxalites also invoked Sahjanand and he became icon of its radical mass organization Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha. The veteran Naxalite leader Ramnaresh Ram also acknowledged that Sahjanand was true leader of peasants<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Rahul Sankrityayan, *Swami Sahjanand Sarswati*, p.20.

<sup>26</sup> Rahul Sankrityayan, *Swami Sahjanand Sarswati*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>27</sup> Sahjanand Sarswati, *Maharudra Ka Mahatandav*, [www.hindisamay.com](http://www.hindisamay.com)

<sup>28</sup> Rahul, *Swami Sahjanand Sarswati*, p.21.

<sup>29</sup> Sudhir Suman, *Samajik Badlav Ke Mahanayak Comrade Ramnaresh Ram, Bhojpur District Committee, CPIML*, 2011, p.5.

However, the main beneficiaries of the Kisan movement were upper and middle caste peasants who enlisted their names in the records of rights after Jamindari abolition. Despite the claim of Sahjanand that the category of peasants meant landless labourers and marginal farmers, Kisan Sabha could not develop any consistent policy regarding agricultural labourers belonging to Dalit community. In fourth conference of Akhil Bhartiya Kisan Sabha its Chairperson Acharya Narendra Dev said that the problem of agricultural labourers could not be easily solved if income of small peasants would not rise<sup>30</sup>. He also acknowledged the caste oppression of Dalits and showed his apprehensions that if agricultural labourers would be organized on communitarian line a fierce struggle would break out between peasants and labourers. Despite this Kisan Sabha never tried to radically question caste hierarchy existing in society<sup>31</sup>. The inclusive politics of Sahjanand and Rahul Sankrityayan had nothing which could appeal dalit agricultural labourers.

After the death of Sahjanand, Bhumihars made him icon of their community but they hardly followed communist ideals taught by Swamiji. Rich Bhumihars sabotaged every attempt of land-reform and captured *maths* and Gairmajarua lands of villages. Although medium and rich peasants along with big landlords constituted only 9 percent of total population of Bihar yet they dominated political and social life of the state in seventies and eighties<sup>32</sup>.

Table-3, Agricultural Census 1970-71

	Percentage landholdings	Area
Marginal peasants	78.5	30.9
Small peasants	12.3	23.0
Medium Peasants	7.7	30.9
Rich Peasants	1.3	11.2
Big landlords	0.2	4.0

<sup>30</sup> Acharya Narendra Dev, *Akhil Bhartiya Kisan Sammelan Me Bhasan*, in Suryabhan Rai(ed.) *Swadhinta Andolan Me Kisano Ki Bhumika*, Delhi, Sahjanand Vichar Manch, p.48

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See. Table-3.

Agricultural census data reveal little about social distribution of land. Even NSSO data are not very useful for the study of social distribution of land because till nineties they had not introduced the category of OBC in its survey. However, we can infer some conclusions by analysing other data. 1921 census shows that the population of upper castes was 37.45 percent in erstwhile Shahabad district. If we assume that land distribution pattern in Shahabad was similar to the distribution pattern for the whole Bihar and all rich peasants and big landlords belonged to upper castes which were definitely not the case, then simple arithmetic shows that nearly 75 percent upper castes were marginal and small peasants.

Table-4, Upper Caste Population in Shahabad District

Upper Castes	Percentage	Lower Castes	Percentage
Bhumihar	4.61	Ahir	20.55
Brahman	15.02	Koeri	4.44
Kayasth	2.74	Kurmi	11.19
Rajput	15.08	Others	26.37

The complex relation between caste and class can only be understood by emphasizing internal differentiation among different social groups. NSSO data of 1991-92 shows that in central Bihar only 2 percent households possessed more than five acres (20 Bighas) land. This data shows that in nineties the majority of upper caste peasants belonged to the category of marginal and small farmers. According to 2002-03 NSSO data 82 percent upper caste households belonged to this category.

Table-6. Percentage distribution of households in Each Social Groups According in size Classes of Ownership Holding, Central Bihar, 2002-2003.

Size Class	ST	SC	OBC	Others
Marginal	100	97.13	83.16	59.89
Small	0	2.55	12.68	22.31
Semi-Medium	0	0.32	2.96	14.17
Medium	0	0.00	0.63	3.56
Large	0	0.00	0.58	0.07

Source: NSSO 59<sup>th</sup> Round (Reference Time 2002-2003.)

Many scholars who visited Naxal affected villages also found similar facts. In 1990, Bela Bhatia in her field-study found that there was no ceiling surplus land in Ekvari village<sup>33</sup>. She also discovered that the largest landholdings in the village were below 100 bighas<sup>34</sup>. Ekvari is the village from where Naxalite movement started and expanded in the whole Bhojpur region<sup>35</sup>. Jagdish Master, Rameshvar Ahir and Ramnaresh Ram alias Parasji and other prominent naxal leaders belonged to this village<sup>36</sup>. In many other villages where conflict was sharp, there wasn't any ceiling surplus land<sup>37</sup>. In Belaur village, many Bhumihaar peasants

<sup>33</sup> Bela Bhatia, *The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 40, No. 15, P.154

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p.1541

<sup>35</sup> See . Arun Sinha, *Class War In Bhojpur-1*, Economic and Political Weekly, vol.13, No. 1, p.10. The first annihilation in Bhojpur was on January 31, 1971 in which a "henchman" of Nathuni Singh was brutally murdered on the bank of Sone river outside Ekvari village. Jagdish Master, Rameshvar Ahir and 40 labourers were implicated in this case. Many of them later joined the Naxalite movement. Prior to this annihilation, at many occasions khalihaans of rich farmers were set on fire by labourers.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Digital land records of Ekvari, Belaur, Kurmuri, and many other villages show the same pattern. Although these record of rights can be contested and in most of the cases they have not been updated. These land records inform more about seventies rather than nineties because in the case of family-division land is not immediately transferred to its legal heir.



were marginal farmers<sup>38</sup>. The biggest landholder of the village, Dharichhan Chaudhary did not possess any ceiling surplus land considering the big size of his joint family<sup>39</sup>.

Nonetheless, it is naive to think that land was not a major cause of conflict and the problem was somewhere else. High Gini coefficient (0.73) shows the unequal distribution of land in central Bihar<sup>40</sup>. These data reveal many aspects of rural society, but value and power attached to land can only be understood by locating land in socio-cultural milieu. Exchange and value of land is always mediated by politics and socio cultural factors. In Marxist literature, land has been seen as a part of base. This reductionist view fails to understand that land can behave as a non-human actor and can influence society to a greater degree<sup>41</sup>. In the following chapters the changing role of land spanned over three decades will be covered. Understanding the “journey” of land through different legal, social and moral regimes requires a careful analysis of social and political conditions of seventies, eighties and nineties which were responsible for the origin and expansion of the Naxalite movemet in the region.

In Bhojpur’s villages the tradition of joint family was strong in upper caste families<sup>42</sup>. In 1970s many of these families divided their land on paper but they still preferred to live in a joint family. Joint family was helpful in maintaining their power, prestige and landholdings. In sixties or seventies it was very common in Bhojpur villages to find three to five households which possessed more than 50 bighas land<sup>43</sup>. Sometimes these rich households were descendent of the same ancestor and their kinship tie was very strong. These households

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<sup>38</sup> Digital land records of Belaur village

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Ajay Rai, Vakil Chaudhary and Ravinder Chaudhary on 3 december 2015, See also digital land records of Dharichan Chaudhary.

<sup>40</sup> Gini coefficient for land ownership, Table 3

<sup>41</sup> Arjun Appadurai also argues that exchange and value are mediated by politics. See. Arjun Appadurai, *Social Life of Things*

<sup>42</sup> Hardi. S. Upadhyay argues that family structure pictured in Bhojpuri songs is Patrilineal and patrilocal Joint family. He further argues that a deliberate analysis of Bhojpri Riddles also reflect same pattern. See 1.Hari. S. Upadhyay, *Family structure depicted in Bhojpuri folk songs, Folklore, Vol. 78, No. 2 PP. 112-15* and 2. *Indian family structure and Bhojpuri Riddles, Folklore, Vol. 81, No. 2, pp. 115-131.*

<sup>43</sup> 1991-92NSSO data shows that 2 percent households possessed more than 20 bigha land in Central Bihar, if we assume that Bhojpur also reflected the same pattern then we can easily estimate that in seventies, one generation before nineties, it was possible that 3 to 5 percent household possessed nearly 50 bighas land. One can select any big village and its land record will conform to the same pattern.

were known as Badka Gharayan or Haveli<sup>44</sup>. Badka Gharayan often included two or more households which were gotiyas. The word Gotiya is different from Gotra although it seems that it was originated from the same root. Gotiya generally includes those households inside and sometimes outside the village which are descendents of the same ancestor, while gotra refers to a larger imagined community which is supposed to be the descendants of the same rishi<sup>45</sup>. From legal point of view these households were not part of the same family as they did not possess any joint property. In seventies, even some traditional scholars of *smritis* would have claimed that these gotiyas were distinct families but a close analysis will help us to understand that these gotiyas constituted a social unit in which emotional ties and solidarity were so strong that functionally they always behaved like a family.

Emotional ties between gotiyas of Badka Gharayan were stronger compared to other households of the same village because they held a sizeable amount of land and hence could afford participation of every gotiyas and his relatives in family rituals and other events<sup>46</sup>. Badka gharayan was often conglomeration of five to six big houses including pakka and kachha buildings and they could accommodate all their relatives including their gotiyas' ones in their houses. In his visit to Chavari village in Bhojpur, Bir Bharat Talwar saw many big houses of Bhumihars and he mentioned the house of one Ramanand Rai, whose door was so big that even an elephant could enter easily<sup>47</sup>. For rich households availability of physical space was conducive to foster a grid of kinship ties. However, poor households having small spaces could hardly afford participation of their gotiyas' relatives in their family events. In some rituals participation of every gotiya was necessary irrespective of their choice. In the situation of birth and death of any family member all gotiyas got polluted and they had to perform some rituals to get rid of this pollution<sup>48</sup>. Even economically weaker households who

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<sup>44</sup> In a Bhojpuri poem suresh Kankar says that Nathuni Singh lives in his haveli. See. Suresh Kankar, *Raktim Tara*, Buxar, Navshakti Prakashan, 2006, p.125.

<sup>45</sup> In my visit to Mansagar village I found that one Gotiya of Shivji Rai, a respected leader of upper castes, lived outside that village. Generally these Gotiyas live in the same village.

<sup>46</sup> Songs of Janeu, marriage and other rituals show the participation of gotiyas and their relatives. In the marriage ceremony of Deepak Rai son of Shivji Rai of Mansagar village I found that all gotiyas and their relatives participated in every ritual and many of them had been staying in his house for 15 days.

<sup>47</sup> Bir Bharat Talwar, 'Chavari Kand Ke Bad, in Bir Bharat Talwar (ed.) Naxalbari Ke Daur Me, p.255

<sup>48</sup> In Bhojpuri for pollution the term Chhutika is used, Chhutika only happens in the situation of birth and death of a family member. Death brings a longer period of pollution(chhutika), only after 10 days of Dashkarma every

were gotiyas had to do these rituals otherwise it would bring a disgrace to their family<sup>49</sup>. Rich gotiyas participated together in every occasion of joy or mourning. Even in marriages of their sons and daughters, songs included the name of every family member of these households (gotiyas). Till date, it has been customary in many families to include the name of every male members of these gotiyas on invitation card which are sent to friends and relatives. Even their priest was same and they had strong emotional bond with their priest. The priest was like a family member and at many occasions he was consulted by all these gotiyas. Sometimes he could work as a mediator in the case of family disputes. The common priesthood strengthened the feeling of being part of the same family among these gotiyas. Members of these households deliberately avoided using the term gotiya and in their everyday language they preferred to call each other as family members.

Even in the worst case of rivalry these gotiyas settled all disputes through dialogue and at all cost they avoided violence against each other. The murder of a Gotiya is considered as one of the most heinous crimes in Bhojpur and the person who commits such a crime is totally excommunicated from the society irrespective of his social status. In Bagar village, when one young man killed his uncle's family member with the help of Ranvir Sena, he was criticised by all Bhumihar leaders despite the fact that his uncle was enemy of Ranvir Sena. Even people were angry with Ranvir Sena supremo Barmeshvar Singh. After this incidence the young man could not return to his village<sup>50</sup>. However, this case was an exceptional one and it happened in 1998. In seventies very few instances of violent struggle could be found among these gotiyas. Their traditional method of Gor-Goti was sufficient enough to settle property disputes at the time of family partition<sup>51</sup>. The village elders wisely divided the whole property in equal shares with the consensus of all parties. And the weakest partner was allowed to

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Gotiya gets rid of this Chhutika. In these ten days they follow strict rules and they use all food without turmeric.

<sup>49</sup> It is believed that something bad will happen to family if family-members would not follow strict rules during the period of chhutika(pollution). Interview with Nilesh Rai on 5 January 2016, Mudaffarpur Village, Sahar, Bhojpur.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Birendra Rai and Bablu Rai of Bagar village on 10 January 2015. A press release of Crime Branch Delhi Police dated 18-11-2013 also shows that Ajay Rai had killed his family members in 1998 and he was a member of Ranvir Sena.

<sup>51</sup> In gor goti village elders divide property in equal parts and one partner is allowed to choose any part of the property. Generally they divide property so wisely that partners get confused that which part of the property is more beneficial. Interview with Ashok Rai on 10 December 2014, Rajmaldih village, Piro

choose any share. This institution of Gor-goti helped to sort out property disputes among Gotiyas and saved them from prolonged litigation. Now-a- days this institution is weakening and property disputes often take a violent turn.

The interest of Rich Gotiyas transcended social and cultural aspects and they often shared technology, labour, seeds and fertilizers. If one of them possessed tractor or thrasher, it was used by all of them. In seventies, these households belonging to Badka Gharayan generally possessed 100 to 200 acres of land and they had wide influence in their villages. In most of the cases they were erstwhile Jamindars who were proud of their past. The elder members of these households belonging to Badka gharayan were like village-kings. Even their fellow caste members did not dare to sit before them without their permission and whenever they went to lower caste hamlets every young and old man stood up in their respect<sup>52</sup>. They solved every dispute of the village and could impose *dand* on poor peasants<sup>53</sup>. Sometimes they excommunicated their own caste-members and they were so powerful that they could bring back excommunicated persons in the fold of caste. However, these members of Badka gharayan thought that they themselves were outside the ambit of any justice system. About rich Bhumihars it is said that no panchyat can settle their issue<sup>54</sup>. Nathuni Singh, the rich landlord of Ekvari village, used to say that the highest court is Lathi-court<sup>55</sup>. His statement was allusion to the anti-poor character of criminal justice system of that period<sup>56</sup>. Seventies were the time when power of these erstwhile Jamindars had not faded. They were still so strong that despite having court order of Kurki-jabti police did not dare to enter into their houses. Police knew its limitations because these powerful men could mobilize thousands of persons against police in the case of confrontation and could use their strong connections in bureaucracy and politics. When a confrontation broke out between Piro police-station and rich peasants of Tilath village, the “chief” of the village issued a farman, “ Every widow,

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<sup>52</sup> I was surprised to see that elder members of these badka gharayan still command respect in their villages, although they are not so powerful.

<sup>53</sup> R. N. Maharaj, “Chavari Hatyakand Ki Visesh Report” in Vir Bharat Talvar(ed.) Naxalbari Ke Daur Me, New Delhi, Anamika Publishers, 2007,p. 245.

<sup>54</sup> In Hindi there is a proverb which says, “ Bhumihar ka kabhi panchayat nahi hota.”

<sup>55</sup> Ex-MLA Ramnaresh Ram told me this, when I met him at CPI ML office in Patna.

<sup>56</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee has given a lot of examples wher poor were falsely implicated in criminal cases, many of them later became Naxalite and joined CPI ML. See

widower and issueless person come forward and teach lesson to these mean creatures!<sup>57</sup>” Consequently, the police personals were severely beaten by the villagers and since then this proverb, “ Piro Police station cannot bear lathies of Tilath village” came in vogue in this area<sup>58</sup>. Even in 1989, when 29 IPF supporters were killed by the supporter of Jwala Singh, a rich Rajput landlord, District Magistrate and Superintendent of the police did not dare to arrest him. The massacre had been done in reaction to the killing of 5 upper caste persons by Naxalites. The then District Magistrate, M A Ibrahim later wrote in his book that the administration could not arrest Jwala Singh because rumour was spread that he had got shelter in the chief minister’s residence<sup>59</sup>. Later, Jwala Singh managed to get anticipatory bail<sup>60</sup>.

The special kinship pattern having strong emotional and economic ties between gotiyas of Badka Gharayan magnified the power and the prestige of Badka Gharayans. These Badka Gharayans jointly possessed 100 to 150 acre land of which a substantial part was often located outside their villages and they faced difficulty in ploughing and irrigating this distant land. Hence they preferred to lease out the distant land to marginal peasants belonging to middle and lower castes. In 1991-92, Gini’s coefficient for operational landholding was 0.62 while for land ownership it was 0.73. This shows that a substantial portion of land was leased out in 1991-92. In seventies when agriculture was totally dependent on bullocks, rich peasants often leased out their land to their Assamies(sharecroppers). Even today some rich peasants take pride in claiming that these middle caste peasants were our Assamies. Strategically they did not lease out more than two bighas land to any Bataidar(sharecropper ) so that they could not accumulate any wealth. Their tactic was to bring more sharecroppers in their ambit of influence. Because having large number of *assamies* was symbol of status and power. Sometimes Badka gharayans had more than 50 *assamies* and these *assamies* were real force behind the muscle power of landlords. *Assamies* also provided service on the occasion of household rituals and other family events and ensured supply of milk and curd at the time of need. Some of *assamies* were so trusted by their landlords that at the family

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Lal Narayan Sharma on 13-12 -2015.

<sup>58</sup> In bhopuri the proverb says, “ Tilath ke lathi, Piro Thana Na Thati.”

<sup>59</sup> Times of India, October 25, 2014

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

occasions they were deputed as incharge of Bhandarghar by their masters. Bhandarghar was used to store food and sweets at the family occasions.

The trust on Assamies was limited not only to the space of *bhandarghar*. Sometimes these Assamies were active member of dacoity- gang formed by their masters. District Gazettiers often lament on the dacoity prevalent in the region. A proverb says, “Don’t go to Shahabad; if you go don’t stay; if you stay don’t sleep.” After independence some dacoits were branded as freedom fighters and started to live a respectable life. Gahit Singh, a Bhumihar, of Kurmuri village was one such dacoit whose capital punishment was cancelled because it was argued that his target was the colonial government<sup>61</sup>. However, after independence many dacoits continued to operate in the region. Rameshvar Ahir, the founder member of CPI ML was also a dacoit. His main intention was to teach a lesson to Bhumihars<sup>62</sup>. But every yadav was not against Bhumihars and Rajputs. Some yadavs, most of them assamies, preferred to join the gang which was headed by their masters. These upper caste rich peasants formed gangs because they wanted to save their property from lower caste gangs. Many a time they killed many lower caste dacoits. For rich landlords banditry was also a tool to teach a lesson to other landlords. Rivalry between Bhumihar and Rajput landlords was well known in the region. Violent conflict often broke out between these landlords for canal water. Ii. S. S. O’Malley, in his district gazetteer, talks about the conflict between “turbulent Rajpoots’ and ‘Tuckulent Babhans’<sup>63</sup>. Football match was another source for conflict in seventies and eighties. This rivalry between these two castes was also reflected in the area of crime. In Bikramganj one Rajput landlord was notorious for looting *khalihans*<sup>64</sup> of Bhumihars. The other prominent Bhumihar landlord of the area threatened him that his *khalihan* would be looted the next day. The Rajput landlord became alert and deployed some police personals to protect his *khalihan*. However, the Bhumihar landlord was audacious enough and he raided the *khalihan* with the help of his assamies, snatched arms from police and carried away all crops from the *Khalihan*. Later, when the rajput landlord surrendered then his crops were

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Dharnidhar Rai of Kurmuri village on 12-12-2015

<sup>62</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, Bhojpur: Bihar Me Naxalvadi Andolan, New Delhi, Radhakrishna Publication, 1980, p.79.

<sup>63</sup> Ii. S. S. O’Malley, Bengal District Gazetteers Sahabad, Calcutta, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1906, p. 116.

<sup>64</sup> *Khalihan* is the place where harvested crop is stored.

returned and he became the friend of this Bhumihaar landlord<sup>65</sup>. There were many other instances of “friendly dacoity.” Contrary to the professional dacoity, most of the time dacoity projected as fun , entertainment was in actuality an issue of prestige for upper caste rich landlords.

However, every landlord was not a dacoit and many of them commanded respect in the region. Some rich upper caste peasants had got reputation across the district. It was famous about some rich peasants that if a marriage procession passed through their villages they could arrange food for all men within hours. An old man of Kathrai village told the story that when they were returning from an animal fair after buying some cattle it became dark and after seeing them helpless, one rich peasant of Shivpur village stopped them and requested to stay in his house<sup>66</sup>. He generously arranged food for sixty persons and provided sani(fodder) for every cattle. By such acts of generosity these peasants had earned reputation across the district. Some of members of Badka gharayan were so famous that still many villages are known by their name.

### **Internal differentiation and intra-caste social stigmas among upper castes**

Apart from some village elites and few well-to-do peasants, a major section of upper caste was poor, illiterate and backward. According to CPI ML documents which are based on agricultural census of Bihar(1981) seventy six percent of landholdings were below the size of 1 hectare and the other ten percent of landholdings were between 1 to 2 hectare<sup>67</sup>. This shows that eighty six percent of total landholdings were below the size of 2 hectare. If we assume that erstwhile Shahabad district also reflected the same pattern of the social distribution of land then simple mathematics shows that a major portion of upper caste households(more than 70 percent) were marginal and small peasants in seventies and eighties. 2002-2003 NSSO data also shows that more than 82 percent households belonging to general category in central Bihar were marginal (60 percent) and small farmers(22 percent).

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Ajay Tivari on 14-12-2015, Shivpur village.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Devi Pande and Asha Pande of Kathrai village on 27-12-2015.

<sup>67</sup> From *The Flaming Fields of Bihar*, CPI ML Archive.

Unlike the rich households belonging to Badka Gharayan which held a large number of *assamies*, *banihars* and *charwahas*, these poor peasants had to do hard labour in their fields to earn their livelihood. Almost all of them participated in every step of agriculture from ploughing fields to harvesting crops. Many of them could not afford a pair of oxen and in peak agricultural season they could not borrow it from other prosperous peasants. Therefore, these poor upper caste peasants prepared their fields with the help of hoes. “To toil like a bullock” a phrase which is still in vogue in the region was not an empty signifier; it had a social and cultural context and it signified coercive labour done by marginal peasants and agricultural labourers. In one village we heard about a Bhumihar peasant who ploughed 10 kattha land with his hoe without taking any rest. Rich peasants ridiculed him by calling him “tractor of his family.” These human tractors and harvesters can still be found in any village of Bhojpur. One aspect of agriculture is coercive human labour which is generally downplayed by our modern economic historians. Technology was inaccessible to these poor peasants; they could not possess tractors, thrashers and harvesters so they did thrashing and harvesting with their own hands. Till 1990, only few rich peasants could afford tractors in villages. In 1971 only 25000 private tube wells were in use in Bihar<sup>68</sup>. Green revolution could not bring any substantial change in economic status of marginal peasants of Bihar.

Caste was never helpful to acquire any social and cultural capital by these poor upper caste peasants. Rich peasants deliberately maintained social distance from these poor fellows. Family-members of Badka Gharayans often used to abuse and assault them physically. Many of poor Bhumihars of Ekvari village were severely beaten by the family members of Nathuni Singh. And some of them joined CPI ML only to teach a lesson to the family of Nathuni Singh<sup>69</sup>. Later I will explain why CPI ML failed to win the confidence of these poor upper caste peasants. There was a clear rift between the rich and the poor among upper castes. In many villages the rich did not use to share food with the fellows of their own caste. Members of Badka Gharayans did not attend any ceremonies in poor households. Only they sent their *banihars* and *charwahas* to attend these ceremonies to oblige these poor families. They deliberately avoided making any marital relations with the relatives of these poor households.

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<sup>68</sup> Tubewells Irrigation in The Gangetic Plain, Economic Political Weekly, Vol. 12, No. 39 pp.90-91.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Vijay Mauar at Bathani Tola on 30 December. Vijay Mauar told the story of one Nageshvar Singh of Ekvari village who joined CPI ML to teach a lesson to Nathuni Singh's family.



A Bhojpuri proverb says that “poverty is not a disgrace”( *garibi kauno pai na ha* ) , though the rich discovered various tools to stigmatize these poor persons of their own caste.

Many of poor upper caste persons were not treated as upper castes by village elites. Different type of social stigmas were attached to them, some were stereotyped as *Betibechava* ( daughter sellers) the other were *Bhutah*(haunted householders), many of them had not good *Aangachh* (*harbingers of ill luck*), and a major portion of them was *Kujati*(excommunicated from caste).Some of them were *Brahmadukhi*(cursed by some *Braham Baba*), other belonged to a *pagla gharayan*(mad household) and the rest were *kodhvansi*( decedents of leper dynasty ) or *Rogi-Dukhi* (diseased). It is very difficult to write history of these social stigmas because Bhojpuri has not produced enough literature which can be used as sources. Even folk songs, narratives and ballades are silent on these issues. The person attached to these social stigmas was not allowed to participate in any village rituals and therefore we hardly find any trace of these stigmas in oral tradition. These stigmas still exist in villages and victims of these stigmas are often reluctant to talk anything about it. However, rich peasants give much information about these prejudices and in my opinion understanding oppressor’s point of view also provide a lot of information about social and cultural role of stigmas because it is the rich and the powerful who are adamant for maintaining these stigmas.

One occasion of major concern for poor upper caste households was the time of marriage for their daughters. The rate of dowry was very high and sometimes even rich peasants had to sell their land for fulfilling the demand of bridegroom’s side. It is said that before the arrival of bridegroom’s procession peasant shifted their livestock in nearby houses because the mind of in-laws could change at any time. An old man of *Chhitandihra* village told me the story about a rich landlord of his village that when he went to his in-laws house in a Bhojpur village( in 1971) he became adamant that if he would not be given a bullock, he would return to his village like a bullock. And finally his strategy was successful; his in-laws gave him one strong bullock in dowry<sup>70</sup>. For poor families it was never easier to manage the amount of dowry, they had to take huge debt from rich peasants and Mahajans, and for this they had to put their land on *Rehon*. *Rehon* was a contract in which the debtor had to pay back money

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Janardan Rai on 23-12-2015.

before a certain fixed date, failing which amounted the loss of possession from the land<sup>71</sup>. Many poor peasants lost their land due to this coercive mortgaging of land by village elites. High rate of dowry and unavailability of easy debt forced many upper caste peasants to marry their daughters with older men or widowers. Such mismatched marriages were often seen with suspicion by rich peasants. They often alleged that poor peasants sold their daughters for money in the name of marriage. No doubt the tradition of daughter selling was in vogue in many regions. In erstwhile Shahabad district many upper caste villages on the Bank of Ganga river, known as Hethar region, were infamous for this cruel system. In a song composed by Bhikhari Thakur a young girl says that “O father I did everything for you and your family but at the end of day you are offering this innocent girl to that old man, just like a goat is offered to a butcher. O father! You have taken money for this act<sup>72</sup>.” Bhikhari Thakur wrote a play *Beti-Viyog* in which this problem has been discussed. It is said that the appeal of this play was so strong that some girls preferred committing suicide rather than marrying old persons, even villagers started objecting mismatched marriages. However every mismatched marriage was not a case where the father had taken money from the bridegroom. It was the rich peasants of badka gharayan who decided whether someone is betibechwa( one who has sold his daughter or sister) or not. Once stigmatised as betibechwa the family was hardly able to uplift status. Even today some poor peasants who have made fortune by new opportunities are humiliated by making them remember their past and they are unable to undo this stigma.

Marriage could bring other stigmas too. The search for a bridegroom was a very painful process for a girl’s father. In a year only some selected times were permitted for searching bridegrooms by *panchang*s<sup>73</sup>. *Panchangs* were strictly followed and the father had very few time in a year to negotiate with bridegroom’s family. A girl’s father could easily be cheated by his Agua, the person who mediates between the two families, and at many occasions after marriage he was informed that his in-laws were Kujati<sup>74</sup>. Sometimes poverty forced people to

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Ashok Rai on 10-12-2014.

<sup>72</sup> This song has been taken from Bhikhari Thakur’s play *Beti-Viyog*. Its Bhojpuri version says-“Ropya Ginai Lihala/ Pagaha Dharai Dihala/ Cheriya Ke Chheriya Banaila A Babuji.”

<sup>73</sup> In a Bhojpuri song when a father becomes anxious about his girl’s marriage he goes to market and immediately buys Panchang. Still in villages this can be seen. See. *Bhojpuri Lokgeet* , Vol-2, edited by Krishnadev Upadhyay, p. 44.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Ashok Rai on 10-12-2014.

marry their daughters in a *kujati* family and thus they also fell in the category of Kujati. Kujati refers to excommunication due to the “impurity of blood”, this stigma is attached when any member of family marries outside his or her caste. Kujatis were behaved like untouchables among upper castes. Due to this stigma they had to face deep humiliation and socio-economic exclusion. The number of kujaties increased day by day and in 2002, in a small village of Sahar only one upper caste family was left who was not kujati<sup>75</sup>. After much deliberation this family decided to start sharing foods with other kujati families following which all Kujati families partly returned back in the caste-fold on account of their numerical strength. In seventies or eighties it was not possible and Kujati families always remained on the margin of the village life. People still avoid marital relation with these kujati families. In some villages only one household of upper caste was present and this household was known as *ek-gharva*, people were suspicious about their purity of blood. Sometimes these *ek-gharva* households had to face similar problems which a kujati family usually faced<sup>76</sup>.

Many poor households of upper castes were allegedly haunted by ghosts. Ghosts were supposed to be very strong in Bhojpur and they were powerful enough to influence village life. These ghosts generally entered into village by the permission of the *dihwar*(*dih-baba*) of village<sup>77</sup>. *Dihwar*(a village deity) was *kotwal* and protector of his village. He also constituted spiritual, social and geographical boundaries of village. Still *Dihwars* and other village deities are invited in marriages by sending them invitation card. Even Naxalite menace was seen by many villagers as a result of the anger of the *Dihvar* of the village. It seems that the *kotwal* of village was reluctant to provide security to poor households. And ghosts had made permanent residence in many poor households. These households were completely excommunicated by villagers. Any kind of transaction was strictly prohibited with these households. Even *gotiys* feared to enter into these households. Their fear was not in vain because local beliefs remind that ghosts prefer *gotiys*' houses over other villagers. Ghosts had destroyed many families, and people knew this story that how kingdom of Chainpur was destroyed by a Brahma-

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Ashok Rai on 10-12-2015.

<sup>76</sup> In Harpur village in Piro I met a Bhumihar family who had to face many problems because they were *ek-gharwa*.

<sup>77</sup>See. Diane M. Coccarri, “The Bir Babas of Banaras: An Analysis of Folk Deity in North Indian Hinduism” in Sandria B. Freitag (ed.) *Culture and Power in Banaras*.

Pisach(the ghost of a priest)<sup>78</sup>.The kingdom of Bihiya was also destroyed by the curse of Mahthin Mai( a ghost of priestess). In Bhojpur villages many Barham Babas are found who are supposed to be ghosts of upper castes who died unnatural death. Many of them sacrificed their life for saving his caste men from other castes. These ghosts had attained the status of semi deity. In Shivpur village I found a place for Barham Baba<sup>79</sup>. Nearly 200 years ago Rajputs of Shivpur, with the help of Bhumihars of Bhakura, had killed a Bhumihar from Baruna village. Later this Bhumihar became Barham Baba and both Rajputs and Bhumihars started worshipping this Barham Baba. Barham Baba cursed that anyone who will drink water of these two villages will become mad. Bhumihars of Baruna still hesitate to drink water in these villages. Barham baba controlled social relation between these villages for two centuries. However, some poor Bhumihars of Baruna made marital relation with Bhumihar families of Bhakura village. And some members of these families later became mentally ill. Most of the time mental problem was due to severe poverty, however, people thought that the family had deliberately invited the curse of Barham Baba .Later this family was declared by villagers as Brahma-dukhi. Once this stigma was attached, the family continued to face social and economic exclusion by villagers<sup>80</sup>.

For many persons madness was not a disease. It was a curse which in effect was likely to continue for generations. The presence of the word Khandani Pagal and Pagla Gharayan shows that madness was perceived by people as a problem which transmitted from generation to generation. Even wise people belonging to these households(pagla gharayan) were often stereotyped as mentally unstable. In Bhojpur villages it can easily be seen that most of the households which are stereotyped as pagla gharayan are economically weaker households. Many persons of these households are hand-cuffed and are ill-treated by villagers. In my own village many persons belonging to a family were handcuffed by villagers. Pagla Gharayans are also treated like excommunicated families and people avoid marital relation with these households. It can easily be seen in Bhojpur's villages how caste and class construct madness.

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<sup>78</sup> li. S. S. O'Malley, Bengal District Gazetteer Shahabad, p. 136.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Ajay Tivari on 30-12-2015.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Amresh Rai of Baruna village on 29-12-2015.

Leprosy was also seen by villagers as a *khandani bimari* (the disease which is transmitted from parents to children) or as a result of some heinous action<sup>81</sup>. In folklores we hear that the disease is not curable. Many of lepers were forced to leave their houses. On the bank of the Ganga River their huts can still be found. Leprosy brought stigma to the whole family of the leper. Even if a leper left his house then too his family members were stigmatised as *kodhvansi*. Many other diseases also brought stigmas to poor families.

### **Dalits and Extremely Backward Castes**

1971 census shows that Chamar(67783), Dusadh(60005) and Musahar(24079) were the most numerous castes among Dalits<sup>82</sup>. These three castes provided numerous cadres for the Naxalite movement. Kahar, Kohar, Netua(1469), Nai, Dhobi(11200) and many other castes were numerically small but they were integral part of vibrant culture of the rural society<sup>83</sup>. Most of the persons belonging to these castes were landless agricultural labourers. Stigma attached to these castes was a major constraint for their socio-economic upliftment. Chamars are considered the most untouchable by upper castes. Even middle and lower castes treat them inhumanly. In Sorathi, a ballad which is sung by lower castes, the mythical girl child Sorathi at the time of her birth requests her mother not allow a Chamar Woman to cut her umbilical cord because she would become polluted<sup>84</sup>. Ingratitude and unkindness of the society becomes intolerable knowing this fact that in rural areas umbilical cord of a new born baby was cut by these Chamar women and the first food of the most of the new born babies was the milk from the breast of these Chamar women<sup>85</sup>. When tension increased in Belaur village in 1994 every Chamar fled away from the village except an old Chamar woman. And when a team led by Swaminath Tiwari(ex-MLA, BJP) visited this hamlet the woman

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<sup>81</sup> In Sutrathar novel a character says that the man who conspired against Mahendar Misir, a famous folk singer, became a leper. See. Sanjeev, *Sutrathar*, p. 269.

<sup>82</sup> District Census Handbook, Shahabad District, 1971, pp.114-133. Numerical data are given for Sadar subdivision of erstwhile Shahabad district. Later the subdivision became a separate district.

<sup>83</sup> Demographic data are available only for Dalit castes.

<sup>84</sup> Satyavrat Sinha, *Bhojपुरी Lokgatha*, Allahabad, Hindustan Academy, 1957, p. 209.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Swaminath Tiwari(ex-MLA of Brahmapur) on 8 January, 2016.

reminded this fact that she had cut umbilical cord of many upper caste persons of the village and therefore she would not run away from the village<sup>86</sup>.

Not every member of Chamar community had such a strong bondage with their villages, customs and rituals; and many of them stepped outside the Hindu religion in Bihiya Block. The rate of conversion to Christianity was high within this community as compared to other lower castes. A brief discussion on conversion is necessary to understand the lower participation of Chamars in the Naxalite Movement in Bojpur's Bihiya Block. In 1990, in Bhojpur's Ganj village only five Chamar households were practicing Hinduism and more than hundred households belonging to this caste were practicing Christianity<sup>87</sup>. Christianity was introduced in the region by Shahpur mission. The mission reached as early as in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The work done by Father Pollard proved partially successful and nearly 1000 families of Raidasiya Chamar converted into Christianity. Till 1990 nearly four thousand baptizations happened in Bihiya Block<sup>88</sup>. The mission organized food for work programme for poor people and in this way it attracted poor people towards Christianity. In the period of famine (1969-70) the rate of conversion was the highest. The mission also worked as a microfinance institution and helped poor people to pay their older debt. Generally these debts were fifty to hundred rupees for which they had to do begari in the fields of their upper caste masters. Now these people became debtors of the Church and they had to do everything on the dictate of Church. The only benefit they got was English education for their children which helped later to get blue collar and white collar jobs to these downtrodden people.

Conversion is not one-sided process. Hybridization of different cultures, religions and customs can easily be found in everyday life of these new converts. In Bhojpur villages these new Christians still follow many of their old customs. Their old priest *Bhagat* is still consulted by them in special circumstances such as the attack of diseases or evil spirits<sup>89</sup>. Many of them celebrate Deepavali, Holi and Chhath Pooja. To felicitate their Chhath

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> K Jose John, *Religion and Community: The Bettiah and Ravidasis Christian Communities in Bihar* Dissertation at Jawaharlal Nehru University(Unpublished),p. 97.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* p.219.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* p.244.

Pooja , the Mission constructed a pond and the statue of Mary was erected in the mid of the pond. Poor people scare of Chhathi Mai, a deity who is worshipped in Bihar, and they believe that even Jesus cannot save them from the anger of this deity. Marriages are not performed in the Church instead priests visit their houses to perform rituals because many relatives of these new Christians are Hindus and they prefer marriages to be performed in households<sup>90</sup>. Names of many new converted persons also reflect the hybridization of old and new ; indigenous and alien. The first name is generally a Hindu name like Madho and the surname is a Christian one, like Matew. In the attempt to convert these Raidasiya Chamars Christianity itself got converted and it lost many of its characteristics which are otherwise an inevitable part of this religion.

Why conversion is not easily helpful in changing socio-economic status of these marginalised people can easily be understood by using the concept of intersectionality. Originally this concept was developed by Kimberley Crenshaw to show that a black woman is harassed because she is in intersection of gender and race and therefore she is vulnerable from both sides. Similarly in the situation of these new converted people it can be argued that their identity is intersection of gender, caste, class, educational status, economic prosperity and many other factors. And in most of the cases their social status is determined by other factors than their new earned religious identity. The oppression of women continued in this new religion too. The Church always tried to control the sexuality of women and they were not allowed to marry outside the fold of their religion<sup>91</sup>. These women continued to face brutal patriarchy within their families and many rituals are still prevalent where women are not treated equal to men. Religion cannot be totally controlled by any institution and in the sphere of households many rituals develop which reinforce gender hierarchy. Apart from the gender question a hierarchy also exist within converted people. And in local dialect many words are present which connotes degree of purity among Christians. There are asli Christians, pasli Christians and Nakali Christians. In Bhojpur villages conversion also followed caste-lines. Generally Dusadhs and Chamars were more interested in embracing this new religion.

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*,p.245

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*,p.248.

However, they continued to practice endogamy within their caste groups, only some sub-castes of Chamars started practicing exogamy within their caste.

The main disadvantage of this new religion was that these poor people were denied the benefit of reservation on account of their lost Scheduled Caste status. To cope with this situation many dalits developed a new strategy. They started practicing Christianity in their private lives but in public life they were less assertive<sup>92</sup>. These Christians were often ridiculed by upper castes as crypto-Christians.

Only few Chamars(till 1990 nearly 4000) in Bihiya Block accepted this new religion. However, due to the influence of Christianity many of them preferred to stay away from Naxal violence. In other blocks like Sahar and Sandesh Christianity was not popular among Chamars. These oppressed people joined the Naxalite movement for their emancipation. From Naxalite movement they learnt secular language and became politically more conscious than their Christian counterparts. CPI ML politically educated these lower castes and helped to awaken a new consciousness in them.

It is believed that the main occupation of Chamar caste was skinning and tanning. However, many of them worked in fields as agricultural labourers for meagre income<sup>93</sup>. Some were also employed as Banihars and Charwahas of the rich peasants. Banihari institution was widespread in Bhojpur region. Banihars got one to two Bighas agricultural land and they had to help his master for the whole year<sup>94</sup>. The work was generally difficult and Banihar could not break the contract in mid-time. At the occasion of marriages and other functions they had to work very hard. They had to take care of every guest and had to manage every stuff necessary for household chores. Atithi devo bhava, Guest is God, was only possible by exploitation of these poor people. And when barbers were not available they had to go on long journey for distributing invitation cards and most of the journey had to be covered on foot on account of the poor connectivity of villages<sup>95</sup>. And all this happened in the hottest

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*,p.236.

<sup>93</sup> See. District Census Handbook, Sahabad District, 1971.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Kanhiya *banihar* of Baruna village on 30-12-2015. See.R. N. Maharaj, *Chavari Hatyakand Ki Visesh Report* in Bir Bharat Talvar(ed.) Naxalbari Ke Daur Me, New Delhi, Anamika Publishers ,2007, p.245.

<sup>95</sup> District Census Handbook highlights poor connectivity of villages. See,District Census handbook, Sahabad District, 1971.



months of May and June. In one of the Sahar village when a Banihar returned after distributing invitation cards, a ghost entered into his body and the ghost demanded a bucket of sharbat, immediately the desire of the ghost was fulfilled by his master and the Banihar got a leave for two days<sup>96</sup>. However, ghosts and spirits were not permanent solution and at many occasions these Banihars violently retaliated against their masters and became Naxalites<sup>97</sup>.

Not every Banihar was disloyal to his Master and we hear stories of some Banihars who sacrificed their lives to protect their masters. Many *kamkars* or *kahars*, a lower caste who were considered pure enough to do household chores of upper caste, remained loyal to their masters. Generally Banihari institution was less open to Chamars, Dusadhs and Musahars and it was kamkars who were considered most suitable for this work by their masters<sup>98</sup>. Their wives and daughters were considered to be pure enough to enter into inner part of households and they helped in cooking and other household works. This easy access to upper caste households for these lower caste women was often seen with suspicion by other lower castes. However, for religious and cultural reasons these women were safe in upper caste households. Vulnerability increased in fields and other spaces. A Bhojpuri proverb says that no panchayat should be set up on the issue of dungcake-house and fodder-house<sup>99</sup>. Generally, it was Kahar women's duty to make dung cake for their masters and this was to be done outside the space of their master's household. In these spaces sometimes they were physically abused by their masters.

1971 census shows that Dusadhs were next to Chamars in numerical strength in erstwhile Shahabad district. In 1965, Yashoda Devi, a member of legislative assembly, wrote a book *Dusadh Samaj Ek Sameeksha* in which she claimed that Dusadhs were descendents of Gahlot Rajputs<sup>100</sup>. The book was published from Patna and it initiated a fresh wave of Sanskritization among Dusadhs in neighbouring districts. Many Dusadhs left pig-rearings and started claiming their superiority over other lower castes by invoking their martial tradition in

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Nilesh Rai of Mudaffarpur village on 7-03-016.

<sup>97</sup> Ganeshi Dusadh the Commander of the Red Army of Bhojpur was a *banihar*. Ganeshi had established a court and a parallel government in Chavari village and he killed many peasants. See. Kalyan Mukherjee, *Bhojpur: Bihar Me Naxalvadi Andolan*, Delhi, Radhakrishna Publication, 1980, p. 61.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Ashok Rai on 10-12-2014.

<sup>99</sup> The Bhojpuri version of the proverb is- "Gothail aur Bhusail ke Panchayat na hola."

<sup>100</sup> Badri Narayan Introduction in Badri Narayan (ed) *Upekshit Samudayon Ka Aatma-Itihas*, p.5.

mythical past. The rivalry between Chamars and Dusadhs is well known in the region. Some Dusadhs also supported Ranvir Sena to teach a lesson to Chamars<sup>101</sup>. However, many reasons were present for violence between Dusadhs and Bhumihars. Most of the Dusadhs not only supported Naxalites but also challenged the domination of Bhumihars on the cultural terrain. *Reshma-Chuharmal Ka Khela*, a play performed by Dusadhs, narrates the love-story of Reshma, a Bhumihar girl and Chuharmal, the mythical hero of Dusadhs. Although many versions of this story were present and Bhumihars never accepted that Reshma was a Bhumihar girl, despite the performance of this play often invoked violence in public spaces and sometimes actors were attacked by Bhumihars<sup>102</sup>. Initially this play was performed in Mokama district but after the circulation of printed story this love-story travelled in other regions, too. A Bhojpuri newspaper *Tatka* ( 2 February 1978) mentions that when this play was performed in neighbouring Aurangabad district an actor was murdered during the performance<sup>103</sup>. Later in Bhojpur, too, several times violence broke out between Bhumihars and lower castes during the performance of this play<sup>104</sup>.

This cultural faultline moved in other directions too. The ballad of Lorikayan celebrates the killing of Mahapatiya and Harwa-Barwa of Dusadh community by Lorik, the legendary hero of Yadva community<sup>105</sup>. The representation of Mahapatiya Dusadh as a gambler and Harwa-Barwa as tyrants in Loriki reinforces those stereotypes which still depict Dusadhs as a militant caste<sup>106</sup>. This cultural antagonism manifests also in political rivalry between Lalu Yadav led RJD and Ram Vilas Paswan led LJP. Ram Vilas has emerged as uncontested leader of Dusadh community.

Taking into account of the assimilation and appropriation of cultural practices by different groups, rifts and differences cannot be overemphasized. Many upper caste persons participate in Rahu worship, despite this fact that this ritual is completely organized by Dusadhs<sup>107</sup>. Many upper caste women also take Prasad of this deity in the hope of getting children. Rahu

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with Rabinder Master on 2-10-2015.

<sup>102</sup> Badri Narayan Tiwari, Folklore of Reshma and Chuharmal, [www.museindia.com](http://www.museindia.com)

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> See Loriki in Satyvrat Sinha (ed.) *Bhojpuri Lokgatha*, pp.259-266.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> In Bhojpur Dusadhs used to invite a member of Badka Gharayan in Rahu-Puja, interview with Amresh Rai.

,Shani and Ketu are generally worshiped by lower castes. Hindu mythology and rural cultural practices show how cosmology and caste constitute each other. However, we cannot essentialize these counter cultures because they draw a lot from so-called Brahmanical culture and in many villages upper castes also participate in worship of these less popular deities of subaltern community.

The worship of Rahu is performed by a Dusadh Priest known as Bhagat<sup>108</sup>. After performing this worship Bhagat runs away from the village and all Dusadhs follow him and if Bhagat is caught then it is understood that they have successfully performed the worship otherwise it would be performed again<sup>109</sup>. Some other lower castes have also their own Bhagats. These Bhagats also command respect among upper castes. In the village society priesthood was not homogenous nor was it a prerogative of Brahmans. Some upper caste families also invite these Bhagats for the worship of Devi<sup>110</sup>. Some Bhagats perform rituals to oust ghost from houses. Yadvas have their own Bhagats and these Bhagats worship dead unmarried children or Manus Deva of their families<sup>111</sup>.

Another village deity of Dusadhs is Goriya Baba. Pigs and wine are offered to this deity. Upper castes also respect this deity and in marriages an invitation card is also sent to the deity<sup>112</sup>. It is believed that spirits of some other lower caste persons also haunt the village and in one village I found that Bhumihars and Rajputs worship a ghost of a person who belonged to Netua(Nat) caste. The ghost is known as Chandrika Baba and his place is situated in Shivpur village on boarder of Bhojpur and Rohtas. Netuas were famous for their wrestling skills and they used to teach these skills to many upper caste persons. In Bhojpur wrestling was very popular and in every well-to-do upper caste households there was a wrestler. These upper caste wrestlers always respected his lower caste Netua Guru(Teacher)<sup>113</sup>. Akhara became a space where men from different castes were treated equally. In Akhara men from different castes gathered and enjoyed wrestling and at many occasions lower caste wrestlers

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<sup>108</sup> Interview with Amresh Rai

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Gopalji Rai

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Narendra Rai.

defeated upper caste men. Notwithstanding this fact, popular language always represented Akhara as a space where upper caste man could not be defeated by any lower caste man. A Bhojpuri story tells that a Bhumihar wrestler was once defeated by a Yadav wrestler, later the Bhumihar wrestler came to know that his opponent was a man of Yadav caste; soon after this he quickly defeated his opponent. Deliberate misrepresentation of space was necessary for mythical constitution of space where upper caste dominance could be established for ever. The body of upper caste was also constructed in a mythical way irrespective of individual attributes. A Bhojpuri proverb says, “Do not hold the body of a Bhumihar, Do not hold the tail of a jackale, and if hold then hold it tightly<sup>114</sup>.”

The foundation of power is always mythical and it is ungrounded with a small blow. After the Naxalite movement, guns and rifles became very common in Bhojpur villages and wrestling lost its aura gradually. Illegal low-priced weapons gave a new confidence to lower caste persons; they killed many of these rich upper caste wrestlers who were extremely casteist outside the space of Akhara. In this regard we can mention name of Ramanuj Rai of Vansidihri village, a famous wrestler of the region, who was brutally killed by Naxalites<sup>115</sup>. The powerful body of upper castes suddenly became fragile and vulnerable, soon wrestling and body-building became the things of past. With the end of the wrestling culture Ustads belonging to Netua caste also became unemployed. Their economic condition deteriorated and they became more untouchable<sup>116</sup>. A more nuanced study of Netua community can reveal how the degree of untouchability changes with time and is linked with socio-historical changes. Many persons belonging to this community changed their profession and some of them left the region. Few persons of this community joined the Naxalite movement.

Another Dalit community which provided a large number of cadres for Naxalite movement was Musahar. Many of them were agricultural labourers and some others were engaged in sericulture and pig-rearing or did the job of honey collectors. Musahars are known as rat-eaters but generally they dig out rats at the time of harvest and peasants generously allow

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<sup>114</sup> In Bhojpuri the proverb is, “Dhad na dhriha Bhumihar Ke/ Pochh Mat Dhariha Siyr Ke/ Dharbo Kariha Ta Sariya Ke.”

<sup>115</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, Bhojpur: Bihar Me Naxalvadi Aandolan, p.71.

<sup>116</sup> Earlier Netua used to come in upper caste houses as long as they taught wrestling to upper castes but now-a-days they are not allowed to enter into upper caste houses.

them to do this in their khalihans and fields. It is believed that rats consume or destroy 15 to 20 percent of food-grains. A major portion of food grains are stored by rats in their holes which are generally an elaborate structure having three parallel holes. One hole is used by rats for themselves and the other is used for the storage of grains and the third one is used by rats to deal with emergency situation. Snakes often enter into these holes but Musahars are wise enough to know whether a rat or snake inhabits in the hole. They carefully watch imprint around the hole and then they use water or smoke to trap these rats. Musahars not only trap rats but also collect grains from their holes. Generally it is thought that rat meat is a taboo for upper castes; contrary to this popular perception we find that many upper caste persons including Brahmans are also rat-eaters<sup>117</sup>. But many people still hate rat-eaters. For Musahars rat meat is a staple diet and a cheap source of protein.

Some Musahars earned a meagare income by stitching leaf-plates and for this they need to gather leaves from gardens and forests<sup>118</sup>. But this fundamental right to livelihood was denied by landlords and government officials. Poverty-ridden Musahars were made scapegoats by Naxalites and many of them joined armed units of the Naxalites. Butan Master was one such Musahar who became commander of the red army of Bhojpur and was later killed in Bahuara encirclement<sup>119</sup>.

In addition to rat-hunting, pig-rearing is another profession which brings stigma to the community. Although many upper caste Rajputs prefer pork over other meats yet pig-rearing is considered a dirty occupation by most of the Hindus. Muslims also hate Musahars on account of their pig rearing habits and they avoid any visit to hamlets of Musahars. And once when Musahars started killing their pigs to satisfy their goddess it was perceived by some people as an attempt of Sanskritization while others thought that this was a strategy of conversion used by Christian Missonaries. A pamphlet was circulated by missionaries which mentioned how Jesus cast the demons in the pigs and later killed all pigs. Ranvir Sena Supremo Barmeshvar Singh was apprehensive about missionaries' activities and shared his

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<sup>117</sup> Interview with Prashant Kumar Pandey, an M. Phil. Student of Jawaharlal Nehru University.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Chandan Singh.

<sup>119</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, *Bhojpur*, p. 92.

concern with his fellows when he was in Ara jail<sup>120</sup>. Ironically many of upper caste men who were reluctant to give any concession to Dalits always expressed anger on the issue of conversion. Although Christian constitute a miniscule community in Bhojpur and the rate of conversion had been slow in the twentieth century. Nevertheless educated upper caste men claim that there are many dalits who are crypto Christians and do not reveal their identity in public spaces but practice Christianity in private spaces. Despite this claim of secret conversion many Musahars still practise many rituals of upper castes. They worship home deity, village diety and some strange gods. Lord Shiva is also a popular deity of Musahar community.

Along with dalits, Nai, Kohar(Kumbhkar), Bhandbhooja, Badhai, Lohar and many other extremely backward castes were important in the village society. The impact of Sanskritization can be felt on these castes. Many of Aryasamaji leaders wrote history of these marginalized community in which Brahman or Kshatriya identity was claimed for them<sup>121</sup>. *Nai Varna Parichay* was one such text which claimed Brahman staus for Nai<sup>122</sup>. The book was written by a prominent Aryasamaji leader. In this text smrities, puran and other religious texts were invoked to claim that Nai belonged to Brahman community. The text promoted Brahmanical and Patriarchal values. In the reply to those texts which claimed that Nai were born from Brahman father and Shudra Mother the author maintains that as *virya* is superior to *raj* therefore the status of a child born from such marriages is equal to that of Brahman<sup>123</sup>. In *Nai Varna Parichay* there is a separate section which deals with the question of the superiority of *virya* over *raj*. Two decades after the publication of *Nai Varna Parichay*, Bhikari Thakur wrote *Nai-Bahar* in which he depicted the miserable condition of Nai caste and claimed Brahman identity for Naies. Bhikhari was an uneducated man and his intellectual journey started after reading *Ramcharit Manas*<sup>124</sup>. He had great respect for Hindu tradition and culture and he tried to bring social reform through his plays without talking annihilation of the religion. Bhikhari's focus was much on gender than caste and his plays are so gender

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<sup>120</sup> Interview with Chandan Singh.

<sup>121</sup> Badri Naraya Tivari, *Introduction* in Badri Narayan Tivari(ed.) Upekshit Samudayon Ka Aatma-itihās, Vani Prakashan, New Delhi, 2006

<sup>122</sup> Revti Prasad, "Nai Varna Parichay", in Badri Narayan(ed.) Upekshit Samudayon Ka Aatma-Itihās.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* p.45.

<sup>124</sup> Bhikhari says in a song-"Tulsikrit Me Man Laptail."

sensitive that still they are relevant. Unlike Bhikhari, some rich Naies who had left their traditional profession claimed Kshatriya identity for their caste. The process of Sanskritization and the claim of upper caste identity could not change the ground reality and many persons belonging to Nai caste were forced to live a life of hardship. *Sutradhar*, a novel written on the life of Bhikhari Thakur artistically portrays the miserable life of these oppressed people<sup>125</sup>.

Kohar or Kumhar were pot-makers and the demand of these clay-pots was high in Bhojpur's villages. Villagers liked rice cooked in *handies* and they believed that it was more tasty compared to the rice made in other pots. Kohar were skilled enough to make different type of pots like chukka(used for drinking water and tea), handi(used for cooking), meta, patuki(used for drinking tari, a desi-liquor) ghaila(used for storing water), Naad(used for making *sani* for animals). They also made diyas, kalash and other patra which were used in different type of rituals. For children they used to make various type of toys, many of these toys are still made by them on the eve of Deepavali festival. The life of Kohar was so busy that they had to work day and night on their *chaks* and they never became active cadre of the Naxalite Movement. Kohars were more inclined towards the process of Sanskritization they started calling themselves Kumbhakar Brahman and still they use "pandit" surname to claim Brahman identity.

Many other extremely backward castes also adopted the path of Sanskritization. Aryasamaji helped in constructing their mythical past. Badhai and Lohar also started naming themselves as Vishvakarma Brahman. Badhai preferred to stay away from the Naxalite movement. However, some Lohars used to make illegal weapons for the Naxalites. Ajay Lohar of Harpura village was famous for making illegal weapons in his underground factory<sup>126</sup>.

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<sup>125</sup> See. Sanjeev, *Sutradhar*.

<sup>126</sup> Suresh Kantak, *Raktim Tara*. p.123.

## Upper Middle Castes

A history of upper middle castes in twentieth century shows that Political and social are not two mutually exclusive spaces. Political and social are so intermingled in this case that they are inseparable. However, for my convenience I will first briefly discuss their political journey from the formation of Triveni Sangh(1933) to political success of Sanyukta socialist party in 1967 assembly elections and then I would try to enter into their socio-cultural milieu.

Yadav, Kurmi and Koeri these three castes had been politically active in erstwhile Shahabad district since 1930. With the influence of Aryasamaj these castes started Janev movement and started wearing sacred threads publically. This was the time when every middle caste claimed Kshatriya status and formed their caste organizations. Yadav kshatriya Sabha, Kurmi Kshatriya Sabha and Koeri Kshatriya Sabha merged in 1933 and Triveni Sangh came in existence in Kargahar village<sup>127</sup>. Yadunandan Mehta of Jitaura village, Sardar Jagdev Singh of Garbe village and Nandkishor Singh of Tenduni village were prominent leaders of Triveni Sangh<sup>128</sup>. Yadunandan Mehta belonged to Koeri or Kushvaha caste and actively participated in Janev movement. In 1936 he went to Myanmar to spread his Janev movement in migrant Kushvaha families<sup>129</sup>. He wrote many books and booklets like *Kushvaha Pukar*, *Kushvaha Prakash*, *Yadav Janev Birodhiyon ke Muhtod Jabab*<sup>130</sup>. The other leader Sardar Jagdev Singh was known as “Mother of Triveni Sangh” and he was also active in Yadav Mahasabha<sup>131</sup>.

Although Triveni Sangh tried to increase its spatial scale by extending its activities in other districts but it could not enlarge its social base which would have changed political outcome. Triveni Sangh was congregation of three numerous castes for electoral benefit and its main focus was district board elections. All its leaders were from well-to-do families and they never talked about annihilation of caste. Even they did not try to overcome social distances existing within Yadav, Koeri and Kurmi and Triveni Sangh lost its aura till 1945. Later Sardar Jagdev Singh and many other leaders of the Sangh joined Radical Democratic Party of

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<sup>127</sup> Chaudgry J N P Mehta, *Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul*, Triveni Shakti Karyalay, Jitaura, Sahabad, 1940, pp. 7-8

<sup>128</sup> Prasann Kumar, *Bihar Me Samajik Parivartan Ke Kuchh Aayam*, pp. 112-172

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* p. 164

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* p. 165.



M N Roy<sup>132</sup>. In 1946 elections RDP contested at 11 places and lost all seats. However, it managed to get more than 5000 votes in Sasaram and 2500 votes in Bhabhua<sup>133</sup>. The role of a political movement cannot be judged solely on the basis of its political outcome. RDP fought against Jamindari pratha and mobilized lower caste peasants against begari and caste based atrocities. RDP played an important role in making socialist and communist ideas popular in Bhojpur's villages. Many of RDP leaders later joined socialist party.

Socialist Party was a strong force in Shahabad district and in 1967 assembly election Sanyukta Socialist Party got 68 seats in Bihar and in its leadership first anti-congress government was formed there. From 1967 to 1972 nine governments had to resign and there was little hope for political stability. Casteism was so entrenched in Sanyukta Socialist Party that many of its backward leaders were not ready to acknowledge Ramanand Tivari as their leader. Lohia's slogan "Backward will get 60 in 100" attracted backward castes towards socialist politics. However, soon it became clear that socialist politics has replaced upper castes by Uchha Shudras (Ahir, Koeri, Kurmi and Baniya). The voice of Nimna Shudras (Extremely Backward castes) and Dalits had no place in the socialist politics. Despite rhetoric of inclusive politics of Sanyukta Socialist Party Dalits and extremely backward castes continued to face poverty, hunger and social discrimination.

Upper middle castes have long history of hostility towards Dalits. It can easily be traced in their folk tradition. In Loriki we see that Lorik, a mythical hero, of Yadav community kills Bethva Chamar and Mahapatiya Dusadh<sup>134</sup>. He also kills Harwa-Barwa of Dusadh community and defeats Randeniya Dusadh. The Domraj of Katalpur is also killed by Lorik<sup>135</sup>. At the time of his birth Lorik says, "O Mother listen me! If you will allow to enter a Chamar woman in this house then my religion will be destroyed, please keep her away<sup>136</sup>." In Loriki representation of a Kalwar woman as a seducer is also problematic<sup>137</sup>. Lorikayan or Loriki is not a text disassociated from life. In every village Ahirs proudly sing this ballad and

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, pp138-139

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>134</sup> Loriki in Satyavrat Sinha, *Bhojpuri Lokgatha*, Allahabad, Hindustani Academy, 1957, pp.259-266.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*.

they worship Lorik as a god. By reciting the text they reproduce social norms and hierarchy. We have already mentioned that in Sorathi, a ballad which is sung by middle and lower castes, its heroine also requests her mother at the time of her birth not allow a Chamar woman to enter home.

Middle castes sometimes followed the path of Sanskritization and at other times they fought for egalitarian society. In the process of Sanskritization they were distancing themselves from dalit community and when they fought for socialism they wanted to grab power from upper castes but they were never ready to share it with dalits and extremely backward castes. In 1967 assembly election when number of backward MLAs reached 82 then too only five of them belonged to Extremely backward caste. Till 1985 their number in the state assembly was limited from 4 to 5. Although EBC constitute 32 percent of total population their political representation is still inadequate.

Caste is a useful category to understand Indian society. Nonetheless, emphasizing or downplaying caste leads to erroneous understanding of the society. Despite political dominance of Yadav, koeri, Kurmi and Baniya we must acknowledge this fact that many persons belonging to these castes were leading miserable lives in villages. In the next chapter we will see that many of poor persons of these castes joined the Naxalite movement and they killed their own caste members who were supporting the opposite side. Many of them were poor Bataidars who were dependent on leasing of a small portion of land. Selling milk, curd and vegetables was their main source of livelihood. Some persons of Yadav community made their fortune in cattle-trading. Many big fairs of cattles were organized in Bhojpur and in neighbouring districts in which Yadav played prominent role. Hasanbajar, Sanjhauli, Brahmipur and many other places attracted peasants for trade of cattles. The Sonapur fair at Hajipur, a place not far from Bhojpur, is one of the biggest cattle-fair and traders from Arab, Iran and Central Asia used to come here.

In numerical strength koeries stand next to Yadav. They produce vegetables and sell it in nearby villages and markets. Many poor members of this caste were also agricultural labourers. In "Ropni ke Geet", which is a folk song genre, there is a song which tells the story about a Koeri woman who went outside her village to sell vegetables and was later

abducted by a king<sup>138</sup>. When the Koeri woman started crying then king asked whether you are crying for your mother or brother. The woman answered neither she was crying for her mother nor for her brother, she was crying for that Koeri youth who helped to make Kyari in her field. Through these songs labourer women enjoy their work of planting seedlings on the paddy fields and also tease their landlords.

### **Gender and sexuality**

CPI ML always represented Bhojpur as a place where extreme gender oppression was part of everyday life. Party sympathisers always exaggerated the story of discrimination and oppression. The rumour was spread that Doli-pratha was in vogue in the region<sup>139</sup>. And according to this tradition landlords had first-night privilege over dalit brides. The claim was made by the Naxalites that they used violence to abolish this system and finally ended this cruel system. No doubt the whole story of Doli-pratha was woven to legitimize the annihilation tactics of the Naxalite movement which was under extreme criticism by its sympathizers and opponents. In my visit to more than fifty Naxal villages I never found a single informant who accepted the existence of this tradition. One who is acquainted with cultural practices of the region will easily understand how Naxalites misrepresented the existing gender-relation of the society.

Even now-a-days a *doli* carrying a dalit woman cannot be allowed to enter into houses of upper castes. Such households would immediately be ex-communicated from the village society. In Bihiya block there exists a temple of Mahathin Mai. It is said that Mahathin mai was a priestess who fought with henchmen of the local king of Hariho Vansh who tried to carry away her *doli* to the palace of the king. Mahthin Mai died in this battle and it is believed that due to her curse the kingdom was destroyed<sup>140</sup>. Still Mahthin Mai is worshipped by men and women of all castes. The popularity of Mahthin Mai shows that the sentiment of Bhojpuri people has been deeply associated with an oppressed woman and they never supported a tyrant king. People can argue that worshipping Mahthin Mai is the celebration of the purity of woman body. Others can interpret it as veneration of the autonomy of woman body. Different

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<sup>138</sup> Krishnadev Upadhyay, *Bhojpuri Lokgeet*, pp.260-261.

<sup>139</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, *Bhojpur: Bihar Me Naxalvadi Andolan*, Delhi, Radhakrishna Prakashan, p.27.

<sup>140</sup> Suresh Kankar, *Raktim Tara*, Buxar(Bihar), Navshakti Prakashan, 2006, p.98

conclusions can be inferred from such cultural practices. Nonetheless these ambiguous cultural spaces are always productive and Naxalite literature also gets inspiration from the story of Mahthin Mai. Suresh Kankar in his poetry *Raktim Tara* represents Mahthin Mai as an icon of subaltern community<sup>141</sup>.

Bhojpuri myths and narratives insist that a man should never attack a woman. In the ballad of Raja Bharthari the King Bharthari went to hunt the Black Deer and when the does came to know this they requested the king that he could kill some does but should leave the Black deer<sup>142</sup>. The king refused their request by saying that he was a brave man and he would not kill women(does)<sup>143</sup>. It is said that even dacoits did not use to abuse women during their raids of villages. According to the Naxalite literature Rameshvar Ahir, the founder member of CPIML was one such dacoit who always respected women<sup>144</sup>. In every village of Bhojpur we can hear such stories that dacoits never touched the body of women. Still in Bhojpur's villages rape and molestation are considered one of the most heinous crime.

Women faced various forms of violence in households. However, it is difficult to find textual traces of atrocities on women because most of the backward women were illiterate and Bhojpuri had not its own script. Only few people who knew Kaithi script were able to write this language<sup>145</sup>. In 1971, in Sadar subdivision(present day Bhojpur District) of Shahabad out of 92572 dalit women only 1752 were literate<sup>146</sup>. Even many upper caste women were not educated enough to write autobiographies. Autobiography as a literary genre was not popular in this region and people were not comfortable with writing about their lives<sup>147</sup>. However, we can get much information about lives of women through folk songs. Different genre of folk-songs like Jantsar, Jhumar, Kajli, Barahmasa, Pidiya, Purbi, Biraha, Ropni ke geet, Sohni ke geet depict their miserable lives. In a marriage song, a mother says, "O daughter since the time of your birth It has become dark like Bhado's night...in-laws are not lighting candles in the

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<sup>141</sup> Suresh Kankar, *Raktim Tara*, Buxar, Navshakti Prakashan, 2006, p.98.

<sup>142</sup> Satyavrat Sinha, *Bhojpui Lokgatha*, Allahabad, Hindustan Academy, 1957, pp.322-323.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, *Bhojpur: Bihar Me Naxalvadi Andolan*, p.78.

<sup>145</sup> All plays written by Bhikhari Thakur are found in this script.

<sup>146</sup> District Census Handbook, Sahabad District, 1971, p.112.

<sup>147</sup> Sahjanand accepted in his autobiography that he was not comfortable with writing autobiography and only after long persuasion of his friends he started writing it. See. Sahjanand Sarswati, *Sanyas Se Purva*, [www.hindisamay.com](http://www.hindisamay.com)

house...from where I will manage dowry for your marriage...If I knew that a girl-child would be born I would have aborted it by eating pepper powder<sup>148</sup>.” Marriage of a girl was always a problem for family members and mismatched marriage was prevalent in the society. In Bhojpuri songs we find instances of brides ridiculing of their child bridegrooms. In a Birha song a woman says that in the backyard of my home there is a bamboo grove which makes noise without any flow of wind and in my legs there are sounding anklets; these sounds make my husband scare<sup>149</sup>. Mismatched marriages had the other side too. And sometimes teenager girls were married with old men in their sixties and seventies. In his play *Beti-Viyog*, Bhikhari Thakur has shown the plight of these girls. Due to mismatched marriage women had to face the curse of widowhood at early age. Bhikhari’s another play *Vidhwa Bilap* addresses this issue properly. Here it is worthwhile to mention that Bhikhari was an illiterate person of Nai caste but he used theatre as a powerful medium for social transformation.

Women had to do hundred of petty jobs in agricultural society. Once crop is stored into house it was the responsibility of women to take care of it. For grinding of food grains they totally depended on hand-run jantas(grinders). In every household there was also a Dhenka which was run by legs, these Dhenkas were used for making rice and *chura* from *dhan*. Although running Jantas and Dhenkas were difficult job still women enjoyed these works with songs. In songs of Jantsar we find myriad colours of life. In some Jantsar-songs women make fun of their Jeths(Husband’s elder brother) in the other songs they express their helplessness and poverty<sup>150</sup>. In the summer these women were busy in making pickles and Aam-papad. Rich peasants had many gardens of mangoes and many baskets of mangoes reached everyday in their houses. Women had to process these mangoes for different purposes. Making pickles and Aam-papad was a difficult job and they had to do it with their own hand. An old woman told me that a bullock-cart full of mangoes used to reach everyday in her house and all women of the house including *pavanies* (maids) had to spend the whole day in making *amavat* or *aam-papad*. Lower caste Women had to do agricultural works in addition to these household chores. Many lower caste women were Preshitpatikas (women whose husband were living in a distant city for livelihood). These illiterate women composed one of the most

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<sup>148</sup> Krishnadev Upadhyay, *Bhojpuri Lok Geet*, Prayag, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1999, p. 38.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, p. 288.

<sup>150</sup> Krishnadev Upadhyay, *Bhojpuri Lokgeet*, Vol-2, pp. 87-115.

elegant Barahmasas to express their pain and sorrows<sup>151</sup>. Unlike many classical poets whose Barahmasas start with Falgun month, Barahmasas of these poor women start with Asadh month. Their nuanced description of nature and its impact on their personal life makes these Barahmasas unparalleled in literary genre. Very few Indian poets understand the relation between nature and culture at these nuanced levels.

Despite doing all these tough jobs sometimes women were ill-treated by their in-laws. In folk songs we often find incidents of ill-treatment by in-laws<sup>152</sup>. Only few lower caste women like Lahri and Sonamati revolted against their oppression and joined the Naxalite movement<sup>153</sup>. We know about a woman brigade of red Army in Bhojpur but we have little information about it<sup>154</sup>. We will see in the next chapter that the Naxalite movement was not able to address the gender-question properly. A CPI ML document published in 1997 accepts that till 1991 women constituted only five percent of total membership<sup>155</sup>. Another CPI ML document accepts that they had not sufficient women candidates who could contest for Panchayat elections when reservation for women in these institutions was implemented by the state government. Participation of women in the Naxalite movement at every level was very low. And it was very difficult for women to participate in the movement when it was underground during seventies and eighties. No doubt there were some brave women like Lahri and Sonamati who became a regular member of armed squad and sacrificed their lives for the cause of their community. The dipty-commander of women brigade, Sheela Chaterjee(Tutu) was also killed in Ekvari village in a police encounter<sup>156</sup>. A few days before this encounter Sheela had killed five innocent Bhumihars in Gorpa village. However, many women preferred to stay away with this underground movement because they could not cope with harsh conditions which underground activists were supposed to face. Kamleshvari Devi, the wife of Jagdish Master, was one such woman who sidestepped herself from the underground movement because she found that her health was not allowing her for this tough job.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, pp. 165-193.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid,p.101

<sup>153</sup> *Bihar Ke Dhadhakte Khet Khalihano Se*, CPI ML Publication, 1986,pp.197-201.

<sup>154</sup> Lahri was the commander of the woman-brigade of red army. Sheela Chaterjee was its dipty-commander. See. *A Report from the Flaming Fields of Bihar*.

<sup>155</sup> *Rajnitik Sangathnatmak Report, Chhatha Party Mahadhiveshan*, (20-25 October 1997), Shakarpur Delhi, CPI ML Publication.

<sup>156</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, Bhojpur: Bihar Me Naxalvdi Aandolan,p.109.

Struggles are fought not only in battle-fields. They are omnipresent and they can be fought in a relatively peaceful space of households. In a Sahar village, in 1998, I met a woman who was very nice and careful to strangers but she was considered mad by his family members. The family included three brothers, their wives and children. The woman was the wife of the youngest brother and therefore she had to work very hard. All her day was spent in cooking, cleaning, bathing children and other household chores. The family possessed 50 Bighas of land and annual income was more than five lakh rupees but this woman did not get anything from the head of the family. Her children had not enough cloths to wear. The other children of the family were studying in Patna while two sons of this woman were not getting any proper education and they were engaged in agricultural work.

The woman used to speak whatever came in her mind. Once she came to me and said, “All leaves of Tulsi have equal worth whether it is small or big.” No doubt she was claiming her equal status within family which had been denied for years. Then she started telling a narrative how an educated Muslim youth of that village became mad. Her story was reflection of her jealousy with those children who were getting better education at the cost of her sons’ future prospect. She used to recite the name of Narayan every time. “Narayan is seeing everything, he will do justice.” This simple prayer was seen as a curse by other family members. They were so scared by her prayer that most of the male family members used to leave the house the moment she started her prayer. She usually read a religious text- *Sukhsagar*. The act of reading this book was also scary for family members. Usually she read this book during mid-night in the light of lantern or diya. Family members thought that she was praying for the devastation of the family and many of them could not sleep properly. She lit a diya and used to place it in an unusual place. Conventionally diyas should be placed before some deities. Liting a diya and placing it in an unusual place was a strange ritual for family members and it was a serious concern for them.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the life of women was only full of pain and sorrows. *Sabbam Dukham*(The life is just suffering.) is an extremist wold-view and Indian society rejected it many centuries ago. Buddisht *Dithi* looked at this world only in a partial way. Women never left any opportunity to enjoy their work and lives. At the arrival of *Savan* women start singing kajli and make jhulas with ropes. In kajli songs they ridicule their

husbands and in-laws. They flirt and tease younger brothers of their husband and make jokes of their *Jeths*(elder brothers of their husband). Women also tease their *Nanads*(husband's sister) in these songs. Not only kajli but also other folk song genre shows that women led joyful life despite all their hardships. Folk songs make ordinary things extraordinary and replace scarcity with abundance of things. They create a mental world which intersects with this real world at every juncture. This world of folk songs cannot be compared with worlds of *Madhyamiks* and *Vijnyanvadies* where everything is void or a dream. Unlike these Buddhist philosophies folk songs create a world which is a hybrid of real and mythical, of mental and physical, of nature and culture. When a woman goes to sell curds or vegetables in nearby villages folk songs say that she is going to sell her vegetables in Mathura city. By replacing ordinary villages with Mathura these songs make her petty jobs as a special one. Ganga, Yamuna, Krishna, Gopi, big palaces, beautiful dresses and precious jewels often come in Bhojpuri songs and they turn ordinary things into an extraordinary one. The reverse also happens through these songs. Extraordinary and mythical is turned into ordinary and real. A pond of village can get the status of Ganga and Yamuna in folk songs and can become a source of joy for villagers. Some persons can argue that folk song normalize or naturalize violence and inequality by mixing mythical and real. However, the opposite can also happen. Through folksongs women express the pain of everyday life. They invoke story of Krishna and Kubri to depict disloyalties shown by their husbands. Women not only enjoyed their life by singing. They performed many plays like *domkach*, *swang*, *jalua* in their households. Women also used to perform Videsiya in the light of lanterns. They also enjoyed many rituals.

Though more or less every woman was the victim of patriarchal society yet we can argue that woman was not a homogenous category and internal differentiation was always there. Upper caste rich women could live a decent life in villages. Many lower caste women came to assist them in their household chores. These lower caste women, who were called pauni in villages, depended for their food on upper caste households and except food they hardly got anything. It is women who are the immediate oppressors of women, upper caste and middle caste women always exploitet their dalit counterparts. In folk songs we find that women were conscious about their caste identity and upper caste women had little sympathy for lower



castes. In a song there is a story about an upper caste woman who mistakenly marry a lower caste man and when she came to know it she starts threatening her husband<sup>157</sup>. Caste consciousness was working at other levels too. When Naxalite menace increased upper caste women of Belaur village organized a procession and gave the slogan-sona becho loha kharido<sup>158</sup>. Although very few numbers of women participated in caste violence, majority of them remained silent on the issue of caste-violence. We do not find any song composed by women against the caste-violence which was prevalent in the region.

In Bhojpur, a village is an exogamous community and it strictly controls sexual behaviour of women and men. All girls and boys belonging to the same village are expected to treat themselves as brothers and sisters. However, some people transgressed this incest taboo imposed by the village society. Generally a man who committed this crime was ousted from the village. In Mudaffarpur village of Sahar Block, when a girl eloped with her cousin the situation became very tense. Finally, it was decided by village elders that the couple would never be allowed to enter into the village. Intra-village love-affairs are increasing due to various reasons but elder people are not ready to acknowledge it. Nonetheless, in private language of adolescents we can find attraction for their cousins and other girls from the same village. Even private language is sometimes so vague that a stranger can hardly understand anything. One boy in a village fell in love with his cousin, gradually everyone became aware with this fact but no one had the courage to say anything. The main problem was unspeakability. One day his friend came and asked,

“Friend: What are you doing now-a –days?

The Boy: What do you mean?

Friend: You understand everything.

The Boy: Can you explain?

Friend: I am the principal of that school where you have got admission.”

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<sup>157</sup> Krishnadev Upadhyay, *Bhojpuri lokgeet*, p. 105.

<sup>158</sup> Interview with Chandan Singh of Khopira village on 10 March, 2016. Chandan Singh is the grandson of Barmeshvar Singh.

Generally private languages are covert regarding the matters of sexuality. And even when they are overt in a narrow circle we cannot bring this language into public. Public language is always shaped by existing power relations. History-writing largely depends on public languages like texts, written documents and folklores and in this way it distances itself with everyday life which manifests itself at more nuanced level in private language. In many villages we can hear stories of incestuous pairs. Most of these stories end tragically and lovers face atrocities of their family members. Some are killed by parents and others commit suicide. But news related with these incidents hardly finds space in mainstream media. Many people believe that cinema is corrupting their culture, others think that mobile is creating problems. Incest taboos are always regarded by any culture as outside the space of argumentation. *Yam-yami Samvad* of *Rig Veda* is invoked by Brahmans to legitimize the incest taboo between brother and sister or between cousins. The same story is also invoked by Ambedkarites and sometimes by Naxalites to demoralize and delegitimize Brahminical culture on account of the attempt of transgression of this incest taboo by Yamai<sup>159</sup>. In this way they universalize those taboos which are dependent on socio-cultural practices and indirectly they become supporter of cruel violence which incestuous pairs are facing in their everyday life. No doubt modern day Ambedkarites use phrases of Ambedkar's writings. Ambedkar wrote, "The sexual immorality of The Aryan Society must shock their present day descendants. The Aryan of pre-Buddhist days had no such rule of prohibited degrees as we have today to govern their sexual or matrimonial relationship. ...In the Rigveda there is an episode related of Yam and Yami brother and sister. According to this episode Yami the sister invites her brother to cohabit with her and becomes angry when he refuses to do so."<sup>160</sup>

Except these incestuous pairs some other people also had to repress their sexuality for different reasons. Women whose husbands migrated to Calcutta were alone in their villages. Their pain has been captured in Purvi and other folk songs genre. Mahendar Misir wrote many Purvi songs and soon became famous as Purvi-samrat<sup>161</sup>. Mahendar Misir was a versatile man who had mastery on classical songs and was also adept at playing many

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<sup>159</sup> Tulsiram and many other Ambedkarites invoked this story to delegitimize Hindu religion.

<sup>160</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, "The Ancient regime: The state of the Aryan Society" in Vasant Moon(ed.) Ambedkar Writings And Speeches, Bombay, Government of Maharashtra, p. 155.

<sup>161</sup> See. Documentary on Mahendar Misir made by Manikant Thakur. *A Discussion in the Memory of Purvi-Samrat Mahendar Misir*.

musical instruments. Mahendra was one of the best lyricists of Bhojpuri language and songs composed by him are still popular in Bhojpuri-speaking areas<sup>162</sup>. Mahendar was so liberal that despite being a Babhan he spent his major time on *Kothas* to teach music and classical songs to prostitutes. He never cared for his social status although he was respected by saints, landlords, intellectuals and revolutionaries. And it is said that when British government arrested him at the charge of printing counterfeit currencies then many prostitutes from Ara to Banaras came with their jewellery in his support<sup>163</sup>. One of his Purvi song depicts the plight of a woman whose husband has not returned for many years:

Sutal Me Rahni Nandi Dekhni Sapanva( I saw a dream when I was asleep)

Kalkatva se mor Balmu Ailan Ho Ram(that my husband came from Calcutta)

Tu Kaise Janat Badu Lahuri Bhaujiya( How do you know it Bhabhi?)

Kalkatva Se Mor Bhaiya Aile Ho Ram(That my brother will come.)

Pair Piraile Nanadi Uthat Ba Daradiya ( My legs are aching and the pain is becoming intolerable)

Se Kaga Bhaiya Aagam Janile Ho Ram ( The crow brother has informed me about this)

Kahat Mahendar Misir Sunu Nyari Sakhiya( Mahendar Misir says O lovely Sakhi!)

Se Terah Baris Beet Gaile Ho Ram<sup>164</sup>(Thirteen years have been passed in such a way)

Not all women were able to control their sexual desire in the absence of their husbands. Many of these women became pregnant because contraceptives were not available in those days. Some of women were killed by their family members while some other accepted their children. In Bhikhari's play *Gabarghichor* this problem has been raised where a woman is fighting for her child with her husband and lover. In the play Bhikhari wants to give a message that a woman has a greater right on her child than anyone else and all this was being done by him before the arrival of the feminist movement in India. After the death of

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Krishnadev Upadhyay, *Bhojpuri Lokgeet*, Vol-2, p.339

Mahendar(1948) and Bhikhari(1971), no one was left in the region who could understand the hearts of women.

### Chapter-3

#### Origin, Growth and Expansion of the Naxalite Movement

On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1971, the dead body of Shivpoojan Singh was found on the bank of the Sone River near Ekvari village<sup>165</sup>. It was first annihilation done by Naxalites in the region. Shivpoojan Singh was the manager of Nathuni Singh, a rich peasant of Ekvari village. Nathuni Singh had initiated the debt recovery campaign in the village after which Jagdish Mahto and Rameshvar Ahir persuaded the villagers not to pay back their debts. In the village under the leadership of Jagdish and Rameshvar the lower castes started polarizing against Nathuni Singh<sup>166</sup>. Later the followers of Jagdish Master burnt the Khalihan of Nathuni Singh. Burning khalihans is considered as one of the worst “sin” by peasants and even in the case of enmity they would hardly use this heinous tactic against their enemies. Nathuni Singh could not understand why this heinous act was done towards him. Some upper caste men thought that the Dihvar of the village had become angry<sup>167</sup>. For peace in the village Nathuni Singh organized a Graha-pooja in which villagers did not show any interest and refused to participate in it<sup>168</sup>. Later an altercation broke out between his manager Shivpoojan Singh and Motiram, who was the lower caste Mukhiya of the village<sup>169</sup>. Motiram was badly beaten by Shivpoojan Singh and in revenge Shivpoojan Singh was murdered by the followers of Jagdish Master.

Jagdish Mahto was a youth belonging to Koeri caste. He was a science graduate and his dream was to become an engineer failing which he started his career as a high school teacher at Chilki High School in Aurangabad district<sup>170</sup>. From 1965 to 1967 he spent his life with his family in Aurangabad. In 1967 assembly election, he came to Ekvari in the support of Ram Naresh Ram who was contesting this election as a candidate of CPI<sup>171</sup>. Nathuni Singh and other Bhumihars were in the support of another candidate called Rajdev Ram. On the day of election a squabble broke out between Jagdish master and the supporters of Nathuni Singh.

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<sup>165</sup> Suresh Kantak, *Raktim Tara*, Buxar, Navshakti Prakashan, p. 126.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Vishvanath Sharma.

<sup>168</sup> Suresh Kantak, *Raktim Tara*, p.124.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, Bhojpur: Bihar Me Naxalvadi Andolan, Delhi, 1980, p. 54.

<sup>171</sup> Ramnaresh Ram's interview in *Samkaleen Janmat*, 23 September-6 October, 1990.

Jagdish Master tried to stop proxy voting by Bhumihars and on his intervention some voters were arrested by the police<sup>172</sup>. In retaliation Bhumihars locked up Ram Naresh Ram in a room and Jagdish Master was brutally beaten by Bhumihars<sup>173</sup>. Master Saheb, as he was popularly known, remained hospitalized for a long time. After this incident Jagdish Master's life completely changed, he left his job and along with his friend Rameshvar Ahir surrendered all his property before the local court<sup>174</sup>. They claimed that they are going to become hermits and they were not sure whether they would live or die.

Rameshvar Ahir was a notorious dacoit of the region. His childhood was very painful and once he was beaten by his school teachers for a small theft in his school. Throughout his life Rameshvar insisted that he had not committed that theft and resented the fact that his father paid the fine imposed by villagers<sup>175</sup>. Initially, Rameshvar was inclined to music and for a few days he joined a *nach-mandali*, however, he had to leave this profession because music and dance was considered as a mean profession in Bhojpur<sup>176</sup>. His father also had his reservations as it was considered a feminine job. After sometime he fled away from his home and started a career as a helper of a businessman in Dildarnagar. In payment he received fake currencies, after leaving the job he joined the gang of Ramgulam dacoit. Rameshvar wanted to be like Ramgulam because in his view Bhumihars of his village were petrified by the name of Ramgulam<sup>177</sup>. After a long history of committing crimes when he was arrested by police he managed to escape by killing and injuring some constables. However, after persuasion by his father he surrendered and was sentenced for life-term by the Ara Session Court. In jail he developed suicidal tendency and to avoid this he started reading Bhagvad Geeta on the advice of the jailor<sup>178</sup>. Later he became fond of reading books, which included Upanisads and other religious texts.

Rameshvar was released after imprisonment of twelve years after which he became a saint and started giving sermons outside Ara Court. When he returned to his village he became

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<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, Bhojpur, p. 55.

<sup>175</sup> Suresh Katak, *Raktim Tara*, p. 52.

<sup>176</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, *Bhojpur*, p. 76.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, p.79.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, p.78.

follower of Jagdish Master. On 14 April 1970 they organized a rally in Ara and demanded a separate Harizinistan for the lower castes<sup>179</sup>. The rally was successful and in this rally Rameshvar gave a call for armed struggle. Inspired by Majumdar's annihilation tactics, Jagdish, Rameshvar and Ram Naresh organized local squads. After murder of Shivpoojan Singh of Ekvari village they became absconders. Together with these three leaders, 37 other villager belonging to the lower castes were also charge-sheeted in the murder case of Shivpoojan Singh<sup>180</sup>. Many of them became absconders and later chose the path of armed struggle. Meanwhile, Charu Majumdar also attended a rally in Kudara where he gave a call for armed revolution<sup>181</sup>. However, at this initial stage Jagdish Master could not establish any contact with CPI ML leadership in West Bengal. They were still following the tactical line of CPI ML. Ramnaresh Ram, the colleague of Jagdish Master, was a cadre of CPI(M), and he was well aware of the ideological differences between CPI, CPI(M) and CPI ML<sup>182</sup>.

In the initial phase of Naxalite movement, the leader of CPI ML in Bihar was Satya Narayan Singh who was in favour of making alliance with rich peasants<sup>183</sup>. On this issue, he had differences with Charu Majumdar and he organized Provisional Central Committee (PCC)<sup>184</sup>. It seems that initially PCC was able to draw a large support base. Later Vinod Mishra wrote, "The PCC, an opportunist conglomeration of various factions, had won a lot of acclaim and support for the alacrity with which it had started rectifying all past mistakes. Its central figure, Mr. Satya Narayan Singh, had deserted the movement in 1970 itself and begun to hobnob with bourgeois politicians<sup>185</sup>." Ram Naresh Ram did not like the line of Satya Narayan Singh which favoured making alliance with rich peasants, therefore, he and his colleagues preferred to stay away with the Satya Narayan Singh(SNS) faction<sup>186</sup>. In February 1972, Jagdish Master became member of the State Committee of CPI ML<sup>187</sup>. Just after ten months of the formation of the Party he was mistakenly killed by Musahars in Bihiya Market.

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<sup>179</sup> Arun Sinha, *Class War in Bhojpur-1*, Economic Political Weekly, Vol.13, no.1, January, 1978, p.10

<sup>180</sup> *Raktim Tara*, p.126.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, p. 124.

<sup>182</sup> Sudhir Suman, *Comrade Ramnaresh Ram*, CPI ML Publication, pp. 4-7.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, p.8.

<sup>184</sup> Vinod Mishra, 'CPI(ML)-The Firm Defender of The Revolutionary Legacy of Indian Communists' in Dipankar Bhattacharya (ed.) *Vinod Mishra Selected Writing*, New Delhi, CPI(ML) Publication, pp.293-294.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, pp.293-294.

<sup>186</sup> Sudhir Suman, *Comrade Ram Naresh Ram*, p.8.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, p.7.

On 10 December 1972, while Jagdish Master was having a cup of tea at Bihiya Bajar some people started crying-‘Dacoit! Dacoit!’ Master Saheb along with his friends fled away towards Mahthin Mai Temple. People thought that they were dacoits and soon they were caught by the Musahars and all of them were brutally lynched. When Musahars came to know that they had killed their own leader they were in a shock. No food was cooked in Musahatoli for the next three days<sup>188</sup>. This tragic end of Jagdish Master drew attention of many scholars. The novel ‘Master Saheb’ was written on his life by Maheswheta Devi.

Before his death Master Saheb had set-up small organizations in many villages. Chavari was one such village where Ganeshi Dusadh had made an armed squad around October 1970<sup>189</sup>. Rameshvar also visited Chavari many times. An informal court was also established by Naxalites which was used to humiliate upper caste peasants of the village<sup>190</sup>. On 30th November 1972, Ramnath Rai a peasant of Chavari village was killed by the Naxalites<sup>191</sup>. On 7 April 1973, Naxalites attacked Avadh Rai in his Khalihan. Later they also attacked Swaroop Rai and hoisted the Red Flag on the land that belonged to Muninath Rai<sup>192</sup>. On 10 April, the same year they killed a small peasant Karu Rai who possessed only 6 Bighas of land and looted the harvested crops from his Khalihans<sup>193</sup>. In mid-May the Krantikari Committee which also functioned as the Village Court decided to plough the land of Muninath Rai<sup>194</sup>. Ganeshi Dusadh and all his followers were illiterate and for them revolution meant annihilation of upper castes irrespective of their socio-economic status and ideological stand. Krantikari Committee used to abuse women on loudspeakers<sup>195</sup>. Events in Chavari were only the beginning of a bloody caste struggle the region was waiting to witness. Upper castes also became aware that Naxalites are massacring them in the name of ideology. Soon they also got polarised and when police raided the village, many Bhumihaar peasants of neighbouring villages were present there with their guns and rifles<sup>196</sup>. Police faced strong

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<sup>188</sup> Kalyan Mukherje, Bhojpur, p. 52.

<sup>189</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, *Bhojpur*, p.61.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, pp.62-63.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*,p.61.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*,p. 62.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>195</sup> Interview with Naval Kishor Sharma of Dhanchhunha village.

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Naval Kishor Sharma.



resistance from Naxalites and initially they had to retreat from the village<sup>197</sup>. It was courageous Bhumihars who first entered the village. It is said that many Bhumihars from distant villages had also gathered there to teach a lesson to Naxalites. Many Naxalites managed to escape from the village but their commander Ganeshi Dusadh was caught and dragged away from his house by Bhumihars and later was brutally killed by them<sup>198</sup>. Along with Ganeshi Dusadh, Lalmohar Dusadh, Bal Kishor Dusadh and Dinanath Teli were also murdered. Some women and children as well got injured in this violent raid<sup>199</sup>.

### **Initial Debate on Violence (1972-1974)**

Chavari massacre intensified the debate among the intelligentsia which was started after the origin of the Naxalite movement. Socialist leader Ramanand Tivari and some other scholars wrote essays in *Filhal* magazine. *Filhal* was edited from Patna by a young writer Vir Bharat Talwar. Later he participated in the Jharkhand movement and finally joined the faculty in Jawaharlal Nehru University. Vir Bharat Talwar was a sympathiser of the Naxalite Movement and his magazine tried to develop a new understanding within the movement. Eminent historian Bipan Chandra and Namvar Singh were members of advisory committee of the magazine<sup>200</sup>. And despite criticism by CPI (M), Bipan did not dissociate himself from this magazine<sup>201</sup>. Though this journal was published for a brief period of two years from 1972 to 1974, the material in this journal provides a rich source for the study of the Naxalite movement in its formative stage. While reading essays on Chavari massacre in *Filhal* one never finds any voice of the poor peasants belonging to upper castes.

Like a professional lawyer, socialist leader Ramanand Tivari argued that upper caste peasants of Chavari were not killed by Naxalites<sup>202</sup>. He even denied any existence of Naxal activities in the village. It was shocking for upper caste peasants because Ramanand Tivari

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<sup>197</sup> Kalya Mukherje, Bhojpur, p. 64.

<sup>198</sup> R N Maharaj, 'Chavari Hatyakand Ki Vishesh Report' in Vir Bhaat Talvar(ed.) *Itihas Ke Dastavej Naxalbari Ke Daur Me*, New Delhi, Anamika Publishers, 2007, p. 246.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> Vir Bharat Talwar, 'Introduction' in Vir Bharat Talvar(ed.) *Itihas Ke Dastavej*, p.19.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> Ramanand Tivari, 'Chavari Hatyakand'in Vir Bharat Talvar (ed.) *Itihas ke Dastavej*, pp. 237-241.

was a respected leader of the state and in 1967 he held the portfolio of minister of Police in Bihar Government. Along with politicians, many intellectuals also denied the existence of Naxalism in Chavari village. Poet Nagarjun , advocate Radharaman, Professor Kapilmuni Tivari and other eminent personalities established a forum, Janvadi Adhikar Suraksha Samiti, which passed a resolution condemning this “indiscriminate killings by landlords with the help of police<sup>203</sup>.” The resolution also denied the existence of Naxalism in the village and claimed that the struggle was due to the issue of lower wages<sup>204</sup>.

Left leaning poets and scholars were so lost in the dream of revolution that they could not identify the casteist character of the Naxalite movement in Bhojpur. Nagarjun felt that Bhagat Singhs and Bagha Jatins of his time were present in Bhojpur. He wrote, “Here is a graveyard of non-violence/Graveyard of the parliament here is/This is the place where Bhagat Singh stands reincarnated/Even Azad Chandra Sekhar is reborn here/Baikunth Shukla is here only, somewhere/ Somewhere here is Bagha Jatin too/Here is the graveyard of non-violence<sup>205</sup>.”

After reading poems of Nagarjun and looking back at the Naxalite movement, it becomes clear that poetry can mislead people and sometimes it can unconsciously become a good carrier of revolutionary fantasies. Nagarjun could not realize that at the graveyard of non-violence and democracy only fascism would flourish. Nagarjun’s poetry overlooked brutal and violent present with the dream of a better future. Nagarjun is still considered a legendary poet of Hindi literature. However, when we re-evaluate the past, it also demands re-evaluation of literature and poetry. Any literature and poetry which supported the Naxalite movement in Central Bihar indirectly supported caste-based killings. Our poets and writers could not distinguish the difference between theory and praxis. They were so lost in the communist utopia that they overlooked the casteist character of the movement at the grass-root level. Marxists critics have claimed that Nagarjun was a jan-kavi (poet of the people). However, anyone who is acquainted with Bihar knows that Ramdhari Singh Dinkar was more popular than other poets. People are more acquainted with his *Rashmirathi*, a poem based on the life of Karna, a mythical character of Mahabharat. Marxist poets could not invoke

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<sup>203</sup> Nagarjun, ‘Janvadi Adhikar Suraksha Samiti Ki Sthapana’ in Vir Bharat Talvar.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> Translated by Pankaj Singh.

mythical characters for their movement. They distanced themselves from the people due to their obsession with rationality. In Bhojpur, popularity of Nagarjun is very low, and few people know what he wrote about Bhojpur. “Popularity” of Nagarjun was not attested by people but it was constructed by Marxist critics.

Nagarjun was not a lone supporter of Naxalism. The young poet Alok Dhanva who had started his literary journey from *Filhal* magazine was also a committed supporter of the Naxalite movement. His “Goli Dago Poster” poem which was published in *Filhal* was widely appreciated in literary circles by many critics. In this poem he asks why he cannot use arms in the name of justice if the same is allowed for an illiterate Daroga<sup>206</sup>. Throughout his life Alok Dhanva remained a sympathizer of Naxal movements in central Bihar. Anyone who has read his poem “Ghar se Bhagi Hui Ladkiyan” is aware of the fact that Alok Dhanva is a serious poet and his poems can uncover the most nuanced forms of violence. Nonetheless it is an enigma why such a poet could not see the mindless violence perpetrated by cadres of CPI ML(Liberation). Dhanva could not realize that every ML cadre involved in annihilation was not sensible like him. He could not transcend his ideological commitments for the sake of humanity and non-violence.

Naxalite violence also got legitimacy from events which were happening at international level. Vietnam became a source for inspiration for revolutionary forces across the world. In *Filhal*, Bir Bharat Talvar wrote that Vietnam war had shown that people cannot be defeated<sup>207</sup>. He said, “Vietnam war has proved that the will power of people is stronger than arms.<sup>208</sup>” He pointed out this fact that even a world power could not defeat people of Vietnam<sup>209</sup>. Indian Marxists were so enchanted with Vietnam that they wanted to copy everything of Vietnam. Bir Bharat claimed that art of people’s war was superior to the war tactic used by imperialist and capitalist forces. He further elaborated on the war tactic of the, people’s war ,where people and army fight hand-in-hand with enemy forces. Bir Bharat Talvar never mentioned that the Naxalite movement created a situation where people and Army of the same country were fighting against each other. Many other essays on Vietnam

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<sup>206</sup> Alok Dhanva, ‘Goli Dago Poster’ in Vir Bharat Talvar, pp.563-564.

<sup>207</sup> Vir Bharat Talvar, ‘Vietnam Ka Yudh Kya Sabit Karta Hai?’ in Vir Bharat Talvar(ed.) *Itihas Ke Dastavej*, p. 283.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

were published in *Filhal*. Even minute data related to the Vьетnam war were included in these essays. Vьетnam became a subconscious part of the Naxalite movement. In Bhojpur, Rameshvar Ahir once wished to rename Sonatola, the village from where he was arrested, as Vьетnam<sup>210</sup>. The song composed by Shailendra on Vьетnam soon became popular among sections of the people of the Hindi-belt<sup>211</sup>.

Vьетnam was not lone source of inspiration for Naxalites. If we look at essays published in *Filhal*, we find that people were debating on different type of struggles of third world countries. Nirmal Sengupta wrote essays on the freedom struggle of Ghana<sup>212</sup>. He also showed apprehension on neo-colonial exploitation of third world countries. Naxalites tried to interlink all these struggles to create a meta-narrative of revolution, emancipation and liberation. They were trying to fit their own struggle in this meta-narrative to legitimize their violence. Through this constructed meta-narrative Naxalites were able to repress local truths and every crime committed by them was seen by the masses as struggle for emancipation. Even brutal lynching of aged people of Narhi-Chandi village could not evoke sentiments among intellectuals<sup>213</sup>. The deformed bodies of these people were brought to Patna at the residence of Jai Prakash Narayan<sup>214</sup>. No political leader showed any sympathy with these victims of Naxal violence. Meta-narrative is central to any politics however sometimes anti-people ideas get a space to hide themselves beneath the meta-narrative of progress, emancipation and liberation.

The meta-narrative of class struggle also inspired many comrades to use the path of violence. Ashim Chaterjee in his statement before Magistrate of Devghar Court told that nothing is beyond class in this class-divided society and it is meaningless to expect justice from the present system<sup>215</sup>. He said that Indian Constitution is a document which is prepared to fulfil the interests of ruling class and maintained that the semi-colonial and semi-feudal

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<sup>210</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, Bhojpur, p. 76.

<sup>211</sup> Prabhat Kumar Roy, 'Jawaharlal Nehru Vishvavidyalay Ka Wah Daur' in Mahasweta Devi(ed.) *Maovadi Ya Adivasi*, New Delhi, Vani Prakashan, 2011, p. 119.

<sup>212</sup> Nirmal Sengupta, 'Ghana Ka Rashtriya Sangram' in Vir Bharat Talvar(ed.) *Itihas Ke Dastavej*, pp.300-307.

<sup>213</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, Bhojpur, p. 123.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> Ashim Chaterjee, 'Adalat Me Ashim Chaterjee Ka Bayan' in Vir Bharat Talvar(ed.) *Itihas Ke Dastavej*, pp.480-483.

constitution can deliver only class-based justice. He thought that for a just cause he had the right to keep arms with him. He further said that he chose the path of armed struggle to save his country from its “internal enemy.” In the meta-narrative of class-struggle it is very easy to stereotype someone as internal enemy and justify violence against him. He also emphasised that only through armed struggle we can defeat these four demons-Imperialism, Social Imperialism, Comprador Capitalism and Feudalism. Ashim forgot that India and many third world countries defeated Imperialism without using violence. His ideas of capitalism as comprador can also be contested. CPI ML’s characterisation of Indian state as semi-feudal seems like a part of Naxalite Propaganda which no one except them is ready to believe, other than their own propagators.

Many Naxalite leaders visited various University campuses across India. Prabhat Kumar Roy an ex-JNU student has mentioned that Vinod Mishra and Satya Narayan Singh both visited JNU<sup>216</sup>. Gorakh Pandey, a JNU student, had strong links with many Naxalite leaders. These leaders interacted with students in closed rooms. Though Naxalite ideology was not so strong in JNU yet many students joined the movement, and Prabhat Kumar Roy has mentioned that he met many of these students during his underground life in Bihar. In JNU, some Naxalites were part of Free Thinkers Group<sup>217</sup>. Many left students criticised annihilation tactic and thought that there is no place for individual terrorism in a revolutionary movement. To critique annihilation line they quoted Lenin’s works. However, JNU students had great respect for Charu Majumdar and other Naxal leaders and they could not offer a strong critique of the movement.

When prominent Naxalite leader Nagbhoosan Patnayak was awarded the death sentence, he wrote a document in which he mentioned that every organs of his body should be donated to needy people<sup>218</sup>. This document was published in *Filhal*(December,1972). Nagbhoosan Patnayak conformed to that tradition of Marxist revolutionary practice according to which any sacrifice can be made for the betterment of society. The word sacrifice comes from

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<sup>216</sup> Prabhat Kumar Roy, ‘Jawaharlal Nehru Vishwavidyalay Ka Wah Daur’ in Mahasweta Devi(ed.) *Maowadi Ya Adivasi*,p.123.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*.p.

<sup>218</sup> Nagbhoosan Patnayak, ‘Phansi Ke Takhte Se: Nagbhoosan Patnayak Ki Vasiyat’ in Vir Bharat Talvar(ed.) *Itihas Ke Dastavej*,pp.465-470.

Judaeo-Christian theology. Nation states used this word to fulfil their own chauvinism and killed millions of people in the name of sacrifice for the Nation. In CPI (ML) documents, every death of a comrade has been described as a sacrifice. Vinod Mishra said, “Bhojpur peasant struggle initiated by not-too-conscious communist revolutionaries and then organized by the Party leadership emerged and was maintained during the hardest of times at the cost of maximum of sacrifices<sup>219</sup>.” Similar to the word Sacrifice, in Indo-Aryan language we find the term *Bali/Balidan*. Narayan Kavi, a CPI ML comrade from Bhojpur wrote in his hybrid language-*Ek din marta sab koi bachta nahi hai koi/ isi se maut ki kimat jo janta ki seva me hoi/ Yahi soch ke sathi Ganeshi, Ramayan, Butan Balidan hue/ Master, Jauhar, Sadhuji, Ratan wo Nirmal Mahan Hue*<sup>220</sup>. The word *Bali* has different meanings in different sects of Hinduism, and these meanings have been changing from time to time. It has been mentioned that Ganeshi Dusadh and his *Krantikari Sarkar* murdered many innocent peasants in Chavari village. How can someone categorize his death as sacrifice? In different languages and culture we need explore terms similar to sacrifice which would help us to understand how in Marxist tradition religious metaphors have been used by so-called secular and scientific movements across the world. It is interesting to see that the people for whom religion was a false consciousness were ready to end their lives by invoking religious metaphors. After mapping the genealogy of the word ‘sacrifice’ we can better understand revolutionary practices in India and abroad. A question must be asked: to what extent the sacrifice is sacred and to what extent it is profane. Only by sacrilizing sacrifice, by bringing it from domain of faith to domain of reason we can understand the real motives behind sacrifice.

### **Expansion of the Movement**

Intellectual support to Naxalite movement at its formative stage added fertilizer to the seeds of casteism and violence. One sided narrative of violence done by upper castes was circulated by ML cadres and their sympathizers, which helped the violence done by the Naxalite followers invisible. Gradually every cruel murder of an upper caste person was declared as

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<sup>219</sup> Vinod Mishra, ‘Evaluation of The Past’ in Dipankar Bhattacharya(ed.) Selected Writings,p.275.

<sup>220</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, Bhojpur,p.103.

the symbol of victory towards social justice. Many times people of upper castes were murdered cruelly which made it clear that Naxalites were extremely casteist. Soon the word Naxalites lost its revolutionary meaning in Bhojpur's villages and many people still think that they are criminals. Naxalites were also responsible for this. Several times Naxalites used to behead innocent peasants and took away their heads with them. Ramanuj Rai of Bansidihri village, Dinanath Pandey of Diul village and many other peasants were murdered in this cruel way<sup>221</sup>. Naxalites soon became famous as people who can make someone six inch shorter—"Chhah inch chhota karne wale log."<sup>222</sup> In Narhi-Chandi village Ramdev Singh along with his mother and father were brutally lynched by Naxalites<sup>223</sup>. Their faces were so deformed that people did not have the courage to look at their dead bodies. Cruelty became the part and parcel of everyday life. In every Naxal affected village of Bhojpur, Naxalites killed four to five people on an average. In some villages they killed more than hundred people. In Ekvari more than 200 people were killed in Naxal violence<sup>224</sup>. The pain and sorrow of these victims of violence have not found any place in poetry, plays, novels and other literary genre. When Nagarjun was sloganeering in his poetry, the victims of Naxalite menace preferred to remain silent and were hardly able to express their pain. A Bhojpuri song says—"O friend! I cannot express this sorrow/ Baruhi, Baruna and other villages are crying...I cannot express this sorrow." In the hey day of Naxalism a dangerous silence prevailed everywhere from households to fields, from khalihans to playgrounds of children and everywhere there was an environment of fear. Mahasweta Devi wrote a novel on the life of Jagdish Master but she never chose to write on the violence done by Naxalites in Bhojpur. Generally Novel-writers describe something in a particular trope. They avoid writing anything further on the same event in other tropes. Even other writers avoid writing anything on the same topic which has been described by some great novelists.

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<sup>221</sup> Interview with Rajkishor Pandey and Surendra Pandey of Diul village on 4 January, 2016.

<sup>222</sup> Bela Bhatia, *Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.40, No.15,2005,p.1538.

<sup>223</sup> Kalyan Mukherje, Bhojpur,p.123

<sup>224</sup> In 1996 Bela Bhatia found that 85 men belonging to upper castes and nearly equal number of lower castes had been murdered till 1996-97. The violence has not stopped till the date and people from both sides are still murdered. See. Bela Bhatia, *Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar* in Economic and Political Weekly, p.1541.

Not faced by any strong intellectual opposition, Naxalite ideology continued to foster in the plains of Central Bihar. To increase the scale of violence many armed units were formed in Bhojpur villages. For arms and ammunition money was collected from party sympathizers and also from the villages. Six hundred rupees and some jewellery were collected from Ekvari village in 1971-72 for procurement of arms and ammunition<sup>225</sup>. One comrade Karan had good links with arms-suppliers and he bought many guns and rifles for the party<sup>226</sup>. One possible source for arms and ammunition was illegal factories of Munger. Since the time of Mir Kasim, Munger had many gun-factories. Artisans of Munger had great expertise in gun-making and in Indo-China war it is they who made Musket guns. After war these artists became unemployed and they established many illegal factories. Some expert Lohars of Bhojpur also started making country guns locally known as *Desila*. Ajay Lohar of Harpura village was one such person who had great expertise in making country guns<sup>227</sup>.

*Raktim Tara* a poem written on Jagdish Master's life claims that Naxalites had nearly eight thousands legal and illegal guns<sup>228</sup>. In Bhojpur's villages people generally thought that Naxalites got financial support from International Parties. Interests of international parties and their links with Central Bihar's Naxalite movement are yet to be explored. On 15<sup>th</sup> November 1988, a Canadian Sikh youth Harjit Singh Sirohi was arrested on the charge of supporting Naxalites in central Bihar<sup>229</sup>. Two delegations of CPI ML (liberation) visited China on the invitation of Chinese Government in 1979 and 1980<sup>230</sup>. Earlier Chinese government had supported Charu Majumdar and many comrades used to claim that China's Chairman was their Chairman<sup>231</sup>. However, no evidence supports this fact that China provided financial support to CPI ML (Liberation).

No matter what were the financial sources of CPI ML, their power increased day-by-day. Armed struggle reached its zenith under the leadership of Subrat Datt alias Comrade Jauhar.

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<sup>225</sup> Suresh Kantak, *Raktim Tara*, p. 123.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p.129.

<sup>229</sup> Urmillesh, *Bihar Ka Sach*, New Delhi, Prakashan Sansthan, 1991, p.87.

<sup>230</sup> Vinod Mishra, 'CPI ML The Firm Defender of The Revolutionary Legacy' in Dipankar Bhattachary (ed.) *Selected Writings*, p.300.

<sup>231</sup> *Bhartiya Kranti Ke Mahanayak Comrade Charu Majumdar*, Samkaleen Prakashan, Patna, 1997, p.31.



On 28 July 1974 a new Central Committee was organized at the second death anniversary of Charu Majumdar<sup>232</sup>. Comrade Jauhar (Subrat Datt) was elected as General secretary of the new Central Committee<sup>233</sup>. Two other members in the Central Committee were Vinod Mishra and Comrade Raghu (Swadesh Bhattacharya). According to Vinod Mishra, “This new CC enjoyed the allegiance of the reorganised State Committee of Bihar, which was at the helm of the growing peasant movement in several blocks of Bhojpur and Patna districts the newly formed State Leading Team of West Bengal, which was struggling hard to keep alive the party and a section of comrades in Eastern UP and Delhi.<sup>234</sup>” Comrade Jauhar reorganized the party and developed the tradition of collective leadership in the party<sup>235</sup>. However, he could not formulate policy for mass movements and his politics remained centred on armed struggles. According to Vinod Mishra, “he (Jauhar) formulated attacks on mobile enemy forces as the beginning of mobile warfare and generalised it for all places-this was a mechanical upgradation of annihilation which gave rise to wrong military line.<sup>236</sup>”

Mishra’s evaluation of the past was not groundless. Jauhar’s aggressive military line proved dangerous for the party. Although CPI ML was in the strongest position at this time and at many occasions, its cadres fought with police and Central Police Force, yet the party suffered huge losses in armed encounters. In the famous Bahuara encounter (29 June-2 July, 1975) the armed squad of CPI ML under the leadership Butan Musahar killed 123 Jawans of the Jat Regiment and the Central Police Force<sup>237</sup>. For 96 hours the Jat regiment could not enter the village. Finally more than three hundred Bhumihars of neighbouring villages came with their guns and rifles and took the second front against the Naxalites<sup>238</sup>. Soon they captured Butan Master who was the commander of the Red Army of Bhojpur. Many Naxalites were killed in this encounter and their dead bodies were removed by the Jat regiment. This was the time of emergency when censorship was strictly imposed on media. Rumour was spread by the government that the CPF and The Jat Regiment did not coordinate. It was presented like the

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<sup>232</sup> Vinod Mishra, ‘CPI ML The Firm Defender of The Revolutionary Legacy’ in Dipankar Bhattacharya (ed.) Selected Works, p.292.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> Vinod Mishra, ‘Evaluation of The Past’ in Dipankar Bhattacharya (ed.) Vinod Mishra Selected Writings, p. 279.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> *Thirty years of Naxalbari*, a CPI ML Document

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

lower castes police personals resisted the attempt to burn the huts of poor persons of that village and later altercation broke out between the police and the Jat regiment. However, this story seems groundless because in those days majority of police personals were upper castes. The number of Casualties was kept deliberately low by bureaucrats in their press release. When media reached the village they were stunned to find many houses interconnected with tunnels<sup>239</sup>. A clinic was also run by the Naxalites in that village. Bahuara became part of folklores and folksongs. An Aalha(a folk song genre) composed on Bahuara says-“Rifles clash with rifles/ cartridges clash with cartridges/ We will make every village Chavari/ We will make every police station Sahar.”

Before Bahuara encounter, several times, Naxalites attacked the armed forces and the police, had snatched their guns and rifles. On 5 January 1974 four musket rifles were snatched from the jawans of Home Guard in Lalganj village<sup>240</sup>. On 14 March 1974 Naxalites looted three rifles and injured seven policemen in Chilhaus village<sup>241</sup>. On 3 April 1975, armed squad of CPI ML attacked a police-post in Koath village and snatched 5 rifles<sup>242</sup>. Just four month after Bahuara encounter (July 1975) in Babubandh village Party's general secretary Comrade Jauhar became injured in a police encounter. Brave Musahars carried him away from that place however due to heavy bleeding he could not survive<sup>243</sup>. Police could not find his dead body. In Babubandh encounter other senior leaders, comrade Mangal and Comrade Nirmal, were also killed<sup>244</sup>. Bahuara and Babubandh proved a major setback for the Naxalites, however their activities continued in the same manner. On 31 December 1976 they attacked the camp of Bihar Military Police and killed one Jawan and injured many others<sup>245</sup>. It is said that they looted many guns and rifles in that raid. On 19 December 1979, Naxalites attacked the Fatehpur police-camp and killed three constables and looted seven rifles and three

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<sup>239</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, *Bhojpur*, p. 91.

<sup>240</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, *Bhojpur*, p.66.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*,p.68.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid*, p.83.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*,p.98.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid*,p.111.

hundred cartridges<sup>246</sup>. There were several other incidents inside and outside Bhojpur where Liberation cadres snatched arms from police and paramilitary forces.

Bahuara was an ML Village, a village dominated by ML cadres. Many ML Villages were present in Bhojpur where only party cadres were allowed to enter. The number of ML villages was highest in Sahar and Sandesh blocks. Tarari, Piro and Jagdishpur blocks also had many ML villages. The establishment of ML villages was inspired by the concept of liberated zone that was present in the Naxalite literature since the start of the movement. ML villages were inaccessible for the outer world and the entry of outsiders and strangers was strictly prohibited in the region. If someone mistakenly went near an ML village he could be killed on the charge of being a spy of the enemy. Lalbabu Rai of Rajmahaldih village(Piro) told me during the interview that whenever he had to go to Mansagar, where his relatives resided, he avoided the path which was closer to Madhuri Tola, an ML Village<sup>247</sup>. It is said that even police could not enter into Madhuri Tola and Ranvir Sena bought Rocket launchers to attack on this hamlet. However, the plan was cancelled for some other reasons. There were many ML villages in Bhojpur, among them one was Sonatola- a dalit hamlet-from where Rameshvar Ahir was arrested.

Through these ML Villages Naxalites constituted their authority and challenged the authority of the state. In Liberated Zones or ML villages government officials were not allowed to enter. Most of these liberated zones were dalit hamlets or villages which were numerically dominated by middle castes. Bahuara was a village where middle and lower castes were numerically strong. Bathani tola and Bathe which were attacked by Ranvir Sena were also 'Maley' or ML villages. These ML Villages could not bring any change in the lives of the rural poor. Caste and gender hierarchy existed in these villages too. Still in ML dominated villages, people preferred to marry within their caste. Yadav and other middle castes do not treat dalit as equal to them. Even there is a hierarchy between dalits. In many ML villages I found that Dusadhs treated themselves superior to Chamars and they often fought with Chamars.

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid,p.125.

<sup>247</sup> Interview with Lalbabu Rai on 23 January 2015.

The rate of literacy was very low in liberated zones. If we look at investigating officer's report of Bathani Tola massacre we find that most of the witnesses were illiterate and they were not able to write what they had seen. Informant Kishun Chaudhary was not able to write his name and he had given thumb impression on his fardbayan<sup>248</sup>. The other witness Naimuddin Ansari was also not able to write his complaint and there was inconsistency in his different fardbayans which were given by him at different times<sup>249</sup>. Radhika Devi and other witnesses who survived the massacre were also illiterate<sup>250</sup>. In the fortress of Leninism women and men were illiterate and they continued to believe in superstitions. Investigating Officer's report mentions that black threads were found around the waist of a dead child<sup>251</sup>. Usually these black threads are called *dara* in Bhojpur's villages and mothers put these threads around the waist of their children to save them from evil spirits. Doctors and medical practitioners avoided to visit any ML village therefore health facilities were in very poor condition. In such a situation the prevalence of superstitions and irrational beliefs was natural. In many ML villages *Bhagats* continued to practise their rituals. Rajkishor Pandey, a veterinary doctor told me that he avoided visiting ML villages and whenever cattle fell sick they depended on their *Bhagats* for their cure and many times they had to bear huge losses<sup>252</sup>. Ancestor cult was also in vogue in ML villages and Chamars spent beyond their capacity to please their ancestors. Some new cults were also gaining popularity in the region and in many ML villages people became followers of Shiv-Guru Parivar and started *Shiv-Charcha* in a routine manner.

Mostly people in these villages were agricultural labourers. Radhika Devi of Bathani Tola said in her statement that she was a labourer and at the time of incident she was carrying soil on her head<sup>253</sup>. Usually poor women use this collected soil for various purposes. They use this soil to fill up village tanks and ponds which are located in *gair-majarua* land, and after filling up these ponds, houses are built up on this land. No doubt wet lands are shrinking in ML Villages. However, only the dalit and poor people are not responsible for the degradation

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<sup>248</sup> Investigating Officer's Report, Sahar Police Station, FIR no. 98, 1996.,p.3.

<sup>249</sup> See. Different Fardbayans of Naimuddin in IO Report.

<sup>250</sup> IO Report,pp.26-27.

<sup>251</sup> IO Report,p.7.

<sup>252</sup> Interview with Rajkishor Pandey.

<sup>253</sup> IO Report, Sahar Police Station, FIR no.98, 1996, p. 26.

of the environment. Unequal distribution of land is a major cause for environmental damage. Eco-feminist thinkers should also deliberate on the question of unequal distribution of resources which creates pressure on commons.

Investigating Officer's Report of Bathani Tola mentions that the house of Naim Miyan, whose family was massacred by Ranvir Sena, was made of straw and earth<sup>254</sup>. The report further mentions that the family of Marvari Chaudhari which became victim of the massacre also lived in a Kacha house. Most of the houses in ML Villages were made of straw, earth and cow-dung. The economic condition was at the worst level in these liberated zones. A witness in Bathani Tola Massacre case, Muslim Ansari, told that he was a street vendor and used to sell cloth in nearby villages<sup>255</sup>. As the level of education was low in these villages people had to depend on petty jobs. Even the coming generation had a dark future because teachers were not ready to go to ML villages. The fear of teachers was not in vain; earlier Naxalites had killed many teachers. In May 1978, an innocent teacher Rameshvar Mahto, was murdered by the Naxalites<sup>256</sup>. Many teachers left teaching in those schools which were located near ML villages. Even private teachers were not ready to go to those hamlets which were fortress of CPI ML<sup>257</sup>.

CPI ML did not make any attempt to impart education to these poor children. Even a single educational institution was not established by CPI ML. Education imparted by 'party schools' was dogmatic and it lacked any critical understanding. 'Party school' was not a regular set-up and it was organized in party offices only once or twice in a year. Eighth Party Congress of CPI ML accepts that "The Central Party Schools we held all these years catered only to a small group of students and there was no automatic dissemination of Party education below<sup>258</sup>." Vinod Mishra was not enthusiastic about party schools, once he said, "Party schools may have a negative impact also: it may generate a sense of dependence on the School at the cost of self-study, which is always the main thing<sup>259</sup>." The irony was that the

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<sup>254</sup> IO Rport,p.5.

<sup>255</sup> IO Report,p.24.

<sup>256</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, Bhojpur,p.121.

<sup>257</sup> Interview with Shivjee Rai of Guljarpur Village. Shivjee Rai is a private tutor.

<sup>258</sup> Eighth Party Congress, Political Organisational Report, 2007,p. 47.

<sup>259</sup> Speech at Central Party School in 1984-85,*Liberation*,March, 1986.

majority of ML cadres were illiterate and were not able to read and write anything. How could one expect from them to start self-study? In the early phase of the movement, when violence was at its peak, ML cadres had scarcely any access to party literature. *Lal Salam*, a one-page newsletter, had only limited circulation in those times<sup>260</sup>. In nineties the situation was much better, *Lokyudh* a weekly newsletter was available for debates and discussion in Bhojpur's villages. *Lokyudh* contained news related to party organizations and some essays on national and international issues. No doubt these essays were rich in contents and ideas but villagers hardly discussed these issues. However, they enjoyed news related to the party activities. *Liberation*, a monthly magazine of CPI ML, was useless for rural areas of Bhojpur because it was published in English. The number of English speaking persons in Bhojpur's villages is very low and Bhojpuri people generally ridicule people who speak English. M N Srinivas has mentioned that in Ara and Chhapra many English medium schools had to be closed on account of low enrolments of students. CPI ML never tried to impart English education to the people of lower castes. Only five to six years ago some English medium private schools have come up in Ara and Vikramganj. However, these schools are inaccessible to poor students belonging to the Dalit community.

One special feature of liberated zones was 'kangaroo court'. These courts were guided by whims of local leaders. Most of the time these leaders were illiterate and they had no idea of the modern justice-system. Violence was their first and last resort. 'Kangaroo courts' punished and terrorized marginal and small peasants of upper castes. Ganeshi Dusadh, a squad commander of CPI ML who had established a *revolutionary government* in Chavari village, used to humiliate marginal peasants of that village<sup>261</sup>. In Belaur village, too, many marginal peasants were humiliated and beaten by the Naxalite Court before the formation of Ranvir Sena<sup>262</sup>. Almost in every village of Bhojpur, 'Kangaroo Courts' came in existence. These 'Kangaroo Courts' were so biased that whenever a complaint reached against a marginal upper caste peasant he was sure that, he would not get justice from these courts. Many peasants left their villages due to fear of these 'Kangaroo courts'. When Ranvir Sena was formed, in 1994, almost all upper caste peasants joined it because they had experienced the justice-system of

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<sup>260</sup> Suresh Kantak, *Raktim Tara*, p.131.

<sup>261</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, *Bhojpur*, pp.62-63.

<sup>262</sup> Interview with Raivandar Master on 7 March, 2016.

the Naxalites. Even a single upper caste peasant never approached these 'kangaroo courts' for justice. If Naxalites would have delivered justice in an unbiased manner they would have got some support from many upper caste peasants. Though Naxalites were very strong in Bhojpur yet rich peasants remained outside the jurisdiction of these 'kangaroo courts.' The members of Badka Gharayan never surrendered before Naxalites. Many people belonging to these families were murdered by Naxalites but they preferred to fight with them rather than becoming a mute spectator. If we look at the family of Nathuni Singh of Ekvari village, almost all male members of the family were killed by the Naxalites. Nathuni Singh, Uma Singh, Sankh Singh and in the next generation Santu Singh were killed by the Naxalites. The family of Nathuni Singh fought alone with Naxalites for three decades. His family members killed many Naxalites of Ekvari village. When Ranvir Sena was formed, Santu Singh and Pramod Singh of this family played a major role in organizing upper caste peasants against Naxalites. Many other rich peasants also fought with the Naxalites for decades and lost their lives to save their dignity. Thus 'kangaroo courts' exercised its jurisdiction only over poor peasants of upper castes and antagonized them forever.

In the process of establishing a liberated zone Naxalites ghettoized ML villages. These villages became the zone of poverty, illiteracy, superstitions and injustice. The idea of space and territory in Naxalite ideology is a violent one. In the formation of liberated zones and base areas Naxalites resorted to violence on an unprecedented scale. For them territory was more important than people. Many times the violence was done only to assert the autonomy of liberated zone. Many peasants were killed in Bhojpur because they mistakenly entered into the area of liberated zone. Later, these liberated zones became spaces of vulnerabilities for the poor people. Several times police and private armies of landlords attacked ML villages. To save ML villages, Naxalites formed many regular armed units which were capable of attacking the police and landlords. Initially armed squads were built for and through annihilation<sup>263</sup>. However, this practice was discontinued due to increasing criticism of annihilation line in the party. Till 1974 many Regular Armed Units came into existence in Bhojpur, Patna and other neighbouring districts. However, these Regular Armed Units

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<sup>263</sup> Vinod Mishra, 'Peasants Struggle in Central Bihar' in Dipankar Bhattacharya(ed.) Vinod Mishra Selected Writings, p. 145.

suffered serious losses during the time of Emergency. In Kaithi(Aurangabad), Kunai(Bhojpur) and Gangabigha(Nalanda) armed units faced a major setback due to state repression<sup>264</sup>. Many people were not willing to continue in these armed units. Therefore, the party changed its policy and it focused on the organization of armed propaganda squads<sup>265</sup>. Fifteen to twenty villages were demarcated for these armed propaganda squads<sup>266</sup>. Vinod Mishra wrote, “They could take action against local reactionaries and snatch firearms on their own initiative. They (could) also organise general village youth in village defence forces<sup>267</sup>.” Thus we find a three tier armed squads present inside the liberated zones. At the top, were regular armed units and at the bottom village defence forces were active. The role of armed propaganda squad was in-between these two layers. These armed propaganda squad used to terrorize upper caste peasants in nearby villages and helped the party to enforce economic blockade on upper caste peasants.

Contrary to Armed Propoganda squads, Regular armed units used to organise “decisive armed actions against powerful armed gangs of the landlords...and mete(d) out appropriate punishments to the erring police officials<sup>268</sup>.” We should keep in mind that armed squads of CPI ML continued even after its embracement of electoral politics. In 1997, a party document of CPI ML openly accepted that in a brief period of three years its armed squad killed seventy six supporters of Ranvir Sena<sup>269</sup>. The same document accepted that armed squad of CPI ML was present in Bathani Tola and neighbouring villages on the day of massacre<sup>270</sup>.

With the help of these armed propaganda squads, the party captured nearly twelve thousand acres of land in Bihar and Jharkhand<sup>271</sup>. Many upper caste peasants got killed by these squads and their land was captured. Many of them left their villages and sold their land at very low price. More than hundred upper caste peasants have been killed by CPI ML in Ekvvari village and in retaliation nearly equal number of lower castes people has been killed. Naxalites also

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<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*,p. 146.

<sup>269</sup> *Political Organizational Report, Sixth Party Congress,(Hindi Version) p.42.*

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid*,p.90.

<sup>271</sup> Rajnitik Sangathanatmak Report, Chhatha Party Mahahiveshan, p. 102.



captured *gair-majarua* land and sometimes they captured land and property belonging to temples. In Bhojpur they captured land belonging to *Baga Math*. They also captured many village ponds and in Barahra they organized fisherfolks and established their dominance on the bank of the Ganga river<sup>272</sup>.

Table-1, Land captured by CPI ML in Bihar in acres (1997)

Champanan 1270	Bhojpur 838
Gaya 835	Aurangabad 644
Bhabhua 300	Darbhanga 280
Patna 320	Jahanabad 311
rohtas 300	Purnia 170
Munger 138	Araria 135
Navada 125	Buxar 100
Nalanda 68	Sivan 45
Mujaffarpur 28	Gopalganj 20
Samastipur 20	Bhagalpur 10.

Source: Political Organisational Report, Sixth Party Congress CPI ML, 1997

For a long period peasants left agricultural work due to the fear of armed squads of CPI ML and insolvency stared them in the face. Due to financial crisis, they were not able to marry their daughters off. These girls could not get education due to the presence of armed squads in villages, CPI ML cadres used to abuse girls and women on loudspeakers<sup>273</sup>. And whenever an upper caste poor peasant arranged for their daughter's marriage, CPI ML threatened that they will not let the marriage procession enter the village. Jairam Rai of Mudaffarpur village

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid*, p.44.

<sup>273</sup> Interview with Ravindar Master.

got such threats several times and whenever there was a marriage ceremony in his house he had to invite armed squad of Ranvir Sena. In 1979, when Ranvir Sena had not come into existence, in Narhi-Chandi village ML cadres threw a bomb in a *marriage-mandap* and later lynched all the family members of the girl<sup>274</sup>. In naxal affected villages peasants became so poor that they were not able to arrange enough dowries for their daughters. After formation of Ranvir Sena, its leader Barmeshvar Singh arranged marriages for many of these poor girls without any dowry. Women composed a song on him-O Barmeshvar brother! please wear these yellow cloths(Penha na piyariya a Bameshvar Bhaiya). Yellow cloths are worn on the occasion of marriage in Bhojpur's villages.

The presence of multi-layered armed squads in ML villages changed the concept of security in those villages. Villagers made their own intelligence networks and became cautious of 'shrewed and subtle network of enemy'. Agents of landlords and police informants were generally punished with death. Suraj Yadav who was supposed to be an informer of the police in Bahuara case was murdered by Naxalites. They composed a song in the celebration of his murder- "*Surja kaile rahe dalali/Surja ke gardan me lagal goli*" (Suraj was a comprador element, a bullet hit him in the neck.) Children, women, youth- all were consciously or unconsciously involved in the struggle. In one ML Village, I found that children were reading a book *Bal Chhapamar* (child guerrilla). The book told the story about brave Chinese children who fought against Japanese imperialist forces<sup>275</sup>. Although the membership for the armed squad was open for persons above eighteen yet children played proactive role in liberated zones. They were often employed as spies and informers. In a struggle zone everyone from children to women becomes unconsciously involved in the struggle and the cult of violence gets legitimacy in an unprecedented way. Gajanand Madhav Muktibodh has described such a situation in an artistic way loaded with revolutionary jargon. He says even the slate of a child becomes a weapon of struggle in the times of revolution- "*Dada ka sotta bhi karta dav-pench/ Gagan me nach rahi kaka ki lathi/.. Teji se lahrati ghumti munne ki salet patti/ Ee-Ek vastu ya ek-ek pranagni bomb hai/ Ye parmastra hain, prachhepastra hain, yam hain....Yah katha nahi hai yah sab sach hai, han bhai/ Kahi aag lag gai kahi goli chal*

<sup>274</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, *Bhojpur*, p. 123.

<sup>275</sup> Ku Vosu, *Bal Chapamar* [In Hindi], Purvaiya Prakashan, Delhi.

*gai*<sup>276</sup>.” Because of his early death, the great poet could not see the violence done to women, children and aged people by pseudo-revolutionary forces. Muktibodh has always been appropriated and used by Naxalites and Maoists to legitimize their mindless violence.

### **The impact of Muktibodh and Hindi literature on Liberation movement**

Muktibodh(1917-1964) is always invoked by Liberation cadre and other left wing extremists for their revolutionary ambitions. Though Muktibodh passed away a little before the Naxalite Movement started yet his influence on the movement in Hindi-belt is unparalleled. His influence grew after 1980 when his works got published through the initiative taken by Ashok Vajpayee. His poem *Andhere Me* has become a source of inspiration and incessant struggle for left-wing intellectuals and cadre. Muktibodh’s poetry is a revolt against the passivity of life. He asks, “ *Ab tak kya kiya/ Jivan kya jiya/ Udrambhari ban anatma ban gaye/ bhuton ki shadi me kanat se tan gaye/ kisi Vaybhichari ke ban gaye bistar...Ab tak kya kiya/ Jivan kya jiya*<sup>277</sup>.” Muktibodh has become an inevitable part of “Marxist syllabus” in Hindi-belt. His poems are widely discussed in ML offices by young cadre. Many seminars are also organized on his poetry by ML intellectuals. Alok Dhanva who is associated with cultural wing of CPI ML is a fan of Muktibodh and he never misses any opportunity to share his views on Muktibodh from ML platforms. Dhanva has a long connection with ML movement and he wrote in the *Filhal* magazine in support of the Naxalite movement.

Muktibodh declares in his poetry that this society cannot function in a proper way because capitalist mind will never change. He said that the slogan of individual liberty cannot seduce minds which are committed for emancipation and liberation: “*Vartaman samaj chal nahi sakta/ Punji se juda hriday badal nahi sakta/ swatantrya vyakti ka vadi/ chhal nahi sakta mukti ke man ko/ jan ko*<sup>278</sup> which can be translated as (The present society cannot work/ The heart which is associated with capital cannot change/ The ideology of individuality cannot betray the goal of emancipation). According to him, the capitalist society fulfils the interest of owls,

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<sup>276</sup> Muktibodh, ‘Andhere Me’ in Ashok Vajpayee(ed.) Gajanand Madhav Muktibodh Pratinidhi Kavitayen, New delhi, Rajkamal Publication, 1984,p.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid*,p.141.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid*,p.165

bats and jackals and a successful person in this capitalist society becomes like these mean creatures-*If you will reach there you will become an owl...will become a jackale/ Never and nowhere you will find a man/ In the kingdom of animals the moonlight which has been spread everywhere/ is not for you, is not for me*<sup>279</sup>. Intellectuals alienated from the society were always at the target of Muktibodh's poetry and he coined a term *Brahmarakshas* for these intellectuals<sup>280</sup>. However, there is a silence on the issue of caste and gender oppression in the oeuvre of this revolutionary poet, writer and critic. Muktibodh was an atheist and in his poem "Ek Aroop Shunya Ke Prati" he ridiculed the existence of an Almighty God and therefore indirectly he attacks Brahmanism. Still his silence on caste oppression is an enigma and it requires a serious deliberation. Many Marxist poets attack mainly the state and the capitalist society, but they hardly pay enough attention on cultural marginalization of poor people. Their poetry does not capture caste and gender oppressions which are prevalent in the society. Muktibodh could also not realize the emancipatory potential of democracy nor was he aware of the fact that in violent struggles fascism often overlaps with revolutionary practices. Muktibodh has become the most respected poet for Liberation cadre and his poems are used as obituary for those comrades who have sacrificed their lives for the cause of "revolution"<sup>281</sup>.

In addition to Muktibodh, CPI ML cadre also got inspiration from writings of Trilochan, Nagarjun, Kedarnath Agrawal and Rahul Sankrityayan. Rahul was a self-made scholar and it is said that he had mastery on more than twenty languages. However, his analysis of Aryan culture and Buddhism was influenced by his teleology of socialism. In his story *Sudas* he constructs Aryan past as a socialist society which degenerated due to the influence of Brahmanism. Buddhism had deep attraction for him and he went on the journey of Tibet and Srilanka to learn Buddhist philosophy and to collect old manuscripts. Rahul declared that Bhumihars were citizens of old *gantantiras* and they were follower of Buddhism. Thus he tried to mobilize the most powerful caste of Bihar for his socialist politics. Rahul's essays on

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<sup>279</sup> Muktibodh, 'Kahne do unhe jo yah kate hain' in *Pratinidhi Kavitayen*, pp.114-115. (My Translation)

<sup>280</sup> In his poem "Brahmarakshas" Muktibodh has described the pain of an intellectual who is alienated from society.

<sup>281</sup> When Shah Chand a CPI ML cadre passed away, in his obituary Sudhir Suman quoted a poem of Muktibodh. See. Sudhir Suman, *Shah Chand: Insaf Ki Jang Ke Nayak*, Patna, CPI ML, p.9.

socialism are still popular among comrades. “Samajvad Kyon”, “Tumhari Chhay ho” and many other books written by Rahul are widely read by comrades.

Gorakh Pandey, a “Janvadi Poet”, wrote many songs in Bhojpuri which soon became popular in Hindi speaking areas. Liberation cadre still recite these songs to mobilize the oppressed people. When socialism was included in our preamble, Gorakh wrote a song which captures the irony of using “socialism” as rhetoric by our capitalist-minded leaders. The song says- “Socialism will arrive in a gradual process/ it will arrive by riding on the back of elephants and horses... It will demolish even poor’s huts/ it will directly enter into Indira’s house. (*Hathi pe aai/ Ghoda pe aai/ Samajvad babua dhire-dhire aai..Tutahi Madaiyo Udai/ Indira ke ghar me samai.*)” The song was written in the genre of marriage songs and its lyrical quality is unparalleled. Gorakh was a pessimist and he committed suicide in Jawaharlal Nehru University; his pessimism overshadowed his creativity. In another Bhojpuri song he says-“I will no longer tolerate this slavery. Now I love freedom...now I love guns<sup>282</sup>.” Though the relation between freedom and gun is not very clear in a democratic society, Gorakh’s obsession with guns shows his immature understanding of politics. Like many other Marxist poets, Gorakh could also not realize emancipatory potential of democracy and he blindly supported armed struggle. Most of the time these Marxist poets were thinking in a violent way but lyrical quality of their songs and poems overshadowed their immaturity.

A detailed study of Hindi poetry can reveal how the *logic* of violence is constituted through cultural metaphors. We must explore the aesthetics of violence because somewhere violence derives its force from its aesthetical stuff. We have seen that in Muktibodh’s poetry capitalist society has been represented as working in favour of owls, bats and jackals. The reduction of every “successful” man into “inauspicious” non-human beings gives legitimacy to violence against these “successful” men-*Duniya ko ek aankh se sirf safalta ki aankh se dekhti faili ha puno ki chandni....Ghughuon, chamgadaron aur siyaron ke hit faili hai puno ki chandni.* “Successful” men are denied the status of human beings in Muktibodh’s poetry. The hatred towards their class enemy in the Naxalite discourse is constituted through these cultural metaphors. I am emphasising culture because we know that there is nothing inauspicious in

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<sup>282</sup> In Bhojpuri the song says, “ Gulamiya ab ham nahi bajibo/ajadiya hamke bhavelle....Bandukiya hamke bhavelle.”

owls, bats and jackals except our presuppositions and superstitions. For Muktibodh capitalist society is a kingdom of animals and anything good in this society is not for human beings. In his meta-narrative any man who is benefiting from capitalist society is a dangerous beast and therefore he becomes vulnerable to ‘revolutionary’ violence.

Without including the name of Dhumil in our list any talk on Naxalite literature will remain incomplete. Dhumil thinks that roots of the Naxalite movement are embedded in poverty and hunger. He says, “Bhukh se riyati faili hatheli ka nam daya hai/ Aur bhukh me tani mutthi ka nam Naxalbari hai<sup>283</sup>.” Naxalite movement has been viewed as a socio-economic problem by poets, writers and government officials. This is a reductionist interpretation of the movement. These people forget the force of an ideology. Naxalite movement has its own goals and it will continue as long as it will remain ideologically strong. The movement has always characterised well-to-do persons as beasts who are dangerous for society. Dhumil says-A female wolf is feeding milk to its baby, and at the same time she is devouring the head of a baby lamb.( *Ek mada bhediya apne chhaune ko dudh pila rahi hai aur sath hi kisi memne ka sir chaba rahi hai*) Representation of rich persons as wolves and poor ones as lambs can persuade anyone for the cause of the Naxalite movement. Dhumil constructs the logic of violence through his dichotomization of the rich and the poor as the oppressors and the oppressed. In this binary thinking there is no space for in-between truths. Some poor people can also behave like beasts while some rich people can be caring and good natured. In Dhumil and other poets, we can find that logic of violence is constituted through binary representations where anyone against Naxalism is a dangerous beast and its supporters are oppressed and innocent persons. This “politics of innocence” gives legitimacy to violence done by Naxalites.

#### Lumpen prolateriat

While Marxists poets were busy in representing rich people as beasts, “revolutionary” cadre of CPI ML started killing poor and illiterate people by categorizing them as lumpens. Although the founder member of CPI ML, Rameshvar Ahir, was a dacoit and many other lumpens also joined the party as full time cadre; despite this CPI ML(Liberation) was not

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<sup>283</sup> Dhumil, *Patkatha* in Sansad Se Sadak Tak, Delhi, Rajkamal,1972,p. 127.

able to develop a consistent theory on lumpen prolateriat. In Marxist literature lumpens are seen as reactionary and counter revolutionary force. Anarchist like Bakunin recognized their revolutionary potential, and later Frantz Fanon also argued that lumpen prolateriat should be included in revolutionary movement of the third world countries. The word lumpen prolateriat has been defined in Marxist literature in different ways. In Bhojpur, however, they were thieves, dacoits, prostitutes and hermits who were categorized as lumpens by the party<sup>284</sup>. The policy of CPI ML towards lumpen was violent. They had only two choices; either they would join the party or they would get killed. Many thieves and dacoits were killed by ML cadre because they were not supporting the party. Ganeshi Musahar and Saryu Lohar-both petty thieves- were killed by the party cadre<sup>285</sup>. Their only fault was that they had left the party. Both of them were petty thieves and scarcely injured any person. Ramnaresh Bari another thief was also killed when he left the party<sup>286</sup>. Many of these lumpens were oppressed people and they committed petty crimes for their livelihood. The categorization of these oppressed people as lumpens reveals the insensitivity of Naxalites towards the most marginalized people on this earth.

Categorization of prostitutes as lumpens shows insensitivity of Naxalites towards gender question. This kind of categorization overemphasises individual agency and downplays structural problems. Young girls of fourteen and sixteen are forced into prostitution by most of the *nach-parties* which are run by human-traffickers. If victims of human trafficking would be categorized as lumpens then what kind of revolution would be expected from CPI ML. In Bhojpur, some villages and *tolas* are famous as villages of prostitutes and villagers avoid making any open interaction with these prostitutes. CPI ML never raised voice against ghettoization of these prostitutes. For CPI ML, revolution always meant distribution of property and it never fought against socio-cultural stigmas. In Bhojpur, prostitution was partly resulting from the caste-system. There were many *raiyati netuas* in the service of big landlords, who were expected to perform dance for these landlords on marriage and other occasions. Sometimes daughters of these Netuas joined Nautanki Party due to poverty and would become a prostitute. In a Bhojpuri song, a king tries to seduce a woman who is going

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<sup>284</sup>Buniyadi Dastavej, Fifth Party Congress, 1992,p.43.

<sup>285</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, Bhojpur,p.112.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*

to meet her husband in the guise of a Netua girl and makes derogatory comments on the girl; which shows that cultural stigma was attached to these lower caste girls<sup>287</sup>. On the outskirts of Bhojpur, there is a place known as Natwar which is famous for brothels. The name of the place itself suggests that it was a hamlet inhabited by Nat or Netua caste. The reduction of prostitutes as a sex-worker is also problematic. People forget that these women cultivated art and music and sometimes composed painful songs which became source of inspiration for many new poets and dramatists. Bhojpuri people know the impact of Muniya Bai and Duniya Bai on the oeuvre of legendary dramatist Bhikhari Thakur. The legendary folk singer Mahendar Misir also composed many songs for these music-loving women.

Categorizing hermits and saints as lumpen shows insensitivity of the Naxalites toward religion. Undoubtedly sometimes religion legitimizes inequality and oppression but it can also do the opposite and there are instances when it becomes a tool of emancipation. In Bhojpur, religion is not organized and institutionalized and therefore we must differentiate its progressive elements with regressive ones keeping in view of its contradictory aspects and regional variances. Veteran peasant leader Sahjanand Saraswati was also a dandi-saint and despite his participation in politics he never left *sanyas dharma*. Many non-political saints also played a major role in emancipation of the oppressed class. Pauhari Baba of Dihri was known for his service to lepers. He cured many lepers by using Ayurvedic medicine. In his ashram lepers cooked food and every devotee accepted this food with pleasure. In Buxar, Mamaji used to organize marriage of Janaki-Ram in which many poor girls were married without dowry. The entire population of the city including rich ones participated in this grand mega-show. Mamaji belonged to that cult of Bhakti tradition which worshiped Sita as a sister. This cult was popular in the medieval period and was very strong in Mithila region, the birth place of goddess Sita. For Mamaji, Sita was more important than Ram therefore in his sermons women had higher place than men.

### **Rectification, the Formation of Indian People's Front and Institutionalization of a Radical Politics**

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<sup>287</sup> Dr. Krishnadev Upadhyay, *Bhojpuri Lokgeet, Vol-2, Prayag, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan*, p.92.



By the end of 1977, CPI ML's armed units faced major losses. Jagdish Master, Comrade Jauhar, Comrade Nirmal, Sheela Chaterjee, Butan Master, Narayan Kavi, Ganeshi Dusadh, Rameshvar Ahir and many other prominent leaders were killed in Police encounters. Naxal supporters had no more patience to sustain armed struggle on such a scale. In such a depressing scenario, Vinod Mishra started a rectification movement. Vinod writes, "Great changes began to occur in the Party line and practice which were formalised in a special party conference held in a Bhojpur village<sup>288</sup>." In 1982 all major factions of CPI ML participated in a conference held in Delhi from April 24 to 26, 1982<sup>289</sup>. Indian People's Front was formed in this conference for the purpose of electoral participation. Third Party Congress at Giridih(Jharkhand, December 1982) accepted the proposal of participation in electoral politics<sup>290</sup>. However, it was decided that all parliamentary struggles would be subordinated to extra parliamentary mass struggles<sup>291</sup>. After the formation of IPF, CPI ML organized many successful mass rallies on different political issues.

The Fourth Party Congress (Hajaribagh,Jharkhand,1988) initiated interaction with the main left parties and came with the idea of a left and democratic confederation<sup>292</sup>. Clearly, at this juncture CPI ML movement got split in two factions. On the one side, there was CPI ML(Liberation) which supported participation in electoral politics and on the other side, there were groups like-the MCC, the Second Central Committee, Party Unity and some factions of PCC of Satyanarayn Singh. Each group accused the other to be trapped in liquidationism. However, CPI ML (Liberation) was successful in 1989 parliamentary elections and it won Ara parliamentary seat in Bhojpur and Rameshvar Prasad became the first Naxalite leader who entered into Parliament. In 1990 assembly elections it won seven seats and in 1995 elections it won six seats. However, it could not save its Parliamentary seat in the next election.

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<sup>288</sup> Vinod Mishra, 'CPI ML The Firm Defender of The Revolutionary Legacy' in Vinod Mishra Selected works,p.293.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid*,p. 295.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid*, p.296.

Electoral politics initiated a new era of mass organizations. The most successful was its peasant organization popularly known as Kisan Sabha or Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha. In these Kisan Sabhas agricultural labours were more active than landholding peasants. Upper caste peasants hardly participated in Kisan Sabhas. In Bhojpur and Sivan its membership reached new heights. In 1997, in Bhojpur, Kisan Sabha had 67000 members while in Sivan this number was 41000<sup>293</sup>. In Bhojpur, members of Kisan Sabha played dual role. On the one hand, they participated in open rallies and demonstrations; and on the other hand, they provided a base for armed units of the party. Many members of Kisan Sabha were also members of armed propaganda squads. The document of the Sixth Party Congress shows that democratization and institutionalization of CPI ML was a tactic to fulfil other non-democratic 'goals' and till 1997 its armed squad continued to practice annihilation in Bhojpur's villages. Sixth Party Congress accepts: "In Bathani Tola on that fateful day, the local squad kept the attackers at bay but then a fighter was hit (he subsequently died) and they had run out of ammunition and were forced to make a retreat. Due to some confusion, reinforcements from other villages arrived too late<sup>294</sup>."

We know that institutions can behave like 'non-human actors'. These actants play an important role in reshaping socio-political choices of different groups. The availability of democratic set-up attracted CPI ML towards electoral politics. However, other Naxalite groups preferred to stay away from the democratic set-up. This clearly shows that democratic institutions are not pervasive and they can provide opposite choices for different groups. CPI ML's history shows that it smartly used democratic institutions for its non-democratic goals. The other side of the history of CPI ML is the history of malfunctioning of our democratic institutions. It was an open fact that CPI ML was involved in many murders and even its party documents acknowledged its involvement in gruesome murders; despite this fact the party continued to function as a full-fledged political party and it was never banned. Its senior leaders were never chargesheeted.

### **Theoretical debates within the Party**

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<sup>293</sup> Rajnitik Sangathanatmak Report, Sixth Party Congress, A CPI ML Publication, pp.41-44.

<sup>294</sup> Appendix, Political-Organisational Report of the Sixth Party Congress.

We have seen that illiterate cadres of ML were casteist in their everyday life and they killed many innocent persons belonging to upper castes. However, there was a great difference between theory and praxis. Party leaders generally viewed Indian society through the lens of Marxism. Class was the basic category through which party leaders analysed Indian society. For party-leaders caste was a superstructure which was based on economic base. Vinod Mishra wrote, “Now, in Marxist discourse, one has definitely heard of an economic base over which all superstructure lies but never of a socio-economy<sup>295</sup>.” This dichotomy of base and superstructure and economic reductionism blocked all alternative ways of looking at the Indian society. None-the-less, Vinod Mishra was aware about the complex relation between caste and class. He wrote, “In certain historical situations it (class) may express itself in the form of castes, in other situations the two may be interwoven, overlapping and at the same time criss-crossing each other<sup>296</sup>.” Vinod Mishra mistakenly thought that modern factories were social factories which carried the potential of annihilation of caste<sup>297</sup>. CPI ML never realized the power of culture and it never fought against cultural dominance. Dipesh Chakravarty in his study on Jute workers of Calcutta has shown that how working class was divided along the line of caste, region and religion. In CPI ML’s view Caste was seen only as a social reality which blocked the formation of class<sup>298</sup>. This reductionist study of caste in the Naxalite discourse downplayed socio-cultural domination imposed by caste on Indian society.

The party thought that “Ambedkar was a class representative of the petty bourgeois stratum of dalits<sup>299</sup>.” However, the party could not see that it was Ambedkar who first showed that Hinduism is oppressive for dalits and annihilation of caste required annihilation of Hinduism. And when annihilation of Hinduism seemed impossible, he chose the path of conversion. Many ideas of Ambedkar can be debated but we should understand that long before Michel Foucault, Ambedkar was able to see that power is embedded in caste, culture and religion. However, the party was right in the criticism of BSP. Sixth Party Congress said, “The BSP at

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<sup>295</sup> Vinod Mishra, ‘Antitheses of Caste and Class-An Orthodox Marxist Hypothesis’ in Vinod Mishra Selected Works, P.176

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid*, p.177.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid*, p.176.

<sup>299</sup> Vinod Mishra, ‘More on The Antithesis of Caste and Class’ in Vinod Mishra Selected Writings, p.183.

the grassroots level has developed a desire among the Dalit castes for dignity, equality and share in political power. At the top, however, it developed a class of Dalit elites who make a vulgar display of wealth and lead a decent bourgeois life<sup>300</sup>.” Millions of Dalits are now in government jobs and some Dalit capitalists have established DICCI to fulfil the interest of Dalit entrepreneurs. This collaboration of caste and capitalism will only entrench caste identities. Now CPI ML is not ready to take any stand on DICCI (i.e Dalit Capitalism) and has been trapped in a problematic situation. Its radicalism has been diluted in the course of its democratization and institutionalization.

CPI ML’s views on caste are also reflected in its outlook on gender, sexuality, religion, nationalism and international relations. The casteist character of any movement can be judged from its stand on women. People who are casteist never want women to be emancipated because only by controlling sexuality of women they can save casteism. Sixth Party Congress of CPI ML said that women question cannot be solved by debates; it would only be solved through people’s action<sup>301</sup>. Obviously, the party was not interested in pursuing a long debate on this issue. The party could also not theorize the relationship between socialism and feminist movement. It was also not able to make a broader alliance with other feminist organizations because in Party’s view they were petty-bourgeois women organizations<sup>302</sup>. Vinod Mishra said, “All these feminist movements are movements of a tiny minority of women, and, by pitting women against men within the democratic movement, they objectively play a disruptionist role.<sup>303</sup>” Vinod Mishra criticised a woman comrade in the party because “half her time was consumed in discussing the problems of freedom of love<sup>304</sup>.” He was not able to see that freedom of love is intrinsically related with the emancipation of women and men. He could not understand the power relations hidden in love and sexuality.

However, due to demands of a democratic politics the time the party established its women’s organization, AIPWA, in 1994. All India Progressive Women’s Association supported 33

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<sup>300</sup> Vinod Mishra, ‘The Dalit Question’ in Vinod Mishra Selected Writings, p.193.

<sup>301</sup> Rajnitik Sangathanatmak Report, Sixth Party Congress, p.63.

<sup>302</sup> Vinod Mishra, ‘Learning The ABC of Marxism’ in Vinod Mishra Selected Writings, p.424.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

percent reservation for women. AIPWA organized a huge procession to constituent assembly in 1996 against Bathani Tola massacre. It also demanded the establishment of Women Commission for the state. Nonetheless it could not understand the internal differentiation among women. Third wave feminism has raised the issue of intersectionality which requires a serious theorization in Indian context. Most of the party cadres are not aware of these issues. Only in recent years, Kavita Krishnan has intervened on gender question in a powerful way but still she has to cover a long journey in this direction.

Vinod Mishra's secularism had no place for religion, he believed in the policy of *Sarva Dharma Varjite*<sup>305</sup>. However, for various reasons the negation of religion could not be followed in the everyday politics. Religion was still strong in rural Bihar and at many occasions communal tensions increased due to religious reasons. In rural areas Hindus and Muslims often fought for the land of Karbala and Imambara. In these situations the party had to take a clear stand, and the party often supported Muslims because they were numerically small. Party documents say that in Bathanitola, too, the main reason for the struggle was the land of Karbala. Ironically the party which was struggling to save the land of Imambaras in villages adopted the view that a national monument in memory of the heroes of 1857 should be built at the place of Babri Mosque<sup>306</sup>. Vinod Mishra could not realize that such type of secularism proves equally dangerous for minorities. Due to his commitment to atheism, he criticized Radhakrishnan's definition of secularism as *Sarva Dharma Sambhava*. He also criticised Gandhian method of invoking Ram-rajya in the freedom struggle and thought that it was the main reason for alienation of Muslims<sup>307</sup>. CPI ML's knowledge of history has always been very limited. Gandhi repeatedly claimed that his Ram-raj is also Khudai-raj. Vinod Mishra's reductionist interpretation of alienation of Muslims downplays the role of number-game in modern democracies.

CPI ML always criticised the attempt at saffronization by BJP and Hindu Right. Vinod was apprehensive about "transformation of Ram from a cultural, religious-mythical figure to a

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<sup>305</sup> Vinod Mishra, 'India of My Dreams' in Selected Writing Vinod Mishra, p.14.

<sup>306</sup> Vinod Mishra, 'Exposing The Saffron Scheme' in Selected Writing, p.125

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid*, p.124.

national hero with arrows targeted against Muslim ‘invaders’<sup>308</sup>.” He rightly pointed out that Ravana of Ram-katha imprisoned Sita, the Ravanas of Sangh Parivar have imprisoned Ram himself for their political manipulation<sup>309</sup>.” Vinod further says, “Ram has to be freed from their clutches to restore him to the spiritual-religious domain of his worshippers<sup>310</sup>.” Vinod and his party could not realize that the shift of religion from ontic to epistemic realm is an irreversible process. The party was not in position to start a serious deliberation on the role of religion and to use progressive elements of religion for its politics.

In the name of rational interpretation CPI ML constructed Hindu Past in the most irrational way. Aryan invasion theory was used by Vinod Mishra to emphasise their foreign origin<sup>311</sup>. CPI ML was never interested in the complex debate on Aryan and Dravidian categories. According to Vinod Mishra the local hostile tribes of Dravidians were personified as Rakshas. Such an anthropocentric interpretation of myths does violence with both myth and history. Contrary to Hinduism Vinod found many things as progressive in Islam. Monotheism of Islam was perceived by Vinod as the movement for unification among warring tribes. Vinod could not see that violence is intrinsic part of monotheistic philosophy. He also argued that Islam elevated the status of women. There is a growing debate which talk about the status of women in Islam ; however Vinod could not address these problems of Islam and did not talk about reformation in Islam which could emancipate millions of suffering women across the globe. Vinod accepts that The Inquilabi Muslim Conference which was launched by the party “failed to intervene in the debates within the community on the question of women, reservations for Dalit Muslim, etc<sup>312</sup>.”

Marxists think that secular and disenchanting language used by them is rational. They forget that rationality has its own context and these secular languages are primarily meant for fulfilling the interest of Nation-states and modern myths of liberty, freedom and progress. The ideology of nation-state is no less religious than any religion and it is no less mythical than any myth. Vinod Mishra said, “Since its inception, CPI ML has declared the unification

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<sup>308</sup> *Ibid*,p.115.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid*,116.

<sup>312</sup> Vinod Mishra, ‘The Muslim Question’ in Vinod Mishra Selected Works, p.201

of India as its principal goal<sup>313</sup>.” Fifth Party Congress even envisaged, “a confederation of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to undo the partition of our great country”<sup>314</sup>. Again CPI ML constructed the past of its “great country” with a teleological view. People can ask whether this “great country” existed before 1947 or not.

Nonetheless the role of CPI ML against fighting National chauvinism seems to be relevant. Political Organisational Report adopted at the Fifth Party Congress (1992) says that under the pretext of enforcing national unity from above, the Indian state has only been strengthening its reactionary apparatus, enacting draconian laws and legitimising fake encounters and mass killings<sup>315</sup>. In the July 1984 issue of *Liberation*, Vinod condemned the attack on the Golden Temple. Although he did not support Khalistan movement, he believed that “it was Indira Gandhi who made a Frankenstein out of Bhindrawale to meet her political ends<sup>316</sup>.” He also criticised Indira for refusing to hold any serious and meaningful dialogue with the Akalis<sup>317</sup>.

The party initially supported the separatist movement led by ULFA. In 1991, ULFA was praised by Vinod Mishra for “opting Mao’s thought as its ideological weapon in its struggle against Indian super-national interest<sup>318</sup>.” However, the party’s stand on ULFA changed dramatically when its member Anil Barua was murdered by ULFA. Vinod declared, “ULFA is no more a democratic or progressive force. Hence their ‘Free Assam’ promises to be nothing but a fascist Assam<sup>319</sup>.” Vinod soon recognized that every struggle for self-determination and for regionalism was not a progressive one. Vinod also criticised Jharkhand movement led by Shibu Soren on account of the bourgeois character of its leadership. He said, “Comrade A K Roy was mistaken when he thought that Jharkhand, the state of tribals, whose society contains the feature of primitive communism, would itself transform into a Lalkhand. In the process he could only give birth to a primitive bourgeois Sibua Soren<sup>320</sup>.” CPI ML could not see internal differentiation among Tribal society. A Santhal woman is not

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<sup>313</sup> Vinod Mishra, ‘On National Unity’ in Vinod Mishra Selected Works, p.202.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> Vinod Mishra, ‘Oppose Army Action in Punjab’ in Vinod Mishra Selected Writings, p.203.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>318</sup> Vinod Mishra, ‘Mao and His Thought’ in Vinod Mishra Selected Works, p.207.

<sup>319</sup> Vinod Mishra, ‘On Anil Barua’ in Vinod Mishra Selected Works, p.209.

<sup>320</sup> Vinod Mishra, ‘On Party’s Political Tactics’ in Selected Works, p.345.

allowed to plough her land, she cannot build the roof of her hut, and she cannot touch an arrow. A Santali poet Nirmala Putul has vividly described this gender hierarchy among Tribal society in her collection of poems which has been translated in Hindi as *Nagade Ki Tarah Bajte Hain Shabd*. During my stay in Oraon tribal villages, I came to know that Oraon people do not share food with other tribes and hostility between different tribal groups was a common feature of rural Jharkhand. Inter tribal marriage was also not permitted among Oraon and other tribes. Tribalism is similar to casteism in many aspects and a tribal chief, Moti Oraon, of an oraon village located at Rohtas Garh fort, acknowledged this fact that *oraons* are gradually adopting many rituals of Brahmans. CPI ML never contemplated on the issue of complex interplay between ethnicity, class and gender within tribal society.



## Chapter-4

### The Vicious Cycle of Violence

Dhvast Kiya Bhita, Ekvari Abki Hai Belaur Ki Bari  
(Bihta and Ekvari have been smashed now it is the turn of Belaur)  
-CPI ML

Na ha Bihata na Ekvari Maley Ke Bhoot Belaure Jhari  
( This is not Bihta, not Ekvari, the ghost of ML would be cured only by Belaur)

-Ranvir Sena

In August 1994, a meeting was held in Belaur village regarding the issue of increasing dominance of Naxalites in the village<sup>321</sup>. Many peasants from neighbouring villages also participated in the meeting and with consensus of people gathered there it was decided to establish Ranvir Kisan Samiti to check the Naxal Violence and safeguard the interest of upper caste peasants. It was mainly congregation of Bhumihar peasants in which some Brahman and Rajput peasants had also been invited. In the initial phase, Vakil Chaudhary and Dharichhan Chaudhary of Belaur village and Barmeshvar Singh of Khopira village played a prominent role in organising Ranvir Kisan Samiti. Barmeshvar Singh was a rich peasant who possessed 60 acres of land and few days ago the armed propaganda squad of CPI ML had fired shots in air to threaten his labourers<sup>322</sup>. Due to his poor health Vakil Chaudhary was not able to run this organization and he appointed Barmeshvar Singh as the chief of the organisation<sup>323</sup>. Barmeshvar Singh later emerged as the most charismatic leader of Ranvir Kisan Samiti and soon he organized many village committees and district committees of Ranvir Kisan Samiti across the 'Central Bihar.' When armed squads of the organisation

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<sup>321</sup> Police Case Diary, Mianpur Massacre Case, p.25.

<sup>322</sup> Interview with Chandan Singh of khopira village on 16 August 2015.

<sup>323</sup> Interview with Ravindar Master, Ravindar Master played an important role in Ranvir Kisan Samiti.

Operation Black Rain, a video made by sting operation, shows that he was an important leader of Ranvir Sena.

started massacring Liberation cadres soon Ranvir Kisan Samiti became popular as Ranvir Sena in electronic and print media<sup>324</sup>.

Formation of Ranvir Kisan Samiti was not an accident. Few days before the formation of the organisation Naxalites had killed a bhumihaar peasant of Belaur village. They had also killed a bus conductor who was the staff of Dharichhan Chaudhary<sup>325</sup>. The armed squad of CPI ML was always present in the village and one day more than three hundred Naxalites attacked the village. However, the village was saved due to the collective resistance of youths; many of them were army personnel who had come in the village on leave<sup>326</sup>. Belaur is a big village comprising 500 Bhumihaar houses and many youths of Bhumihaars are in the army and police.

Naxalites not only resorted to physical violence, they had discovered many tactics to terrorize peasants. Most oppressive of them was the tactic of Economic Blockade<sup>327</sup>. Sometimes it was imposed on some particular peasants and at other times it was forced on the entire village of upper caste. Imposition of economic blockade meant that peasants could not plough their land and labourers of the village would completely leave agricultural work in fields of those farmers against whom the blockade was imposed. Even labourers from other villages were not allowed to do any work in the fields of landlords. Due to economic blockade many rich peasants called labourers from North Bihar villages at the time of plantation of seedlings or harvesting of crops. In such circumstances, often violent struggle broke out between Naxalites and peasants. In many villages the economic condition of peasants degenerated as a result of prolonged economic blockade imposed by Naxalites. Generally, the victims of economic blockade were upper caste peasants whose most fundamental right, the right to livelihood, was snatched by the Naxalites. If someone tried to oppose the blockade his name was immediately included in 'annihilation list' or 'Hit List.' Naxalites generally put up these Hit Lists on the wall of the villages.

The terror of Naxalites increased day-by-day and many peasants left agricultural work. When CPI ML won Sahar and Sandesh seats in Assembly election it imposed economic blockades

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<sup>324</sup> Punyadev Sharma an accused in Mianpur massacre case said in his statement that initial name of the organisation was 'Ranvir Samiti.' See Also. Police case Diary, Mianpur Massacre Case, p. 25.

<sup>325</sup> Bela Bhatia, *Justice Not Vengeance*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.48, Issue No.38, 21 Sep.2013, p.46.

<sup>326</sup> Interview with Bharat Chaudhary, Belaur.

<sup>327</sup> Rajesh Joshi, *Terror in White*, Outlook, December 1997.

on many peasants<sup>328</sup>. Investigating Officer's Report of Bathani Tola massacre reveals the fact that before Bathani Tola massacre land of Badki Kharaon (the village from where, it is supposed, that attackers had come) was lying fallow and it was one of the main cause of tension between ML cadres of Bathani Tola and upper caste peasants of Badki Khadaon<sup>329</sup>. In the judgement of Bathani Tola massacre case it has been mentioned that, "at the time of occurrence (date) all fields situated in Bathani Tola were lying barren because from one year back of the occurrence date, no crop was grown in those fields due to the tussle between landlords and labourers and high wild grass had grown up in those fields around Bathani Tola<sup>330</sup>." Land which was earlier a source of prosperity and power became a burden for many peasants. For agricultural work peasants had to work in their fields which was dangerous for their life considering the Naxal threat in the region. The terror of Naxalites was so pervasive that even in relatively peaceful villages upper caste peasants preferred to lease out their land and many of them sold the land which was located at some distance. In Chhitan Dihra village, in Buxar district, when a rich peasant was murdered by Naxalites his family members sold 50 bighas land which was located outside the village<sup>331</sup>. In Sahar and Sandesh block of Bhojpur many peasants sold their land to middle caste peasants. Land became curse for upper caste peasants and many of them started migrating towards cities for new future prospects. For some people the land transfer from upper castes to middle castes was the cause of anxiety while for others it was a source of happiness. Jitendra Rai, son of Shivjee Rai once said, "People should not worry about land transfer from upper castes to middle castes. We should be happy that we are transferring our burden on to their shoulders<sup>332</sup>." In nineties, land had lost its aura and people had started preferring government jobs. In seventies and eighties, for rich peasants government job was not a decent occupation. They used to say, "*Uttam krishi/ Madhyam Ban/ Adham Chakri Bhikh Nidan.*" However, for many peasants agriculture was only source of livelihood. Many peasants who were illiterate were not able to get a decent job in cities. They continued to work in their fields which had now become graveyards for these illiterate people.

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<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>329</sup> Arrah Sessions Court Judgement, Bathani Tola Massacre Case, p.18.

<sup>330</sup> Arrah Sessions Court Judgement, Bathanitola case, p.18.

<sup>331</sup> Interview with Abhisek Rai, Chhitan Dihra village.

<sup>332</sup> Interview with Jitendra Rai, Mansagar Village.

Naxalites did not miss any opportunity to kill upper caste peasants and many of them were killed in their Khalihans. Some of them were murdered while they were working in their fields. Naxalites also destroyed alternative means of livelihood. They burnt tractors of many poor peasants. Nathuni Singh's family was once the owner of a transport company but Naxalites soon burnt all his buses. Due to the fear of Naxalites rich peasants avoided buying harvesters which was a lucrative business. Till nineties, there was not a single harvester in Bhojpur while rich peasants of Buxar bought many harvesters and earned huge cash during this period. In Buxar district, one can easily find ten to twenty harvesters in many villages. In Mukhraon village, I found that a peasant had eight harvesters and he had nearly 25 drivers and assistants from Punjab. Peasants generally prefer Punjabi drivers and technicians because they are well trained to handle harvesters. Till nineties, harvester was a dream in Bhojpur; Naxalites had destroyed every opportunity of livelihood. Many peasants who were engaged in petty government contracts also became jobless because it was not easy to complete a construction project in Naxal-prone area without paying levy to them.

Within few years peasants became so poor that even rich ones were not able to afford education for their children. Education of upper caste girls was seriously affected in the era of Naxal violence. They had to confine themselves in their households because their parents feared that Naxalites can do anything with these girls. Their fear was not in vain. Generally, illiterate Naxalites used to abuse these girls on loudspeakers in many villages. These girls were not able to attend schools and they could not get their matriculation degree. These girls faced severe problems at the time of marriage, because in nineties, many families preferred educated brides. In Bhojpur's villages only arranged marriages were in vogue. There was no chance of love marriages in a caste-ridden society and arrange marriages required a huge amount of dowry. Before the formation of Ranvir Sena, people generally avoided making any marital relation in Naxal-affected villages. A peasant residing in Naxal-affected village faced very difficult situation in finding a bridegroom for his daughter. Some peasants had to spend four to five years in the search of a bridegroom. I have already mentioned that only in some fixed periods of the year a father could search a bridegroom. The life of upper caste women was so badly affected by Naxal violence that these women had hardly any sympathy with Naxalites and it is said that in Belaur village it were women who first organised a procession

against Naxalites and gave the slogan-*Sona Becho Loha Kharido*. A resident of Kurmuri village said, “In those days it was extremely shocking to see that women celebrated massacres carried on by Ranvir Sena and they happily cooked food for armed squads and leaders of Ranvir Sena.”

Another cause which was equally responsible for aggression of upper caste peasants was annihilation tactic used by Naxalites. In Bhojpur’s villages annihilation always resulted in caste-polarisation. Naxalites thought that when they would annihilate rich peasants poor ones would remain silent. They could not realize this fact that many poor peasants were related to the rich peasants through kinship ties. Naxalites also killed many poor peasants by stereotyping them as henchmen of rich landlords. Sometimes humble people were also killed by Naxalites because they were soft target. In Diul village, they killed Dinanath Pandey who was widely considered a nice person. Even lower caste persons resented his murder<sup>333</sup>. In every Naxal affected village, we can find that Naxalites killed many innocent people. For upper castes it became clear that Naxalites are killing them only on account of their identity and passivity on their part.

Before the formation of Ranvir Sena, many a times upper castes had tried to build solidarity along the caste line at village or inter-village level. In Ekvari village, after the murder of Shivpoojan Singh, Jagdish Singh tried to organise upper caste peasants in the initial phase of the Naxalite movement. However, Jagdish Singh and his supporters were brutally murdered by Naxalites<sup>334</sup>. In Chavari, too, upper caste peasants were organised against Naxalites and they played a crucial role in eradicating *krantikari Sarkar*(Revolutionary Government) of Ganeshi Dusadh. In Gurpa village, Naxalites murdered five Bhumihar peasants under the leadership of Sheela Chaterjee. In retaliation, Bhumihars attacked the Dalit hamlet of the village<sup>335</sup>. However, all these organisations were working only at the village level. Sometimes upper castes showed solidarity at inter-village level too. In Chavari many Bhumihars from different villages had gathered to fight the armed squad of CPI ML. In Bahuara, too, more than 300 Bhumihars had gathered with their guns and rifles to fight

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<sup>333</sup> Interview with Surendra Pandey.

<sup>334</sup> Kalyan Mukherjee, *Bhojpur: Bihar Me Naxalvadi Andolan*,p.57.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid*, p.111.

Naxalites<sup>336</sup>. Jwala Singh, a rich Rajput landlord of Danvar Bihta village, whose supporters had killed 19 cadres of CPI ML had strong support among upper caste peasants. However, he could not build a permanent organisation which could counter Naxal violence. Jwala Singh was killed by Naxalites in a landmine blast near Piro. After the death of Jwala Singh upper caste peasants became disenchanted and Vinod Mishra claimed that his party had smashed upper caste mobilisation done by Jwala Singh<sup>337</sup>. In Badahra region some Rajput landlords had built Ganga Sena to save them from Naxal violence<sup>338</sup>. Ganga Sena became defunct within few years of its formation.

Ranvir Sena was unique in its organisational capacity. It soon extended its network across the whole central Bihar. Its influence was in Bhojpur, Rohtas, Buxar, Gaya, Aurangabad, Patna, Jahanabad, Navada and in many other districts of South Bihar<sup>339</sup>. CPI ML could not realize Ranvir Sena's potential in the initial phase of its formation. Sixth Party Congress said, "Ranvir Sena could have been nipped in the bud. It is true that at that juncture however, we could not grasp the full implication of this phenomenon and saw that struggle at Belaur as a local phenomenon confined to the village. Caste mobilisation, however, was spreading quite fast and soon clashes began in many Sandesh(a block of Bhojpur) villages and landlords in hitherto dormant Sahar villages too started exhibiting activism<sup>340</sup>."

Police Case Diary of Mianpur massacre case reveals that the organisation was working at four levels-village committee, subdivision committee, district committee and state committee<sup>341</sup>. The district committee was constituted by five permanent members and equal number of non-permanent members<sup>342</sup>. In the state committee there were eleven members which were headed by Barmeshvar Singh of Bhojpur. Punyadev Sharma, an accused in massacre case, accepts that the organisation had not too much arms. According to details given by him the organisation had six A K 47 rifles, Twenty eight SLR, fifty-.315 rifles and

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<sup>336</sup> After Thirty Years of Naxalbari,

<sup>337</sup> Vinod Mishra, 'More on Ranvir Sena' in Political Organisational Report, Sixth Party Congress, a CPI ML Document.

<sup>338</sup> Rajnitik Sangathnatmak report, Sixth Party Congress, 1997, CPI ML Publication, p.44.

<sup>339</sup> Bhavesh Kumar's statement in Mianpur Police Case Diary, p.25.

<sup>340</sup> Vinod Mishra, 'More On The Ranvir Sena' in Vinod Mishra Selected Works, p.158

<sup>341</sup> Police Case Diary, Mianpur Massacre Case, p.25.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

one MMG which was distributed at the level of district committee<sup>343</sup>. However, the organisation was able to collect huge number of arms from upper caste villages. Case diary mentions that in Mianpur massacre case fifteen arms were brought from Chauram village and the rest were brought from Bhojpur<sup>344</sup>. Two accused persons accepted in their statement that a gunsmith from Limda village of Jehanabd district had made many guns for the organisation and the quality of arms made by the gunsmith was no less than licensed arms.

The main source of income of the organisation was money collected from upper caste peasants. The membership fee was five rupees and peasants annually paid a certain amount money which was fixed by the organisation at the rate of per *Bigha* land<sup>345</sup>. The rate was very nominal and peasants happily gave the donation. Force was never used to collect money from peasants. Many supporters of Ranvir Sena who were in government jobs were expected to give salary of fifteen days per year to the organisation<sup>346</sup>. The organisation was also able to draw a huge support from upper castes of other states. Many leaders of Ranvir Sena accept that Tyagies of Uttar Pradesh, Rajputs of Rajasthan and some Tamil Brahmins were blind supporter of the organisation<sup>347</sup>. Some Non Resident Indians also sent money for the organisation. In those days there was an organisation named Doctor Beyond Borders which provided financial support to the organisation. When the power of organisation increased its sympathisers donated a lot of money to the organisation. Later Ranvir Sena started massacring people for fulfilling the goals of political parties, at that period of time it had no dearth of financial resources.

### **The Psychology of Massacres**

Before the formation of Ranvir Sena, CPI ML used the tactic of individual annihilation of upper castes. The tactic of annihilation continued for more than two decades and in many villages innocent people belonging to upper castes were killed by Naxalites. In its initial

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<sup>343</sup> Police Case Diary, Mianpur Massacre Case,p.25.

<sup>344</sup> Police Case Diary, Miyanpur Massacre Case,p.48.

<sup>345</sup> Police Case Diary, Miyanpur Massacre Case.p.26.

<sup>346</sup> Police Case Diary, Miyanpur Massacre Case.p.26.

<sup>347</sup> Interview with Sriman Narayan and Chandan Singh.

phase, Ranvir Sena was interested in killing only members of armed squads of Naxalites. In Khopira, Sarathua, Chandi, Pathalpura and Nanaur it killed only ML cadres and the number of people killed was generally three to six in every massacre<sup>348</sup>. In retaliation CPI ML killed eight innocent peasants at Narhi village in Bhojpur in 1996. Though CPI ML has always claimed that its cadres murdered only supporters of Ranvir Sena, the truth is that it could not kill even a single member of armed squad of Ranvir Sena for a long time. Political Organisational report of Sixth Party Congress(1997) says that ML cadres killed seventy six supporters of Ranvir Sena during the period of 1994 to 1997 while newspapers and books discuss only killings of eight upper caste people by CPI ML in Narhi Massacre during the period<sup>349</sup>. It shows that the number of people killed in everyday violence was higher than those killed in massacres. The same document also reveals that Ranvir Sena killed 162 people and 20 of them were active members of the party<sup>350</sup>.

Table-1 The Chronology of Massacres in “Central Bihar”

Year	Place	District	Name of the Organisation which was involved in the massacre	Victims	Number of persons killed
1995	Khopira	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	3
	Sarathua	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	6
	Gulzarbigha	Aurangabad	Police	PU Cadres	4
1996	Chandi	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	4
	Pathalpura	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	3
	Mathanbigha	Aurangabad	Police	MCC cadres	7
	Nanaur	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	5
	Nadhi	Bhojpur	CPI-ML cadres	Bhumihar Peasants	8
	Nadhi	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	9
	Morath	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	3
	Bathanitola	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	Families of ML Supporters	22

<sup>348</sup> See. Table-1, The Chronology of Massacre.

<sup>349</sup> *Rajnitik sangathanmak Report*, Sixth Party Congress, A CPI ML Publication, p.42.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*



	Purhara	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	4
	Khanet	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	5
	Ekwari	Bhojpur	Upper Caste Peasants	M L Cadres	6
1997	Khanet	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	3
	Machil	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	3
	Haibaspur	Patna	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	10
	Akhopur	Jehanabad	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	4
	Jalpura	Patna	PU cadres	Upper caste Peasants	11
	Indo	Patna	Police	PU cadres	6
	Ekwari	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	M L Cadres	10
	K-hadasin	Jehanabad	Ranvir Sena	Dalits	8
	K-odihara	Patna	Police	PU cadres	2
	Katesar Nala	Jehanabad	Ranvir Sena	SC/agri. labourers	6
	Lakshmanpur-Bathe	Jehanabad	Ranvir Sena	Family Members of ML Cadres	58
	Chauram	Jehanabad	CPI(ML) Liberation	Upper caste/landlords	9
1998	Nagri	Bhojpur	Ranvir Sena	Armed Squad of CPI ML	10
	Aiyara	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Sigori	Gaya	Police	MCC	6
	Rampur-Aiyara	Jehanabad	PU cadres	Upper caste/landlords	7
	Mahadevbigha	Gaya	Police	MCC cadres	4
1999	Shankarbigha	Jehanabad	Ranvir Sena	SC/agri. labourers	23
	Narayanpur	Jehanabad	Ranvir Sena	SC/agri. labourers	11
	Usri Bazar	Jehanabad	Liberation cadres	Marginal Peasants	7
	Bheempura	Jehanabad	PW cadres	Marginal Peasants	4
	Senari	Jehanabad	MCC cadres	Family Members of Bhumihar Peasants	35
	Sujathpur	Buxar	Police	Liberation cadres	16
	Sendani	Gaya	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste & SC	12
2000	Lakhisarai	Lakhisarai	Backward caste/Contractors	SC/Sand workers	11
	Rajebigha	Nawada	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste/Middle farmers	5
	Afsar	Nawada	Backward caste/Middle farmers	Upper caste landlords	12
	Mianpur	Aurangabad	Ranvir Sena	Family Members of	35

				MCC Cadres	
	DharDumariyan	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	Armed squad of CPI ML	6
2001	Chironichi bigha	Gaya	MCC cadres	Police	6
	Kariambura	Jehanabad	Police	PW cadres	5

Source:1. Prakash Louis, *People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar*, pp.242-246. 2. Times of India, Dainik Jagran, Hindustan and other News Papers

After Narhi Massacer in which eight Bhumihar peasants were killed by CPI ML, Ranvir Sena killed nine ML cadres in the same village. Later in Morath, Purahra, Khanet and Ekvari villages ML cadres were killed by Ranvir Sena. In All these massacres generally three to six people were killed. In meantime, villages located near Bathani Tola became another centre of conflict, the main cause for the conflict was economic blockade imposed by ML cadres on peasants of Badki Khadaon village<sup>351</sup>. Armed squad of CPI ML was present in Bathani Tola and it used to terrorize peasants of neighbouring villages. An altercation broke out between ML cadres and Rajput landlords of Kanpahri, Navadih and Barki Khadaon village<sup>352</sup>. ML cadres killed two Rajput peasants of barki Khadaon in the leadership of Nayeemuddin Ansari, after which the situation became very tense<sup>353</sup>. Armed squad of Ranvir Sena also started its activity in these villages. In Kanpahri village it attacked the congregation of ML cadres. On 11<sup>th</sup> July,1996 when the armed squad of Ranvir Sena was passing near Bathani Tola, the armed squad of CPI ML attacked Sena men. Many Bhumihar and Rajput peasants of neighbouring villages also started firing shots in air. After long hours of exchange of fires armed squad of CPI ML ran away and Ranvir Sena entered into Bathani Tola and killed eighteen people including women and children.

It was the first time when Ranvir Sena killed women and children. Its squad commander Visheshvar Singh alias Sadhujee, who was a dreaded criminal before joining Ranvir sena,

<sup>351</sup> See. Ara Session Court Judgement on Bathani Tola Massacre Case, p.18.

<sup>352</sup> Vinod Miahra, 'Bathani Tola Massacre' in Vinod Mishra Selected Works,p.254

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*

declared that “every child of ML cadres is sweet poison<sup>354</sup>.” In upper caste villages people say that Sadhuji used to say that the womb of a dalit woman is the factory of Naxalites<sup>355</sup>. Generally, it was Sadhujee who killed women and children in massacres. The post-mortem report of Bathani Tola shows that women and children were brutally murdered by armed squad of Ranvir Sena. A girl of ten year, Phula Kumari, was stabbed in her chest and a six year old boy’s neck was cut by the armed squad. Many other people were killed in a brutal manner. This brutality and the mentality of revenge were deriving its force from caste-consciousness. The feeling of revenge was also present in Naxalites and this feeling was equally deriving its force from caste consciousness. Sixth Party Congress says, “In Ara Town a grenade was hurled at our Mahadharna killing one comrade and injuring many others. This prompted a general call for retaliation against Bhumihars even remotely connected with Ranvir Sena<sup>356</sup>.” For CPI ML retaliation meant annihilation. It was beyond expectation that a communist Party could speak such a casteist language.

Statements given by accused persons in Mianpur massacre case shows that revenge was not directed towards individual, it was always directed against every member belonging to some particular castes. Butan Sharma , the area commander of Jahanabad district, accepted that in Senari village of Jehanabad martyrdom day was organised by the villagers on 18 March 2000 and was decided that they will take revenge of killings of forty Bhumihars of the village by MCC<sup>357</sup>. Villagers of Senari believed that in the Senari massacre people of Mianpur village were involved and therefore it was decided to massacre all men, women and children of Mianpur<sup>358</sup>. The other accused in Mianpur Massacer case, Satish Sharma, also accepted that after Senari massacre in which many Bhumihars had been killed by Naxalite, many youths joined Ranvir sena to teach a lesson to MCC<sup>359</sup>. Punyadev Sharma, an accused in Mianpur Massacer case, was a researcher and he was interested in Kabir. However, after murder of

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<sup>354</sup> The “Sweet Poison” statement is popular in many upper caste villages.

<sup>355</sup> Interview with Bhola Singh, Kurmuri village.

<sup>356</sup> *Rajnitik Sangathanatmak Report*, Sixth Party Congress, CPI ML, p.90.

<sup>357</sup> Mianpur Massacre Case, Police Case Diary, p. 47.

<sup>358</sup> Mianpur Case Diary, p.47.

<sup>359</sup> Mianpur Police Case Diary, p.43.

seven men from his village by Naxalites his mind changed and he became an active member of Ranvir Sena<sup>360</sup>.

Statements of these accused persons clearly show that they were committing massacres for revenge. Some people argue that massacres were political plot. Even if we accept this conspiracy theory then too we cannot downplay the role of caste antagonism and hatred towards others. Members of armed squads were not aware of political deals happening at higher level and they were working day and night for saving the “dignity” of their caste<sup>361</sup>. Bhavesh Singh, a prisoner of Bhumihar caste, wrote a letter to Amirdas Ayog in which he mentioned that the main cause behind the formation of Ranvir Sena was atrocities done on Bhumihar caste by Lalu Prasad government and Naxalites<sup>362</sup>. He mentioned Bara Massacre in which thirty four Bhumihar peasants were killed by MCC. Bara Massacre was perpetrated by MCC before the formation of Ranvir Sena. Ranvir Sena always invoked Bara Massacre to legitimize its violence. Every massacre done by MCC was seen by Bhumihars as massacre done by Yadavs. In MCC, a large number of cadres and leaders belonged to Yadav caste. In Senari, MCC killed innocent women and children belonging to Bhumihar caste which showed the casteist character of MCC. After Senari massacre Ranvir Sena chose Mianpur, a Yadav hamlet, as its target and killed 33 men, women and children.

Administration also played a major role in increasing the caste hatred among different castes. Whenever Ranvir Sena committed a massacre, neighbouring villages of upper castes were collectively fined by invoking Bihar Collective Fines Imposition Act(1982)<sup>363</sup>. Generally common villagers did not have any idea about Ranvir Sena’s strategy and sometimes massacre was planned in Bhojpur and it was committed at Jahanabad. Sena-men used to cross the Sone River on boats and after committing the crime they returned to their villages in Bhojpur. However, it was the trend of administration to charge sheet every young and old man of neighbouring villages belonging to Bhumihar Caste. It was this wrong tactic used by administration which misguided the whole investigation process and proved harmful in long

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<sup>360</sup> Mianpur Police Case Diary,p.21.

<sup>361</sup> Bhavesh Singh to Amirdas Ayog, Unpublished letter.

<sup>362</sup> Bhavesh Singh to Amirdas Ayog, An unpublished letter.

<sup>363</sup> The investigating officer of Mianpur Case recommended that collective fine should be imposed on people belonging to a particular caste. See. Police Case Diary, Mianpur Massacre Case,p. 284.

run. Many massacre accused were acquitted later by Patna High Court. In many cases Police could not charge sheet real culprits because police investigation in most of the cases was completely biased which continued in a particular direction and relied on soft targets of neighbouring villages. In the name of trial innocent people were harassed on account of their caste identity and thus caste became more entrenched. In those days, Lower Caste Darogas frequently raided upper caste households at mid-night. Mostly the raid was done with caste prejudice and the main intention was to create trouble for upper caste peasants. In a Jehanabad village during such a raid upper caste women were brutally beaten by Police after which Patna High Court took suo-motu cognizance<sup>364</sup>. At least 40 women were hospitalized in Jehanabad Sadar Hospital who were beaten by rifles and lathies<sup>365</sup>.

The police was also operating with the same *psychology of massacre* which believes that every men women and children belonging to some particular identities are culprits. The *psychology of massacre* derived its force through different symbolic actions. In Bathani Tola CPI ML built a statue in the memory of those who were killed by Ranvir Sena. The sculptor is so horrible that after seeing it many lower caste persons start hating Bhumihars. CPI ML never built a statue in the memory of those innocent peasants who became the victim of its annihilation tactic. Ranvir Sena built a statue in Belaur village in the memory of Ranvir Baba. The statue is a pride for villagers and massacres of innocent women and children is seen by them as a brave act which is expected from the descendants of Ranvir Baba. The *psychology of massacre* somewhere derives its force from caste-pride.

Massacres were also associated with caste-pride. After the murder of Barmeshvar Singh millions of Bhumihars came openly in his support. Barmeshvar Singh was a pride for them. A violent funeral procession was organized after his death and this procession was seen by many Bhumihars as an act which brought glory to their caste. Many upper caste policemen also participated in the funeral procession in civil dress<sup>366</sup>. Barmeshvar Singh was a hero for Bhumihars and when the rumour was spread about his arrival in a Buxar village, thousands of

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<sup>364</sup> *The Times of India*, 2 August, 2000.

<sup>365</sup> *The Hindu*, July 30, 2000

<sup>366</sup> Interview with Sri Bhagvan Rai.

villagers gathered there to have a glimpse of this “great personality<sup>367</sup>.” He got nearly 1.5 lakh votes in Parliamentary election. It is believed that majority of upper castes preferred him over a BJP candidate who was also contesting from the same constituency. Till the date his martyrdom is celebrated in his native village in which across the party-line many politicians participate. Ironically many illiterate peasants and some shrewd politicians claim that he was the Gandhi of Bhojpur. Former Union Minister Akhilesh Prasad Singh claimed, “Such personalities are born in hundred-two hundred years. His stature remains higher than MP or MLA<sup>368</sup>.” Many upper caste people still believe that he was like a god for them.

The *psychology of massacre* is pervasive and it operates in literature, poetry, religion, history(as a discipline), anthropology and in our everyday language. It reduces a person to his immediate identity. It does not see any quality in people belonging to some particular identities. In 1992, Bihar Ex-Chief Minister openly said-*Bhura Bal Saaf Karo* (Wipe Out Bhumihars, Rajputs, Brahmans and Lalas)<sup>369</sup>. And when administration failed to contain Ranvir Sena he said, “Bhumihars are more dangerous than Pak-supported terrorists.” Not every Bhumihar was a supporter of Ranvir Sena, many of them remained loyal to Communist ideology despite this the caste was stereotyped in discourses and everyday language.

### **The politics of Massacres**

Many upper caste people still think that Ranvir Sena used violence for saving their property and life. They believe that they defeated Naxalites in the plain of ‘Central Bihar’ and thus indirectly they helped administration. In nineties upper caste peasants had not any hope from the state government. In Lalu’s regime casteism reached at its zenith. In Lalu Prasad’s regime Rashtriya Janta Dal supporters raised the slogan, “Bhumihar ko saf karo/Brahman ko half/Rajput ko chhod do/Lala to sala hai.” Democracy is run by consensus, debate and dialogues while majoritarianism always represses the voice of numerically smaller groups.

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<sup>367</sup> Interview with Shivjee Rai.

<sup>368</sup> Girdhar Jha, *Supporters Praise Ranvir Sena Founder Barmeshvar Singh*, India Today, June, 2015.

<sup>369</sup> The Telegraph, August 31, 2010.

Lalu Prasad's anti-upper caste rhetoric created a fear among upper caste men and for many of them Ranvir Sena was a tool to destabilize the state government.

After Bathani Tola massacre (1996) Ranvir Sena got attention in print and electronic media. Despite this it was still not a stooge of political parties. After Bathani Tola massacre Ranvir Sena killed ML cadres in Purahra, Khanet and Machil in Bhojpur. Amirdas aayog mentioned the name of many political leaders who supported Ranvir Sena. However, after the formation of Nitish government the Commission was dissolved. Generally it is believed that BJP and JDU had strong link with Ranvir Sena. However, in its initial phase Ranvir Sena never cared for BJP leaders. In Belaur village when Swaminath Tivari( a senior leader of BJP) appealed for peace no one paid attention to his words despite this fact that he was a respected leader of Bhumihars<sup>370</sup>. Swaminath Tivari has always been depicted as a supporter of Ranvir Sena in CPI ML's literature. Contrary to CPI ML's claim Swaminath Tivari travelled from village to village to establish peace in the region. In Ekvari village he organised a Gram-gaurav Yatra for peace and prosperity of the village. When the *Yatra* was organised Shantu Singh, the family member of Nathuni Singh, suddenly came and murdered the *chaukidar* of the village<sup>371</sup>. After this incidence Swaminath Tivari confined himself in Buxar region, he left interfering in Bhojpur's affairs.

Laxmanpur Bathe(Jehanabad) massacre in which 58 people were killed was a clear indication of politics involved in massacres. Though Laxmanpur Bathe was an ML village, the number of people killed was unexpectedly high. The choice of place also shows the political motive behind the massacre. Laxmanpur Bathe was located in Jehanabad district which was closer to Patna, Bhojpur and Aurangabad. Vinod Mishra said, "The essential purpose was to send the message across the whole of Central Bihar<sup>372</sup>." Through Bathe massacre Ranvir Sena posed a serious challenge to the state government and various groups of Naxalites. In those days, for the state government metaphor of the "Jungle Raj" had become popular in media. In retaliation to Laxmanpur Bathe massacre ML cadres killed nine upper caste people in

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<sup>370</sup> Interview with Swaminath Tiwari.

<sup>371</sup> Interview with Swaminath Tiwari. See. Rajesh Joshi, *Terror in White*, December 1997.

<sup>372</sup> Vinod Mishra, 'On Jehanabad Killings: The Battle Must Be Won' in Vinod Mishra Selected Works, p.268.

Chauram village in Jahanabad district. After Bathe massacre Ranvir Sena's influence increased and many political leaders tried to make contact with it.

Now, Ranvir Sena's focus on Jehanabad and neighbouring districts increased and organisation was strengthened across the whole central Bihar. However, not every massacre was guided by political factors; Ranvir Sena committed many massacres at small scale due to different reasons. Bhavendra Kumar Bhavesh, an accused in Mianpur Massacre case said in his statement that in 1998, at Nagri Bajar(Bhojpur) nearly fifty to sixty cadres of CPI ML had gathered to massacre Bhumihars of Nagri village<sup>373</sup>. Accidently the armed squad of Ranvir Sena reached there. ML cadres started firing in which Bablu Pandey a supporter of Ranvir Sena was killed<sup>374</sup>. In retaliation Ranvir Sena killed eleven ML cadres<sup>375</sup>. In 2000, when armed squad of Ranvir Sena was crossing the *tand* of Dharmadas Dumaria accidently it met with ML squad and after long hours of exchange of fire six ML cadres were killed<sup>376</sup>. However, killings of members of armed squad of CPI ML were represented in media as massacre of dalit labourers by feudal landlords.

In nineties, eighty percent of upper caste landholdings fell in the category of marginal and small<sup>377</sup>. If we look at the social composition of Ranvir Sena leadership except few leaders most of them were poor peasants. Barmeshvar Singh and Dharachhan Chaudhary were rich peasants because they held nearly eighty *Bighas* land. Second rank leaders were marginal peasants. Ravindar Master of Belaur village was a teacher in a private school and his salary was two thousand per month. Shivjee Rai had only four bighas of land. People who were active member of armed squad were also from poor background. Case diaries of different massacre cases show that most of the accused were marginal or small peasants. Many of them had not any criminal background. It was shocking to see that these poor peasants were fighting against Communist Parties. Though the CPI ML leadership was dominated by upper and middle castes yet it was not interested in making alliance with poor peasants of upper castes. A senior leader of CPI ML once said, "If we will try to make alliance with poor upper

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<sup>373</sup> Police Case Diary, Mianpur Massacre Case,p.32

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid*,p.33

<sup>377</sup> See.NSSO Data on Social Distribution of land, 59<sup>th</sup> Round.



castes, dalits would immediately leave our Party.” CPI ML never raised the voice of marginal peasants, its focus remained on agricultural labourers. In its literature CPI ML always represented Ranvir Sena as the private army of feudal and rich landlords. However, the truth was opposite. Ranvir Sena could not make its base among the rich peasants of Buxar. The main support base of Ranvir Sena was marginal and small peasants of “Central Bihar.”

In 1999, Ranvir Sena massacred 23 dalits in Jehanabad district on the eve of Republic Day. It is believed that the massacre was done to defame RJD government so that it could be dismissed by Central government before the next assembly election. Governor Sunder Singh Bhandari, who was an RSS man, demanded dismissal of the Rabri Government. The President of India also criticized the state government. However, it is believed that he was not ready to impose presidential rule in the state. Everyone in the state was aware of the fact that the next massacre by Ranvir Sena will bring imposition of presidential rule in the state. Ranvir Sena did not miss this “opportunity.” It massacred eleven agricultural labourers in Narayanpur(Jehanabad) after which President rule was imposed in Bihar by invoking article 356. However, the President Rule had to be revoked within few days because BJP had not enough number in Upper House of parliament.

### **Justice, Legality and Consensus**

Acquittal of massacre accused has always been represented in media as massacre of justice. However, justice is always *constrained* by legality. Judges cannot transgress legal norms, they cannot by-pass legal procedures. Legal procedures have their own loopholes and they create lacunas in over-all justice system. Jacques Derrida rightly says, legal is always contaminated by illegal. The police case diary of Bathani Tola Massacre shows that informant Kishun Chaudhary was an illiterate person and he had given thumb impression on his fardbayan<sup>378</sup>. The fardbayan is the statement on the basis of which a First Information Report is lodged. The fardbayan of Kishun Chaudhary and other witnesses were written in Hindi. As these people were illiterate, it was natural that they were not comfortable in Hindi. Language came between justice and legal procedure. For the possibility of justice they had to speak others’ language. Nonetheless by bringing themselves in others’ language these people

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<sup>378</sup> Police Case Diary, FIR no.98/1996, Police Station-Sahar, District –Bhojpur,pp.2-3.

subjugated themselves to a higher authority, somewhere their subjectivity was suppressed by more powerful. At certain occasions they had to retreat to silence. In the cross-examination at the Arrah Sessions Court, informant Kishun Chaudhary accepted that he was not able to recollect what was written by Sub-inspector of police<sup>379</sup>. It might be possible that Sub-inspector would have distorted his statement and would have read it incorrectly before his witness.

Prosecution witness Nayeemuddin gave three fardbayans at different places. In his first fardbayan he mentioned name of only two accused persons while in his second fardbayan he claimed to identify nearly forty accused persons<sup>380</sup>. Nayeemuddin was well aware that inconsistency in his different fardbayans would make his case weak. Probably it was the main cause why he later claimed that every time he was forced by police to put up his signature on the blank sheet of paper. Naimuddin's statement might have some truth but the opposite can also be true. Naimuddin was a politically conscious man and he was a local leader of CPI ML<sup>381</sup>. Earlier Nayeemuddin had filed a case against fourteen people for the land of Kabristan<sup>382</sup>. There was less probability that such a politically conscious man would put up his signature on the blank sheet of paper repeatedly three or four times. Nayeemuddin was also involved in a murder case before Bathani Tola Massacre. The defence had accused that Nayeemuddin was collecting money from accused persons by blackmailing them<sup>383</sup>. There was also discrepancy in identification of accused persons by Nayeemuddin. He had claimed that he identified 29 accused persons by the distance of 20 to 25 yards. However, in court he could identify only 15 accused persons<sup>384</sup>. Despite this the Session Court believed the story of Nayeemuddin and accepted his statement as authentic one<sup>385</sup>. Later Patna High Court completely rejected Nayeemuddin's story.

Patna High Court rightly pointed out that police investigation was in a particular direction and it never investigated in other directions. Not any leader and squad member of Ranvir

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<sup>379</sup> Arrah Sessions Court Judgement in State vs Ajay Singh and others, p.17

<sup>380</sup> Police Case Diary, Bathani Tola Massacre Case, pp.19-46.

<sup>381</sup> Ara Sessions Court Judgement, State vs. Ajay Singh and others, p.94.

<sup>382</sup> Vinod Mishra, 'Bathani Tola Massacre' in Vinod Mishra Selected Writings, p.254

<sup>383</sup> Ara Sessions Court Judgement, Bathani Tola Massacr Case, p.60.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid*, p. 61.

<sup>385</sup> Ara Sessions Court Judgement, Bathani Tola Massacre Case, p.61.

Sena was charge sheeted. Even Barmeshvar Singh's name was not included in the charge sheet. In Bhojpur's villages it is an open fact that Bathani Tola Massacre was done by the armed squad of Ranvir Sena and no one from Badki Khadaon village was the member of the armed squad. In upper caste villages many people know the name of members of the armed squad of Ranvir Sena. Many accused persons also revealed the name of members of the armed squad. An accused person in Mianpur massacre case informed about some of members of the armed squad of Ranvir Sena-Langar Singh(Kab, Patna), Alok Sharma(Chasi, Bhojpur), Gudan Rai(Guljarpur, Bhojpur), Shantu Singh(Ekvari, Bhojpur), Upendra Singh Magahiya(Paliganj, Patna) Visheshvar Rai(Bagar, Bhojpur), Goga Rai(Chasi, Bhojpur)<sup>386</sup>. These names are popular in Bhojpur's villages. For a long time Visheshvar Rai alias Sadhuji of Bagar village was the commander of the armed squad and almost in all massacres he participated. People say that it was Sadhuji who killed women and children in a brutal way. Later Sadhuji was murdered in Jehanabad jailbreak by Maoists<sup>387</sup>. We hardly find Sadhuji's name in police charge sheets, which shows the failure of state's intelligence network. Police could not arrest Sadhuji and other members of armed squad for a long time and they openly walked in Bhojpur's villages.

It seems that due to political pressure police arrested many innocent villagers of Badki Khadaon and made them accused in the case. Patna High Court also accepted that accused persons were arrested "like sitting ducks"<sup>388</sup>. Many accused persons were arrested from Badki Kharaon village while they were busy in their everyday work. The same story was repeated in every case of massacre. In Gangabigha massacre case, many Bhumihars from neighbouring villages were made accused. In Bathe Massacre(Jehanabad) many Bhumihars from nearby villages were charge sheeted despite this fact that the massacre was committed by Bhojpur's armed squad. In court judgements we find several instances where accused persons complained that they were made scapegoat only on account of their caste identity.

It was the time when upper caste people were not treated as trustworthy witnesses. In Bathani Tola Massacre case, Assistant Sub-Inspector Raghuraj Tivari, who was posted near Bathani

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<sup>386</sup> Police Case Diary, Mianpur Massacre Case,p.32.

<sup>387</sup> Bela Bhatia, *Jailbreak and The Maoist Movement*,Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.40, No.51, Dec.2005,p.5369.

<sup>388</sup> High Court Judgement, Bathani Tola Massacre Case, pp.9-10.

Tola, had claimed that the firing was started from Bathani Tola's side despite this no FIR was lodged against villagers of Bathani Tola<sup>389</sup>. Session Court did not believe the statement of Raghuraj Tivari<sup>390</sup>. Witnesses from Bathani Tola never mentioned that armed squad of CPI ML was present and it exchanged fire with Sena-men. AS Bathani Tola was an ML village and many of its residents were active member of CPI ML they knew this fact that acknowledging truth will bring a police investigation against them. It has already been mentioned that the document of Sixth Party Congress accepted that armed squad of CPI ML was present in Bathani Tola and it exchanged fire with the opposite party on the day of massacre.

In media, the judgement of Patna High Court which acquitted all accused persons was represented as denial of Justice. Parallel to judiciary, a *trial* was started in media. A *trial* without witnesses, without any material evidence, without any recorded statements of victims and accused persons was started in print and electronic media. Media never asked why witnesses fabricated false stories, why they turned hostile and recorded different statements at different times. In seminars and public meetings it was openly said that judiciary was casteist. It is worth to mention that the Session Court Judge who awarded death sentence of some of accused persons involved in Bathani Tola massacre was also an upper caste man. If judiciary at its lowest level is not casteist, how one can claim that its higher bodies are casteist.

Time and again media asked a single question who killed the people of BathaniTola. An activist asked, "If the court finds all the accused innocent then it must also tell who are guilty." Judiciary cannot give such answers, it is responsibility of police to investigate the case and frame charge sheet against accused persons. *The Indian Express* criticized High Court Judgement and claimed that the judgement did not pay enough attention to injured eyewitnesses and quoted Naroda Patiya Verdict of Gujarat High Court in which the Court observed that "value of injured eyewitnesses is on high pedal<sup>391</sup>." It also quoted Nayeemuddin Ansari's statement in which he asked who killed 21 people that afternoon. The newspaper never mentioned that it was Nayeemuddin Ansari who had given three different

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<sup>389</sup> Ara Session Court Judgement, Bathani Tola Massacre Case,p.95. See. Deposition of Umesh Kumar Singh dated 29 January, 2009, Ara Session Court, Case no.28/98.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>391</sup> *The Indian Express*, January 18, 2016.

farbayan at three different places and misled the whole investigation. The Patna High Court verdict was criticised by Noam Chomsky, Jean Dreze, Uma Charavarti and many other prominent scholars<sup>392</sup>. A joint petition was sent to The Chief Justice of India by activists and scholars<sup>393</sup>.

Bathani Tola massacre case clearly shows that justice requires consensus of civil society. When the crime is targeted against marginalised group it becomes a sensitive issue and it is healthy for a democratic society to start debate, discussion and deliberation on such issues. Justice is persuasion however judges try to persuade only legal experts. In their judgements judges invoke laws and other judgements to persuade legal experts. They do not pay attention to those statements which are made by scholars who are not legal experts. The nature of Bathani Tola massacre case was a different one and it demanded “public consensus.” When judiciary was widely criticised for its judgement, judges should have also participated in the discussion to restore the credibility of judiciary.

Anand Teltumde wrote in Economic Political Weekly that Dalits were only worried about Cartoon Controversy and were not paying enough attention to the denial of Justice in Bathani Tola’s massacre case<sup>394</sup>. He also criticised Dalit politics for its obsession with empty symbolism. Without giving any legal details of Bathani Tola massacre case he claimed that denial of justice was a norm in atrocities cases. Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary of CPI ML(Liberation), also criticised judiciary and claimed that acquittal in such cases was a norm<sup>395</sup>. Bela Bhatia wrote a long article on the Patna High Court Judgement in which she has provided “detailed descriptions” of events in Bhojpur<sup>396</sup>. She also wrote few words on legal procedure. Generally these scholars read judgements of the sessions Court and the High Court and start criticizing judiciary. They never take trouble of reading police case diaries, depositions of victims and other legal records which can unfold those circumstances on the basis of which accused persons were acquitted.

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<sup>392</sup> *The Times of India*, May 30, 2012.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>394</sup> Anand Teltumde, *Bathani Tola and The Cartoon Controversy*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.47, No.22, p.10.

<sup>395</sup> Dipankar Bhattacharya, *Bathani Tola-2, Miscarriage of Justice*, Vol.47, No.22, 2Jun, 2015

<sup>396</sup> Bela Bhatia, *Justice Not Vengeance*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.48, Issue no.38, 21 Sep, 2013.

Activists, intellectuals and media persons never showed sympathy with those innocent upper caste people who were harassed for a long time in the name of investigation. Among fifty three accused persons, who were charge sheeted in the case, many of them were in their fifties and sixties. Most of them were hard working peasants who had no criminal past. Our intelligentsia and media is setting a dangerous trend which pre-supposes that every upper caste person charge sheeted in the crime against lower castes is a criminal and he must be punished, he must be hanged. The *psychology of massacre* is pervasive and it seems that some of our intellectuals and media-persons have also come in its grip.

## Conclusion

Caste played a central role in reshaping the socio-political life of Central Bihar. Caste behaved like a non-human actor. Caste was super hero and it was the most dreaded villain. People mobilised caste for fulfilling their economic, social and political interests. At the same time caste reconstituted itself through changing economic opportunity, newer form of social organisations and political institutions. Caste was deeply embedded in culture, religion, myths, folklores, ballads and music. Caste has generally been viewed as the unit of social structure. This architectural metaphor is not able to capture the pervasive character of caste. Caste works at more nuanced level, it is like DNA of society which decides the blue-print of culture, religion, myths, folklores, ballads and music. As DNA mutates itself, caste can also go through different kind of mutations in changing socio-political circumstances.

One can accuse that by representing caste as a super actor I am downplaying the role of individual agency. However, this agency-structure binary itself creates a lot of problems in understanding socio-economic changes. We saw in chapter one that Individual agency was always crippled by omnipresence of caste. Caste brought different type of stigmas to a family or social groups which constrained their socio-economic mobility. The victims of caste were not only dalits and lower castes, a major section of upper caste was also suffering from intra-caste stigmas which were result of oppressive caste-system. The subject of intra-caste stigmas remains to be explored; I have done only a little effort in this direction. Caste was not a homogenous category and internal differentiation was always present. Despite this in political propaganda upper castes were always represented as homogenous group. Supporters of Rashtriya Janta Dal, followers of Socialist Politics and Naxalites, spread hatred towards upper castes. For their electoral benefits political parties used every tactic to increase caste antagonism among different groups. Even CPI ML, which claimed that it believed in class ideology, relied on caste politics. The inconsistency between theory and praxis proved harmful for Naxalite movement and a major section of upper castes became its enemy and used same tactic of annihilation against Naxalites.

Naxalite movement could not understand that caste is a double edged sword. At the grassroots level it was easier to mobilize lower castes by invoking caste inequality. However,

such mobilizations always resulted in violent caste struggles which delegitimized the Naxalite movement. In its everyday politics Naxalites used caste as a key category of social mobilisation. However, in its base-superstructure dichotomy caste was always relegated to the realm of superstructure. The Naxalite Movement never tried to undo socio-cultural stigmas prevalent in the society and sometimes it reinforced old stereotypes by categorising some groups as lumpens. The question of gender and sexuality which was intimately connected with the question of caste was never strongly raised by the Naxalite movement. Its focus remained mainly on economic redistribution. It wasted its whole energy in 'land grab' movement, economic blockade, individual annihilation and group massacres. The document of Sixth Party Congress shows that it could capture only twelve thousand acres of land in Bihar and Jharkhand till 1997. And a substantial part of it was later recaptured by landlords after the formation of Ranvir Sena.

The tactic of economic blockade was the most oppressive for poor peasants and it was imposed on peasants belonging to some particular castes. The target of Individual annihilation and group massacres were also upper castes, particularly Bhumihars and Rajputs. It was the tactic of annihilation and group massacres against which upper castes united themselves by forgetting their internal differentiation. One who has closely watched Bhojpur's villages knows this fact that intra-caste stigmas weakened during the era of violent caste struggle. Many *kujaties* returned in caste-fold, persons who were earlier harbingers of ill omen suddenly became useful against the struggle of CPI ML. Even the information provided by family members of "mentally sick households" also became important. Ravindar Master once told we should give excuse to our men who committed wrongs in past. Indirectly he expressed will for undoing social stigmas prevalent in upper castes. Had CPI ML raised the voice against these stigmas a major section of upper caste would have joined the fight for social justice.

After the formation of Ranvir Sena the region witnessed a new era of violence. People crossed all limits of madness. Massacres became a tool for socio-political dominance. Caste prejudice increased so much that people started questioning judicial verdicts without knowing details of the case



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