

Statics and Dynamics of Social Inequality in Rural Bihar . A Diachronic Analysis

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KUMAR SURESH

**CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI—110067. INDIA
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जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS

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C E R T I F I C A T E

Certified that the dissertation entitled 'STATICS AND DYNAMICS OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN RURAL BIHAR : A DIACHRONIC ANALYSIS ' by KUMAR SURESH, has not been submitted for award of any degree to this or any other University. We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for the consideration of award of DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY in Sociology of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.


(NANDU RAM)
Supervisor


(R.K. JAIN)
Chairman



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KUMAR SURESH

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Social inequality is a multi-dimensional phenomenon in which unequal distribution of wealth, power and prestige occupies central place. Three dimensions¹ of wealth, power and prestige are interrelated and provide meaning to the term 'social inequality'. In Indian agrarian social structure these three dimensions are reflected in the inequalities emerging from the separation of ownership, control and use of land and other material resources, on the one hand, and unequal positions in the caste hierarchy, on the other. Equal opportunity to participate in the democratic political process is an ideal of the state in India. In reality, chances of participation generally correspond to the caste and class positions. So, a complex of caste, class and power presents India as one of the most hierarchical systems in the world. Hierarchy is reflected not only in the structure of form but also in the structure of content.²

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1. For details see Max Weber, "Class, Status and Party" in his From Max Weber (edited and translated by H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills), Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1970; also see W.G. Runcimen, "Three Dimensions of Social Inequality" in Andre Beteille (ed), Social Inequality: Selected Readings, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1969, pp 45-63.
 2. See Louis Dumont, Homo-Hierarchicus, Vikas Publications, Delhi, 1970, pp 40-60.

In the traditional Indian society caste was the basic organising principle and the structural unit around which every activity used to revolve. It was difficult to imagine one's position outside his/her caste. Hierarchy was the basic principle of caste and was based on the mutual opposition of pure and impure.³ The rules of purity and pollution were derived from and strengthened by the Sanskritic literature and Hindu ideology. Social inequality was justified and legitimized by the caste ideology backed by the theory of 'Karma' (deeds) and 'Dharma' (duty). Existing inequalities were consistent with the values of society. That is why, Bataille⁴ looks at the traditional Indian society as a classic example of the 'harmonic' social order. Here, social inequality was considered as proper, right and legitimate.⁵ Moreover, conflicts over unequal distributions of material resources were limited and subdued. In brief, social inequality was institutionalized, cumulative and structural compulsion due to the congenial value-system and low level of consciousness among the masses.

3. Ibid. pp 43-60.

4. Andre Beteille, Studies in Agrarian Social Structure, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1974, pp 194-200.

5. Andre Beteille, Inequality and Social Change, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1972, p 25.

However, the colonial policies were also responsible for the creation, maintenance and perpetuation of social inequality later on. Uneven land distribution system was one of the most important mechanisms which not only created a vast inequality in agrarian structure but also worked for its perpetuation. The disparity in agrarian structure created by the permanent settlement of 1793 introduced new parasitic classes of landlords and intermediaries, on the one hand, and sharecroppers and landless agricultural labourers, on the other. The relationship between these two opposite classes was basically of exploitation, oppression and repression. But this new agrarian structure was fitted into the old caste structure and "... the caste system contributed to the persistence of these inequalities by providing the values and norms which were appropriate to the agrarian hierarchy...."⁶ A close examination of the caste hierarchy and agrarian hierarchy suggests a correspondence between them. Traditionally, the big land owners were of high castes, members of the low castes were generally landless labourers, and in between were the middle level peasants or cultivating castes.⁷ The internal structure

6. Ibid. p 25.

7. Ibid. p 23.

and dynamics of the traditional society and the colonial policies, therefore, created, maintained and perpetuated glaring inequalities in which the contemporary society was bound to remain in the sea bed of social inequality.

The elimination or at least reduction of inequality to its minimum level was one of the ideals of the Indian National Congress before independence. The emergence of the left wing within the Indian National Congress was an important phenomenon. The leaders were greatly influenced by the socialist ideology and the Russian Revolution and they were putting emphasis on socialist values. When India attained Independence these ideals came to the forefront. Thus, many provisions were incorporated in the constitution.⁸ The introduction of the adult-franchise, decentralization of power and establishment of a representative democracy were the major steps to counter the problem of those inequalities which emerged from and related to the unequal opportunity to participate in the political process. Land reforms measures and specific developmental programmes were

8. Some of the important provisions are listed in the constitution of India in the different articles such as 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 26, 40, 44, 45, 46, 164, 224, 330, 334, 335, 338, etc.

supposed to reduce the gap between rich and poor in the rural areas. On the social level, the abolition of untouchability, protective discrimination, free and compulsory education at the primary level and free access to the legal system were some of the important measures to promote the egalitarian social order. Yet, even after forty years of independence one gets the signs of pessimism with regard to achieving social equality.

Some changes have, however, taken place in the traditional patterns of social inequality. In the modern Indian society the nature of social inequality and its mode of operation has been highly influenced by the changing social, economic, political and cultural settings. The traditional patterns have undergone the process of change and new forms and mechanisms of perpetuating social inequality have come in prominence. New aspirations, needs, economic crisis and increasing consciousness are the by-product of the emergent structure. The existing realities are not corresponding to the traditional values. The inconsistency between the existential order and the normative structure, coupled with economic crisis and increasing consciousness, has resulted into quite apparent and frequent tensions, conflicts and violence.

The land reform measures, penetration of market forces and mechanisms into rural areas, and the introduction of semi-capitalist mode of production in agriculture have altered the traditional patterns and created new types of land relationship in agrarian structure. These changes in agrarian structure have greatly affected the traditional caste structure. The middle castes have emerged as a dominant force in the rural areas.⁹ Being economically and politically better off the middle castes have started challenging the traditional hegemony of the upper castes. At the same time, they have emerged as exploitative, oppressive and repressive force for the lower castes who also fall in the category of lower class. But the members of the lower castes also have started asserting for their identity and exercising their rights which have been given to them by the government. Over the time, the exploitation has resulted into the consciousness from below.

The period after independence has contributed richly to the emergence of new theoretical and substantive

9. Y. Singh maintains that Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris have emerged as the dominant castes. See his "The changing power structure of village community - A case study of six villages in Eastern U.P." in A.R. Desai (ed.) Rural Sociology in India, Popular, Bombay, 1961, pp 711-723.

concern in the sociology of social stratification. Numerous studies have been made to understand the nature of inequality in rural India. But there is lack of comprehensive view in which all the three aspects - distributional, relational and normative - of social inequality have been taken into account. Literature available on society in general and agrarian social structure/ⁱⁿparticular is scanty. Most of them are statistical and descriptive in nature. A few available analytical works suffer from certain ideological bias as these have attempted to analyse the whole social reality in a ready-made framework of the class model and, thus, negate other sociological realities.

Caste and class are referred as two models for analysing the complex nature of social inequality in Indian situation. Analysis based on caste model generally concentrates on the relationships based on the rules of purity and pollution, social mobility, etc. and the economic and political dimensions are treated as dependent variables.¹⁰ Those social scientists who are fascinated with this model have overlooked the class

10. See Louis Dumont, op cit, p 235.

character in the caste system. Thus, unrest, tensions and violence in agrarian social structure have been seen as caste phenomena. Such type of view is over-simplification of the complex reality and comes from ethnographic and anthropological studies.

The 'class model', on the other hand, negates the sociological properties of caste. It treats caste as a phenomenon of the past which, with the changing infrastructure, has transformed into class. The social scientists with this model try to impose the Marxian framework on Indian society and, thus, present the complexity of the problem in a mathematical form. Therefore, both caste and class models equally suffer from reductionist fallacy which leads to the sociological debunking. In fact, both caste and class are equally important and are inherent realities of Indian society. But at the same time it is a fact that caste and class are not polar categories in Indian situation. On numerous occasions caste and class cut across the boundaries. Sometimes caste incorporates the features of class and other times class operates in the framework of caste.¹¹ Therefore, there is a need to strike a balance between caste and class models on the one hand

11. K.L. Sharma, "Caste and class in India: Some conceptual problems" in his (ed.), Social Stratification in India, Manohar, Delhi, 1986, pp 29-61.

and to provide a comprehensive analysis of distributional, relational and normative aspects of social inequality on the other.

It is with this background the present dissertation tries to understand, analyse and provide a comprehensive view of social reality in a backward state like Bihar. It seeks to understand and analyse the situation in the changing social, economic, political and cultural contexts. The extent, directions and social implications of the changing patterns of inequalities in agrarian social structure in Bihar since 1920s are three major questions posed in this enquiry. The dissertation has been divided into six chapters. Besides this, the next chapter entitled "Social Inequality: Some Conceptual and Theoretical Problematics" attempts to provide some conceptual and theoretical explanations to the problem in a broader social context. In this regard, a number of theoretical and conceptual issues have been examined which arise in the study of social inequality. Secondly, this chapter also tries to understand the statistics and dynamics of social inequality in the light of some empirical evidences. Since the general patterns of social inequality, with some internal specificities and variations, have bearing to the statics and dynamics of

the world capitalist system, divergent social processes and the Indian society as a whole, this chapter finally tries to answer three interrelated questions in a broader social context: (a) What does the term social inequality refer to and what are its different dimensions and aspects? (b) Under what social processes social inequality gets its legitimacy and perpetuation in the long run? and (c) Is it sufficient to analyse the problem of inequality only as a mode of existence and can we ensure at all, an egalitarian social order?

Chapter 3 entitled "Logical Validity of Caste and Class Models in India" examines the potentials and applicability of both the models and analyses the relationship between caste and class in the changing social situation in India. Here, caste and class have been seen as the two important structural units inextricably linked with each other.

The next two chapters are exclusively concerned with the statics and dynamics of social inequality and their social implications in rural Bihar. Chapter 4 entitled "Structuration of Social Inequality in Rural Bihar" deals with the general patterns of social inequality in rural Bihar. Here, the social inequality has been analysed in the light of the existing mode of

production which is semi-feudal in nature. In this context, the debates on mode of production have been taken into consideration as it broadly corresponds to the nature of agrarian social structure and social inequality in Bihar. In other words, an interplay between land, caste and politics has been analysed diachronically to understand the nature of social inequality in the rural areas.

The fifth chapter entitled "Social Implications of Inequality : Continuities and Discontinuities" examines the relationship between changing patterns of social inequality and tension, conflict and violence in agrarian social structure in Bihar. In this context, it has been maintained that tension in rural areas, which appears to be caste tension, reflects even the class character due to the correspondence between caste and class. Besides, the changing intercaste relations and the resultant tensions and conflicts have also been examined in this chapter.

Finally, the concluding chapter tries to provide an analytical explanation of the whole issue in a comprehensive manner. Since the issue of social inequality especially in rural areas is so complicated and controversial, a universally acceptable and final conclusion

cannot be drawn. However, the conclusions derived from the study provide some insight to the understanding of agrarian structure and social inequality in rural areas in general and Bihar in particular.

The purpose of this study is not merely to critically review the available literature on the problem but to answer the questions formulated in this and the next chapters. The study is based primarily on the secondary sources of data and the whole problem has been examined diachronically. But at the same time synchronic method has also been taken into consideration wherever it is required. It would be wrong to claim the absolute objectivity in social analysis. Yet, the efforts have been made to acquire the objectivity, to its maximum extent, in the present analysis.

Chapter II

SOCIAL INEQUALITY : SOME CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL
PROBLEMATICS

Social inequality is one of the most debatable topics in social sciences in general and sociology in particular. From the very beginning, social scientists have tried to seek the roots, origins and rationales of the problem but they have not arrived at the common agreement. In fact, controversies are the natural outcome of the search for higher orders of explanation and inclusive system of classification of the problem. There is, thus, no consensus among them on the explanations of social inequality. The differing value systems, perceptions of social orders, equality and justice have led them to provide different explanations. In such situation, there arise a number of conceptual and theoretical issues in the study of social inequality which call for proper understanding and comprehensive analysis. This chapter is an attempt in this direction.

The first problem which puzzles analysts is the distinction made between social inequality and natural inequality. There is a popular view that social inequality and natural inequality are quite different from each other. For instance, Rousseau¹ made a distinction between socially

1. For details see, J.J. Rousseau, "A Discourse on the origin of Inequality" in his The Social Contract and Discourses, J.M. Dent and Sons, 1938.

based inequalities and biologically based inequalities. He referred to biologically based inequality as "natural or physical because it is established by nature, and consists in a difference of age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of the mind or the soul". Similarly, socially based inequality, according to him, "consists of the different privileges which some men enjoy, to the prejudice of others such as that of being more rich, more honoured, more powerful, or even in a position to exact obedience."²

However, Rousseau's dichotomous view does not provide an all inclusive explanation of the phenomenon. It seems that he has overlooked the normative evaluations of society which present biologically based inequalities as ~~social~~ social inequality. In fact, every society has its own cultural code, value system and the system of evaluation of normative pattern which provide the foundation for building structures of social inequality. The biologically based inequalities assume importance in many societies because of the meaning assigned to them. In fact, "... Natural inequality is based on differences in quality,

2. Quoted in T.B. Bottomore, Classes in Modern Society, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1965, pp 15-16.

and qualities are not just there, so to say in nature, they are as human beings have defined them, in different societies, in different historical epochs."³ In reality, they have social context and social base and, thus, it would be wrong to assume that natural inequality has nothing to do with social inequality. In the present inquiry the main focus is, however, on those inequalities which arise from the unequal distribution of wealth, power and prestige and which form the structural realities of different societies.

Social stratification, hierarchy, class, status etc. are different forms of social inequality. These are used frequently in the study of social inequality with a great deal of overlap in their connotations. Thus, it is imperative to examine these concepts though, due to the continuing debates and controversies around these, it may not be possible to provide a single and precise definition of each of them. However, some workable definitions of these may be sought in the light of available literature.

3. Andre Beteille, Inequality among Men, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1977, p 10.

Generally, a distinction is made between social stratification and hierarchy. Dumont,⁴ rejects the commonly adopted view of the Anglo-American writers that caste is a form of social stratification. He argues that the term hierarchy should be reserved for the analysis of Indian caste system because of the fact that hierarchy is a consciously organized principle and caste is an expression of that reality. On the other hand, stratification refers to the layers which are constructed by the sociologists on the basis of variable criteria. Insisting on this principle Dumont⁵ makes a difference between the hierarchical order of Indian society and the layering of American society. He treats the Indian social order as homo-hierarchicus (based on hierarchical principle) and the American system as homo-Acqualis (based on egalitarian principle). Any way, the term social stratification refers to the existence of different layers which are created on the basis of unequal positions occupied by the members in a society. The unequal distribution of wealth, power and prestige provides the basis for the creation of different layers or strata in a society. The members of one stratum generally share a common awareness, common identity, common

4. Louis Dumont, Homo-Hierarchicus, Vikas Publications, Delhi, 1970, pp 239-258.

5. Ibid, pp 231-238.

life style and common life chances. The value system of the society also forms an important part of the whole reality. However, this also depends upon one's class position.

The term "class" has got different connotations in the writings of sociologists and social scientists. In the classical Marxism the term class is different from that of the liberal perspective. Moreover, the treatment of class as a category in neo-Marxist theories differs from classical marxism. It is interesting to note that the distinction is also made between class and stratification. In the French tradition class is opposed to stratification because of the fact that the former is an analytical and dynamic category whereas the latter is a descriptive and static one.⁶ But in the English tradition class is not opposed to stratification but is a form of it. Though the whole situation is very complex, we shall come again to this issue in the next chapter.

It is, however, important to note here that class is different from status. Classes are, generally, defined in terms of economic criteria whereas statuses or status

6. Ralph Dahrendorf, "Class and Class-conflict in Industrial Society", Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1959, p 76.

groups are considered as the expression of unequal esteem, honour and prestige.⁷ Bottomore clearly writes, "The difference, broadly, is between a hierarchy of organised or partly organised economic groups whose relations to each other are antagonistic, and a hierarchy of groups, more correctly described as aggregates of individuals of equal social prestige based on similarities which are not primarily antagonistic but are partly competitive and partly emulative ... "⁸ Dahrendorf also shares the similar view where he asserts that "class is always a category for the purpose of analysis of social conflict and its structural roots, and as such it has to be separated strictly from stratum as a category for purpose of describing hierarchical systems at a given point of time".⁹ It seems logically convincing that class and status are two distinct categories. But it is wrong to assume that the relationship between two status groups is always of harmony and cooperation. The whole exposition

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7. Max Weber, "Class, Status and Party" in R. Bendix and S.M. Lipset (eds), Class, Status and Power: Social Stratification in Comparative perspective, The Free Press, New York, 1966, pp 21-28.
 8. T.B. Bottomore, op cit., pp 58-59.
 9. Ralph Dahrendorf, op cit., p 76.

shows that these terms have separate connotations but they are basically manifestations of the same reality i.e. social inequality.

The conceptualization of social inequality is also debatable and a subject of controversy. Marx's¹⁰ explanation can be regarded as a watershed in the analysis of social inequality as for him social inequality can always be understood in terms of society's socio-economic formation. He also states that every type of social inequality is basically manifestation and reflection of such formation. Broadly speaking, the socio-economic formation can be divided into two parts - base and super. The base structure consists of forces of production and relations of production and forms the basic foundation of society. It also determines the super-structure which consists of political system, legal system and ideological system. Due to unequal control over the means of production there emerge two classes with opposite interests. Those who have control over the means of production have also corresponding support of the super-structure. Due to

10. R. Bendix and S.M. Lipset, "Karl Marx's Theory of Social Classes" in R. Bendix and S.M. Lipset (eds), op cit, pp 6-11. Also see Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy, Edited by T.B. Bottomore and M. Rubel, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1956.

their economic power they control political power and enjoy higher position in society. In this situation, both political power and social status do not constitute independent categories.

Marx further argues that every historically known societies, except the primitive communism, are divided into classes based on the existence of "private property" and "social division of labour". The class of slave in ancient society, serf in feudal society, and proletariat in the modern capitalist society have been exploited by the masters, the landlords and the bourgeoisie in their respective socio-economic formations. Due to the inherent contradiction and following the laws of dialectics, the slavery was replaced by the feudal society which, in turn, has been replaced by the capitalist social order. Marx asserts that the capitalist social order would be over-thrown by the class of proletariat which is revolutionary in its nature and social formation. The overthrow of the capitalist social order leads to the establishment of the communist society based on the collective ownership of the means of production. By this time, according to Marx, the past historical processes cease to operate and an egalitarian social order is created.

But this position has been challenged by Dahrendorf,¹¹

11. Ralph Dahrendorf, op cit.

besides several others, who holds the view that the root cause of social inequality is the unequal distribution of power and position in the authority structure. The ownership and non-ownership of the means of production is one of the several modes of exercises of authority. He argues that in the post-industrial society the legal ownership of the means of production and an effective control over these have been segregated. Moreover, the abolition of the means of production does not ensure the abolition of the occasion for the exercise of power. Thus, he asserts that it is the exercise of exclusion from authority which is a significant criterion of social inequality rather than the ownership and non-ownership of the means of production. The unequal distribution of authority, according to Dahrendorf, is inherent in the very structure of society and, thus, it is a universal phenomenon.



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But both Marx and Dahrendorf appeared to be reductionist in their perspectives. The reduction of all types of inequalities to economic inequalities is the preoccupation for Marx whereas an unequal distribution of authority is the starting and end point for Dahrendorf. Of course, they have analysed and showed important aspects of society but have overlooked the multidimensionality of social reality. In this context, Weber¹² may be more correct who suggests that

12. Max Weber, op cit, pp 21-28. 7,

social inequality must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon. He argues that there are at least three important dimensions of social inequality, i.e., economic, political and social. All the three dimensions are inter-related and emerge out of unequal distribution of wealth, power and prestige and give rise to class, parties and status groups respectively. Although there is a high degree of interactions and relations between these dimensions, none of them, Weber argues, can be reduced to another since they have independent bases and existence of their own. In defining class as a group of people having similar position in the system of production, Weber comes closer to Marx but at the same time he departs from him when he argues that "... In contrast to classes status groups are normally communities",¹³ and the relationship between two classes is not necessarily antagonistic.

Moreover, he denies the possibility of polarisation of the classes in the capitalist mode of production due to the amorphous nature. He argues that one's class position is basically determined by his further position in the market situation. Besides class, he gives equal importance to the political and social dimensions also. Status (in

13. Max Weber, From Max Weber, in his edited and translated by H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1970, p 186.

the trinity of class status and power) is derived from the unequal distribution of esteem, honour and prestige (social variables) and, thus, it differs from class which emerges due to unequal positions occupied by members in the system of production (economic variable). About the power dimension he writes, "... In general, we understand by "power" the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in action."¹⁴ Runcimen¹⁵ also accepts the multidimensionality of social inequality. Thus, the multidimensional analysis of social reality in general and social inequality in particular appears as more logical and comprehensive though the same may not be universally applicable. In many societies there may be the tendency of dispersal. In the traditional Indian society, for instance, there was almost complete congruence between wealth, power and prestige but over a time the situation has slightly changed.¹⁶ However, if the multidimensional nature of social inequality is recognised, the assumption of a casteless and classless society is falsified. Moreover,

14. Max Weber, 1966, op cit, p 21.

15. W.G. Runcimen, "The Three Dimensions of Social Inequality" in Andre Beteille (ed.), Social Inequality : Selected Readings, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1969, pp 45-63.

16. Andre Beteille, Caste, Class and Power : Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1969, pp 1-18 and 185-225.

it presents social inequality as a social fact which has universal scope though the different dimensions of social inequality might be combined in different manners depending upon the nature of society.

This becomes clearer when we examine the different types of societies in the world. For instance, if we take simple society as a unit of analysis we find some elements of social inequality there also. It is generally argued that the simple societies have existed in the past and exist even today without a clear division of hierarchically arranged strata. It is also a popular belief that these societies are egalitarian in their ethos. But this has been refuted on the basis of both theoretical¹⁷ and empirical studies.¹⁸ Levi-Strauss, for instance, argues

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17. Theoretical formulations suggest that social inequality is not a matter of individual abilities, aptitudes and personal choice but is a fact which is evident from historical experiences. Dahrendorf tries to analyse the problem of social inequality in terms of the existence of norms and sanctions and the distribution of power which are universal features of human society. See his "On the origin of Inequality among men" in Andre Beteille (ed.), op cit, pp 16-44. Also see Andre Beteille, "The Decline of Social Inequality?" in his Ibid, pp 362-80.
18. Some major empirical studies are : E.R. Leach, Highland Burma M.D. Sahlins, Polynesian Society, and C. Levi-Strauss, Baroro tribe of Brazil, M.D. Sahlins, "Social Stratification in Kinship Societies" in Beteille (ed.) Ibid, pp 239-247. C. Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, Basic Books, New York, 1963. E.R. Leach, "Concept of Rank and Class among the Kachins of Highland Burma" in Andre Beteille (ed), op cit. pp 248-262.

that the conscious model to the understanding of social reality is not always real. The unconscious model is equally important, rather more important than the conscious model. If we analyse the nature of inequality in simple societies through the unconconscious model, we find that inequality is reflected even in marriage relationships.¹⁹ Leach²⁰ and Sahlins²¹ also confirm the universality of inequality in their respective studies. Both hold the view that kinship structure and marriage rules are the main sources of inequality. Schapera²² goes a step further when he observes that even in the simple societies there are some apparatus, often merely an aspect of the kinship system, through which activities are organised, order is maintained and conflict is regulated and ultimately resolved. These observations lead to conclude that inequalities exist in the inner structure of even simple societies. It is another thing that inequalities in simple societies are are something different from that in the advanced industrial societies. So, if we analyse the problem of social

19. C. Levi-Strauss, op cit.

20. E.R. Leach, op cit.

21. M.D. Sahlins, op cit. pp 239-247.

22. For details Isacc Sehapera, Government and Politics in Tribal Societies, Watts, 1956.

inequality in simple societies with the framework of industrially advanced societies we are bound to be misguided. In fact, explanation of inequalities in simple societies must be sought in terms of their own structures where these are expressed in the system of Kinship, political organization, the institutional rank and prestige and in the rules of property inheritance.

All the three types of inequalities i.e. economic, political and social are quite apparent in the capitalistic societies though these societies also strive for the establishment of an "egalitarian" social order. These have chosen the path of free competition and mature economic growth for equalizing social position of their members. Political and legal equalities have been assured in these societies and the equal opportunity to all is their guiding principle. However, due to considerable inequalities in the uneven external condition of competition, the ideal of equality has not yet been realized. In principle, all individuals are free to compete with one another but in practice the scales are weighted in favour of some and against others. In fact, the ideal of equality of opportunity cannot be effectively articulated in practice if social structure is asymmetrical and individual's potentialities are unequal.

Another ideal of twentieth century is the emergence of socialism whose basic premise is to establish an egalitarian social order. The countries of East Europe may claim that their society is free from inequality because the basic source of inequality, i.e. the private property, has been abolished. But a number of studies suggest that in the socialist societies one type of inequality has been replaced by the another type. It is a fact that the abolition of private property has, at the same time, induced the foundation of political inequality which gets reflected in the theories of "bureaucratic communism" and "monolithic power structure."²³ The difference between the income of the manual labour and mental labour, difference in the authority structure and the resultant difference in social status are still effectively visible. Djilas²⁴ points out that the illusion of the U.S.S.R. that the process of collectivization of means of production will result into an egalitarian social order has been disenchanting, when a new class with all characteristics of earlier capitalist

23. See Donald C. Hodges, The Bureaucratization of Socialism, The University of Manchester Press, Manchester, 1981.

24. See Milovan Djilas, The New Class, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1957.

class has come into existence in the socialist societies. He further argues that the new class of political bureaucracy has control over distribution, enjoyment and use of the national property. Since this class has control over political power, it indirectly grabs economy and, hence, the system of inequality gets perpetuated. Ossowski²⁵ also refers to the Soviet society as one with a number of "non-egalitarian classness". Similarly, Habermas²⁶ and Mercuse²⁷ are of the opinion that Soviet society is one of the variants of industrial society which is based on repressive freedom and instrumental rationality.

A number of theories post-capitalism add some other dimensions and explanations to the social inequality. Bell²⁸, for instance, argues that in post-capitalist societies the expert theoretical knowledge becomes the main source of inequality. He observes that in the post-capitalist society possession of knowledge confers power in the way in which ownership of property did in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the industrial

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25. Stanislaw Ossowski, "Non-Egalitarian Classness : Similarities in interpreting mutually opposed systems" in C.S. Heller, (ed), Structured Social Inequality : A Reader in comparative Social Stratification, MacMillan, London, 1970.
26. Jurgen Habermas, Towards a Rational Society : Student Protest, Science and Politics. Heinmann, London, 1971.
27. Herbert Mercuse, One Dimensional Man : Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964
28. Daniel Bell, Coming of Post-Industrial Society, Arnold-Heinmann, New York, 1974.

societies. The university, in which the theoretical knowledge is formulated and evaluated becomes the key institution in the post-capitalist society. Foucault²⁹ also considers knowledge as the main source of power in the advanced industrial societies. He argues that the "knowledge-power industry" is the main agent which creates, sustains and perpetuates inequality.

Contrary to this, the developing countries present a composite picture of social inequality. In these countries the traditional patterns of inequality have not been fully eliminated. In the process of modernization some alterations have, however, taken place in the traditional forms of inequality but both old and new types of inequality still persist. For instance, in India the economic, political and status inequalities have not been eliminated. The caste system which used to provide the basis for inequality in the traditional Indian society has been abolished only in the legal sense. The class distinctions or economic disparities are quite visible. The formation of elite groups is also one of the most important developments of modern India.

29. Michael Foucault, Power-Knowledge : Selected Interviews and other writings, 1971-1977 (edited and translated by Colin Gordon et al), Harvester, Sussex, 1980.

The analysis of these societies leads us to conclude that social inequality is a universal phenomenon found in every society. It will be wrong to assume that a society can be fully free from all types of inequalities. On some occasions inequality, as a mode of existence, would appear at its minimum level but on other occasions inequality, both as a mode of existence and as a mode of consciousness is so universal that there is no possibility of an egalitarian social order.

The question then arises that how can social inequality be legitimized, maintained and perpetuated in the modern society whose basic ideal is the attainment of equality? Here, one must be cautious that the nature and source of legitimacy may vary from one society to another depending upon the nature of society. It is, however, a fact that the normative structure of society has a great role in this regard. For example, in the traditional Indian society caste usually existed as an all encompassing phenomenon whose basic source of legitimacy was the theory of 'Karma' and 'Dharma' as stated in the previous chapter. In this regard, the structural-functional theory of society maintains that the system of unequal distribution of rewards and privileges is derived from the general values of society over which there is a consensus.

This value-system provides the ground for legitimacy in which inequality is considered as functional and desirable.

The self-perception theory³⁰ offers another explanation of the legitimization of social inequality. It holds that people accept their location within the structure of inequality because they are convinced that their positions are justly deserved. But how does it happen? Della Fave³¹ argues that individuals by comparing their various characteristics and achievements with the generalized others (other members of society) locate their relative rank in the larger social structure and subsequently evaluate the social value that others attribute to their positions in society. It is through the reflective appraisals of others and the facts of the situation, Fave argues, that individuals judge the worth of their contributions and justify their position in the social structure.

30. This theory is influenced by the basic premise of symbolic Interactionism, particularly of G.H. Mead. For the basic guiding premises of symbolic interactionism in general and self-perception theory in particular where he shows a continuous interaction, between mind, self and society see his Mind, Self and Society : From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviourist, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1972.

31. L.Richard Della Fave, "The Meek shall not Inherit the Earth : Self Evaluation and the Legitimacy of Social Stratification", American Sociological Review, Vol. 52, 1980, pp 955-71.

These cognitive explanations play crucial role in the process of legitimization of social inequality.

In the modern capitalist societies these explanations are not sufficient because they do not take into account those mechanisms which are more important in the legitimization process. In the capitalist social order state and the ruling class ideology play vital role in this process. Althusser³² points out that it is the state ideology and ideological state apparatuses which justify, legitimize and strengthen the position of ruling class on the one hand and prepare the vast masses for complete submission on the other. He insists that ideological state apparatuses which include mass media, law, religion and education provide a more effective means of maintaining class rule than the use of physical force. In fact, ideological state apparatuses transmit ruling class ideology and create false consciousness which largely maintains the subject class in sub-ordinate position. They accept their position as normal, natural and inevitable and fail to realize the true nature of their situation. This situation not only legitimizes the existing inequality but also perpetuates it from generation to generation. Every thing is done through the combined effects produced by

32. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological state Apparatuses" in B.R. Cosin (ed), Education : Structure and Society, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1972, pp 242-280.

the school and family as agents of socialization. Miliband³³ also argues that through the process of 'massive indoctrination' the subject class is persuaded to accept the status-quo. Through this process the capitalist class also justifies, legitimizes, maintains and perpetuates the existing inequalities in society. Thus, it is evident that social inequality follows a pattern which corresponds to the nature of society and this correspondence is the by-product of the process of legitimization.

The above exposition shows that social inequality exists not only as a fact but also becomes value in different societies and in different social contexts. It is found in both the harmonic and disharmonic social systems.³⁴ In the harmonic system social inequality is not only a fact but also a value and, hence, is considered as proper, right and legitimate. On the other hand in the disharmonic order it exists only as a fact because it is not supported by the existing values. However, the conception of harmonic social order is applicable only to the simple and traditional societies. In a modern complex

33. Ralph Miliband, State in Capitalist Society. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1970.

34. Andre Beteille, Studies in Agrarian Social Structure. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1974, pp 194-200.

society, which is characterized by rational-legal authority and rational bureaucracy, its application is limited. The modern Indian society has divorced from the ideal of harmonic social order. Social tension, conflicts, violence, etc. are the manifestations of the challenge to the existing inequalities.

The meritocracy and equality of opportunity are the major guiding principles in the modern society. But it is important to note that the equality of opportunity is not enough because it does not ensure the equality of result. If society is oriented towards the reduction of economic inequality, its orientation is to be in the direction of equality of result also. In fact, both the distributive justice and equality of result go hand in hand. In the Indian context, one can easily find the paradoxical relationship between equality of opportunity and equality of result. How can the poor, illiterate, and deprived masses compete with the privileged sections of society? For them, the equality of opportunity simply does not provide any meaningful ideology. It seems that it is everything for nothing. The equality of opportunity is basically a mechanism to justify the existing inequalities in a more subtle form. It cannot provide the strong base for the establishment of equality but can only alter and modify the existing inequalities.

CHAPTER III

LOGICAL VALIDITY OF 'CASTE' AND 'CLASS' MODELS IN
INDIA

A comprehensive understanding of social reality calls for a synthetic and integrative approach. But this task is not so easy because of the fact that the perception of social reality varies from one society to another, depending upon the nature of social order, type of polity and value system. Moreover, the ideological presupposition also complicates the problem. Every social scientist and analyst, generally preoccupied with a particular ideology, tries to analyse and project social realities within that particular ideological framework. In doing so, he or she usually overlooks those facts which do not fit into his or her ideological framework. As a result, some important facts are concealed which lead to the presentation of fragmented and fractured view of social reality.

This situation arises more frequently in those societies which are termed as 'transitional'.¹ These societies are at a crucial juncture of modernity and

1. The term generally refers to the countries of the third world which have attained independence in the different time scale of this century and are passing through the process of modernization.

tradition. They neither have adopted all the elements of modernity in true sense nor have they discarded the traditional values altogether. Thus, both modernity and tradition are existing side by side, sometimes in a harmonious fashion and sometimes in a conflicting manner. Due to the continual overlap between modernity and tradition social scientists and analysts sometimes get confused because of the fact that they either take modern structure into account or put emphasis on traditional elements. The treatment of these two structures in terms of opposition leads to the ignorance of perpetual continuity between tradition and modernity in the third world countries in general and India in particular. In fact, the whole situation cannot be seen in rupture, instead we have to consider and plead for a continuous model.

But all these have happened in the study of social inequality in particular and social reality in general in Indian situation. Two trends have been dominating the social analysis: the first includes cognitive-historical, structural-functional, empirical and evolutionary treatment and the second corresponds to the Marxian analysis of social reality. The latter is also known sometimes as 'dialectical-historical approach'. Both the trends are quite opposite in the treatment and analysis

of social inequality. In correspondence with these two dominant trend two models have evolved for analysing social reality in India. The first is known as 'caste model' and the second as 'class model'. Besides, a third model has also been in the currency which is basically an imposition of the Weberian model for analysing social inequality in India. For instance, Beteille² has applied the Weberian concepts of class, status and party in the study of social stratification in India. A multidimensional model, no doubt, can reveal some important facts but at the same time one must keep this fact in mind that it can be contextually specific. Thus, this model cannot be imposed as a universal one on Indian situation where a congruence of caste, class and power has been both historical and sociological reality. Secondly, power dimension of social inequality hardly constitutes an independent category in India; instead, it has a social base provided either by the economic dominance or the structural position in the caste hierarchy.

So as far as the 'caste' and 'class' models are concerned, they have projected, presented and treated

2. See Andre Beteille, Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1969.

'caste' and 'class', the two important realities of Indian society, as polar opposite categories. And at the same time, by putting emphasis on one structural reality they have either negated or undermined the other reality.³

For instance, the caste model has confined itself to the studies of caste as an independent unit of reality. By putting too much emphasis on the idio-structure (structure of ideas) and the cultural bases of the caste system in Indian society, the adherents⁴ of the caste model have overlooked the political and economic aspects of caste in general and its class character in particular. They have presented the caste system as an infrastructural reality of Indian society and have underscored those historical facts which expose interlinkages between caste and class on the one hand and show the dialectical relationship between 'ideational aspect' and 'existential reality' in Indian society on the other.⁵

3. K.L. Sharma, Caste, Class and Social Movements, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1986, pp 16-39 and also his "Caste and Class in India: Some Conceptual Problems" in his (ed.) Social Stratification in India, Manohar, Delhi, 1986, pp 29-61. Also see, Yogendra Singh, "Caste and Class: Some Aspects of Continuity and Change", Sociological Bulletin, vol. XVII, No. 2, 1968, pp 165-86.

4. Louis Dumont, Homo-Hierarchicus, Vikas Publication, Delhi, 1970; C. Bogle, Essays on the Caste System, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1971; L. Dumout and D.F. Pocock, "Pure and Impure", Contributions to Indian Sociology, No. III, 1959 119-33; M.N. Srinivas, Caste in Modern India and other Essays, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1962; McKim Marriott, "Interactional and Attributional Theories of Caste Ranking", Man in India, Vol 34 No. 2, 1959. pp 92-107; Rajini Kothari (ed.), Caste in India Politics Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1975.

Likewise, class model has confined itself to the economic and political aspects of social reality. The supporters of this model have undermined the historical role of the caste system in Indian society. If they analyse the system of caste in India, they treat it as dependent variable. So, a critical examination of both these models exposes their lacunae on the one hand and calls for the adoption of an integrative and synthetic approach on the other. But before coming to the common and logical point, it is an imperative to give a brief exposition of both these models. Besides, an effort has been made, in this chapter, to adopt an integrative approach in which both caste and class could be comprehended in a systematic manner.

For the critical examination let us first take the caste model which has been dominating the sociological literature from the very beginning in India. This model is based on some fundamental premises. First, it treats the Indian society as sociologically unique. Second, it insists that caste plays a major role in social relations. Third, it considers that the role and functions of caste

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5. See Maurice Godelier, Rationality and Irrationality in Economics, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1972, pp 86-102.

are not explainable in material and dialectical terms alone.⁶ For the proponents of this model, the basis of caste system is its ideology i.e. the concept of pure and impure rather than politico-economic condition. For them, caste is both the structure and superstructure and is primordial reality of Indian society. However, in dealing with the caste model it would be proper to show that how has caste been conceptualized? Whether it should be understood in terms of attribution or in interaction? Whether it is particularistic or universalistic one? Whether it is a cultural or structural phenomenon? Whether it is infrastructural or superstructural reality or a dialectical process? Answers to these questions can provide a comprehensive and better understanding of the caste system in India.

In the study of caste both the attributional and interactional criteria have been taken into account but the emphasis has largely been paid either on attributional or interactional aspect. D'Souza⁷, for instance, puts

6. Louis Dumont, op cit, pp 35-38.

7. Victor S. D'Souza, "Caste Status and its Correlation", Journal of Social Research, Vol. 7, Nos. 1-2, 1964, pp 119-125. See also his "Measurement of Rigidity - Fluidity Dimension of Social Stratification in Six Indian Villages", Sociological Bulletin, Vol. 18, 1969, pp 35-49.

emphasis mainly on the attributional aspect.. But caste cannot be understood only in terms of attribution because the attributional approach is unable to analyse the meaning structure (cognition) and existing actual social relationships in a comprehensive manner. On the other hand, the interactional criteria focus on the pattern of social relationships. From a sociological point of view, it is more important to study that how the different castes in a village interact with each other rather to study how many castes are found in a particular village. That is why, Marriott⁸ insists that in the study of rural stratification systems the interactional approach should be adopted.

So far as the universalistic-particularistic and the structural-cultural treatments of the caste system are concerned, Singh⁹ has summarised all types of views into four broad categories: (a) Cultural Universalistic; (b) Structural Universalistic; (c) Cultural Particularistic; and (d) Structural Particularistic. The universalistic/particularistic debate is based on the question that whether the analysis of caste should be confined to denote

8. McKim Marriott, op cit, pp 92-107.

9. Y. Singh, Social Stratification and Change in India, Manohar, New Delhi, 1980, p 7.

the system of caste in India only or it can be extended to the caste or caste like phenomenon found in other societies also. The structural and cultural views are different in their analysis of the caste system. For instance, the cultural view analyses caste primarily in terms of an ideological or cultural system. On the other hand, the structural view considers it as a system of social relationships. Singh¹⁰ observes that Weber's and Ghurye's analyses of the caste system fall in the category of cultural universalistic view of caste whereas Barth's¹¹ and Berreman's¹² analyses can be regarded as the structural-universalistic in nature. Similarly, Leach,¹³ Bailey¹⁴, etc. also advocate for the structural-particularistic treatment of the caste system so that the relationship between the upper castes and the lower castes,

10. Ibid, pp 6-9.

11. F. Barth, "The System of Social Stratification in Swat, North West Pakistan", in E.R. Leach (ed.), Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1960, pp 113-46.

12. G.D. Berroman, "Stratification, Pluralism and Inter-allion: A Comparative Analysis of Caste", in Anthony de Reuck and J. Knight (eds), Caste and Race: Comparative Approaches, J.A. Churchil, 1967, pp 45-73. Also see his Caste and Other Inequalities, Folklore Institute, Meerut, 1979.

13. E.R. Leach, "What should We Mean by Caste" in his op cit.

14. F.G. Bailey, "Closed and Open Social Stratification in India", European Journal of Sociology, Vol. IV, No. 1, 1963, pp 107-24.

the nature of exploitation and the resultant tension and conflict in the system could be analysed.

On the other hand, Louis Dumont can be regarded as the representative of the cultural-particularistic view of the caste system. He has greatly influenced the studies on caste and social stratification in India. He argues that caste can best be understood in terms of its ideological structure which is the primary reality of Indian society.¹⁵ He further argues that the caste system is a system of ideas and values and is based on the principle of hierarchy. The principle of hierarchy, in turn, is based on the binary opposition of pure and impure. The concept of pure and impure comes from the classical Hindu texts and philosophy. He asserts that the principle of hierarchy includes division of labour and of repulsion; and the religious order which is expressed in the principle of hierarchy subsumes economic and political orders. So, in this sense, the ideational system is the kernel of the caste system and it is an independent variable while the economic and political orders are dependent variables.

The whole concept of purity and impurity, enshrined in the Hindu mind and ideological structure, presents

15. Louis Dumont, op cit, pp 35-91.

India as a sociologically unique society of which hierarchy is a specific expression. This concept of hierarchy is different from the gradation system of different strata in the U.S.A. Though the ideology of individualism, competition and equality is absent in the Indian caste system, it is the holistic and hierarchical in its design. Therefore, in Dumont's sense Indian social reality should be analysed in terms of unique ideological structure and value system and a primacy should be given to the 'ideational aspect' over 'instrumental aspects' i.e. economic and political aspects of the caste system. Thus, the explanation of caste system by Dumont presents him as a culturalogist for whom the system constitutes the primordial reality of Indian society.

Contrary to Dumont's view, the classical Marxist's view regards the caste system as a superstructural phenomenon which has developed and crystallised over a period of time. Although the Marxists do not negate caste just by treating it as a myth, they put emphasis on economic and political grounding of the system and in this process they place secondary value of the ideational aspect. In this context, they are accused of being economic determinist and reductionist. But when we examine the significance and relevance of the caste system in the

light of the neo-Marxists' explanations of social reality particularly that of Althusser¹⁶ and Godelier¹⁷, we find that the caste system cannot be analysed only as a super-structural phenomenon having no influence on society at large. Moreover, we have to consider the fact that there is a 'dialectical relationship between base and super-structure' on the one hand and the 'relative autonomy' of the parts of super-structure on the other. Thus, any analysis of social reality must be made in terms of historical and contextual specificity. Presenting a critique to the conventional (Economic deterministic) Marxist theory, Godelier¹⁸ advocates for the relative autonomy of super-structure; and being influenced by Althusser's concept of 'overdeterminism', he rejects the crude reductionism of the Marxists theory where every thing is directly related to the economic instance. "But unlike

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16. Louis Althusser holds the view that the base and super structures do not exist in isolation. In fact, they exist in a mutually influencing manner, hence, the relationship between them is essentially dialectical and economy becomes the determinant only in the last instance. Here, this view has been logically extended in the understanding of the caste system. See his For Marx (Translated by Ben Brewster), The Penguin Press, London, 1969, pp 89-128.
17. M. Godelier also shares the similar view and considers the relative autonomy of the parts of superstructure. See his, op cit, pp X and 92-103.
18. See Dipankar Gupta, "Caste, Infrastructure and Super-structure: a critique" in I.P. Desai et al, Caste, Caste Conflict and Reservations", Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1985, pp 13-43.

Althusser for whom sometimes it is the economy, or the contradictions at the level of the economy, which articulate and unite the dominant contradictions, Godelier quite unequivocally believes that each level has its own "specific hierarchical causality", and that "each structure - social kinship, political, etc. has its own content, not reducible to any other, and its own mode and time scale of evolution."¹⁹ This assertion of Godelier comes from his study of kinship in the primitive society where kinship, he argues, constitutes the infrastructure and serves as relations of production. Likewise, the caste system in India, according to him, also serves the same purpose. Criticising Marxist theories which deny that superstructures have their own evolution and their independent logic, Godelier argues that politics, kinship and caste exist at the level of the infrastructure and they function at the level of production relation. Moreover, he asserts that every level is autonomous.

But Godelier's analysis of the caste system and its conceptualization as the infrastructure of Indian society comes closer to Louis Dumont for whom caste is an all encompassing phenomenon and which can only be understood as a system of ideas and values as mentioned above. One

19. Ibid, p. 29.

point can be logically deduced from their arguments that as long as the caste system exists, the emergence of economic classes and of economic relations of production is unthinkable. But putting too much emphasis on the role of caste in Indian society both Dumont and Godelier undermine the economic and political realities which have played an important role in the crystallization of the caste system itself. In this regard, Gupta observes that considering caste system as the infrastructural base since antiquity one negates the historical reality of Indian society. If we adhere to this principle, he maintains, "no epochal or structural changes have ever taken place in this society and several castes through history would not have resisted and revolted against their subjugation."²⁰ In fact, the infrastructural or superstructural roles of the caste system should be understood in terms of the historical-contextual specificity.

The above explanations show that the caste system is one of the most important realities of Indian society which cannot be denied just by treating it a myth. But at the same time it is also important to keep this fact in mind that the Indian society cannot be understood only in terms of caste model. The historical evidences suggest

20. Ibid, p 39.

that the caste system should not be analysed only as a cultural system; it is also a structural reality. In other words, caste system is not only a system of ideas and values but is also a system of interests. It is also not only an ethico-normative structure, but is a system of actual existing social relationships. Besides, the caste system can be treated as a particularistic category because of the fact that it is different from other types of gradation system. The value system reflected in the theory of 'Karma' (deeds) and 'Dharma' (duty) and the arrangement of the economic and political subjugation through the caste system present Indian caste as something different from other types of stratification system. Therefore, a systematic understanding of this phenomenon can be made only in terms of particularistic treatment.

So far as the class analysis of Indian society is concerned, it is again a subject of controversy and debate. For non-Marxists, class analysis of Indian society is not possible because of the fact that the organized class consciousness; class conflict and class action have not emerged. The caste system is an all pervasive phenomenon which prevents the emergence of class structure. Agrarian and other movements and mobilization of the masses for various purposes in rural sector are organised on the caste line. But such assumptions are based on the

empiricist's grounding which ignores the undercurrents of societal reality. Classes have been existing latently in Indian society from the very beginning. However, before reaching to any such type of conclusion, it is an imperative to show that how has class been conceptualized and how should it be conceptualized? Secondly, is there any demarcating line between caste and class in India? Thirdly, how can the class analysis of Indian society be made where the primordial ties and loyalties have been deep rooted in its social structure?

The conceptualization of class is itself a debated topic which differs from the Marxists to non-Marxists theorists on the one hand and the neo-Marxists to classical Marxists on the other. Keeping the different views in mind Beteille²¹ observes that class can be defined in a number of ways. It can be defined in terms of the ownership or the control of property, dependence or conflict, hierarchy, interest or consciousness, and in static or in dynamic terms. Some more questions arise in the conceptualization of class. These are: whether class is a universalistic or a particularistic category? Whether it is attributional or interactional? Whether it should

21. Andre Beteille, Studies in agrarian Social Structure, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1974, p. 51.

be defined in terms of the objective or the subjective criteria? Whether class is a component of the system of stratification or its dialectical process? All these questions can be explained with reference to Marx's own conception of class since he is considered as the exponent of scientific class analysis. In fact, diversified views on class are a natural outcome of the ideological-theoretical and methodological presuppositions rather than the sociological and empirical ones.

If we seek answers of the aforesaid questions within the Marxian framework, we find that class is not simply a cataloguing category but a complex process. More precisely, this can best be understood as an active economic and political process. Marx²² himself devoted too much time in the analysis of class but he never defined it in a systematic, coherent and logical manner. However, on the basis of his various writings, we can derive three important points - preconditions about his notion of class. All these three are interrelated and

22. R. Bendix and S.M. Lipset, "Karl Marx's Theory of social Classes" in their (eds), Class, Status and Power: Social Stratification in Comparative Perspective, The Free Press, New York, 1966, pp 6-11. Also see Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy (edited by T.B. Bottomore and M. Rubel and translated by T.B. Bottomore), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1956, pp 117-209 and Passim; Anthony Giddens, Class Structure of the Advanced Societies, Hutchinson, 1980, pp 23-40.

and refer to both objective and subjective aspects of class. These preconditions are:

1. Class is a group of people who have common objective economic position in the system of production.
2. There must be some sort of common awareness among the members of a class about their common objective economic position in the system of production.
3. The last precondition of a class refers to class action in terms of the emergence of leader and codification of ideology in order to articulate the common awareness about the common objective economic position in the system of production.

The first precondition refers to the objective aspect of class and it constitutes 'class-in-itself' i.e. the homogeneous class categories. But when ever the rest two preconditions get combined with the first, the class-in-itself' becomes a 'class-for-itself'. Marx²³ maintains that when a 'class-in-itself' becomes a 'class-for-itself' constituting subjective conditions, it can be regarded as a revolutionary class. The proletariat, which is a class of the capitalist social order, fulfils all the three

23. For details see Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Karl Marx and F. Engels: Collected Works, Vol. 11, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1979, pp 103-197, and also his Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy, op cit.

conditions or preconditions of a class and, hence, it is a revolutionary class. The classes of other socio-economic formations are only class categories due to the fact that they could not fulfil in the past the last two preconditions of class. Taking the cue from this explanation (explanation of subjective conditions of a class) the non-Marxists undermine the class analysis of Indian society. They argue that since the subjective conditions are absent, applicability of the concept of class in India is doubtful and, thus, the term class should be reserved for western world.

Further, class has been differentiated from social stratification also which is a general system of social gradation in most of the third world societies. For instance, Dahrendorf²⁴ builds up the model of class on the basis of power and authority structure and makes a difference between class and stratification in terms of dynamic and static categories respectively. He puts too much emphasis on conflict in the conceptualization of class. For him, it is conflict which distinguishes class from other social categories. So far as conflict as a

24. Ralph Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1959, pp 76, 138 and Passim.

precondition of the concept of class is concerned, it is difficult to find it in Indian situation at the overt level and in this sense the concept of class is not applicable in India. However, when a study of Indian society is made on the basis of its inner structure and dynamics, it becomes very clear that class analysis is not only possible requirement for the best sociological insight and explanation of social inequality but also a necessity. In fact, class should be recognised as an active political process as mentioned above.

If we use the term class in the processual sense, it becomes possible to analyse the class structure of Indian society. However, in the analysis of class the attributional criteria are of least significance because class is not merely a thing but it refers to the relationships as mentioned above. The interactional analysis of class is, therefore, more important than its attributional cataloguing. Secondly, class must be understood as a dynamic category whose relationship with the system of stratification is dialectical in nature. This is so because class is a component of the system of stratification and at the same time it influences the whole patterning of the system. In Indian context, class consciousness, class action and class conflict get their expression

primarily through caste consciousness, caste action and caste conflict. Moreover, caste and class are not polar categories in Indian society as stated earlier. Although caste and class can be recognized as two categories, they are not antithetical to each other. Instead, they are interwoven to a great extent and class relations are as old as caste relations. A number of studies²⁵ attest the fact that there has been historical and contemporary interlinkage between these two categories. In Indian context, "Caste incorporates the elements of class and class has cultural style of functioning"²⁶

If we emphasize much on both the historical and contemporary interlinkages between caste and class, it would be a concealment of fact. This is so because even after 40 years of independence one cannot deny the existence of caste as a sociological reality. One has to encounter the caste throughout the country, though its structure is not uniform. In some parts of the country it appears into the most virulent form than the others. It also

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25. See for instance, S.S. Sivakumar and Chitra Sivkumar, "Class and Jati at Asthapuram and Kanthapuram: Some comments towards a structure of interests", Economic and Political Weekly, Annual No. 1979 pp 263-286. Also see Sharad Patil, "Dialectics of caste and class conflicts", Economic and Political Weekly, Annual No. 1979, pp 287-296; Ajit Ray 'Caste and Class: An Interlinked view', Economic and Political Weekly, Annual No. 1979, pp 297-312.
26. K.L. Sharma, Essays on Social Stratification, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1980, pp XI-XII.

emanates almost all spheres of life. It has been pointed out earlier in this chapter that there is a continuity between traditional structure and modern values.

In fact, the traditional structure and modern values exist side by side in a harmonious fashion through the process of 'compartmentalization', 'ritual neutralization', 'vicarious ritualization', 'typological stylization', 'reinterpretation', 'archaization', etc.²⁷ Thus, those who assume that the traditional institutions like caste and joint family are being replaced by modern institutions of class and nuclear family respectively are empirically and logically invalid. The different studies²⁸ conducted both in urban and rural areas in terms of finding the effects of industrialization, urbanization, modernization, etc. suggest that the traditional institutions have not been eroded altogether. On the contrary, they have been adapting themselves with modern structure. Caste has been abolished only in the legal sense but in every real

27. Milton Singer, When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1972, p. 404.

28. For an overview see Manish Dasgupta, "Changes in the joint family in India", Man in India, Vol. 45, No. 4, pp 283-38; Michael Ames, "Modernisation and Social Structure: Family, Caste and Class in Jamshedpur", Economic and Political Weekly, Special Number, July 1969, pp 1217-24; O.M. Lynch, "Rural cities in India: Continuities and Discontinuities" in M.S.A. Rao (ed.), Urban Sociology in India, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1974, pp 251-71; C.T. Kannan, "Intercaste and Inter-community Marriages in India" in M.S.A. Rao, *Ibid*,

situation it can be located both at the cognitive and existential levels as stated earlier.

There is no complete separation between caste and modern political and economic activities. Now, caste is not confined to ritual and religious order only but it has been extended to modern politics and economy.²⁹ The needs and demands posed by the modern structure have led the members of different castes to get organized in order to articulate opportunities for mutual benefits. Moreover, it is modern structure which has led to the politics of vertical mobilization among members of the dominant castes on the one hand and the 'horizontal mobilization' among the lower castes on the other.³⁰

Moreover, one cannot overlook the class character of caste. In rural India caste positions generally correspond to class positions. The dominant castes are not just groups numerically preponderant but they are, in fact, dominant classes of their respective region. Castes have invariably the elements of class and power,

pp 348-54; Saroj Kapoor, "Family and Kinship groups among the Khattris in Delhi" in M.S.A. Rao, *Ibid*, pp 355-66.

29. See Rajni Kothari (ed), Caste in Indian Politics, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1970, pp 3-25.

30. L.I. Rudolph and S.H. Rudolph, The Modernity of Tradition, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1967, pp 64-87.

and power has elements of both caste and class.³¹ This correspondence between caste, class and power has been both historical and sociological reality. The dominant castes have always tried to maintain their hegemony in the field^{of}/economy, polity and culture. For this purpose, they have articulated the system of beliefs and values in their own interest. Even in modern Indian society this process is operative. The dominant castes inculcate and indoctrinate caste consciousness, caste sentiment and caste ideology among the members of their respective castes in order to articulate the modern opportunities on the one hand and to maintain the traditional hegemonic position in society on the other. Caste federations, caste banks, caste organisations and caste associations are the manifestations of this reality. Thus, as 'ideological state apparatuses' play vital role in the intergenerational perpetuation of social inequality, caste also plays the similar role in Indian society. It functions as a barrier in the maturation of class consciousness. Keeping these facts in mind we have to accept the reality of caste. If we negate this reality just by treating it as a phenomenon of the past, we are bound to be misguided in our analysis.

31. K.L. Sharma, op cit., pp XII.

In sum, both caste and class constitute the sociological reality of Indian society and none of them can be left aside in a systematic analysis of social inequality in Indian society. Both are equally important and can be analysed within a single framework in which their roles and importance of each may be determined according to context. In one context, caste may be more important and in another class may gain more significance. So far as power dimension of social inequality is concerned, it can be analysed with reference to caste and class. Thus, in the analysis of social inequality we must have to strike a balance between the two opposite models of caste and class in Indian society.

CHAPTER IV

STRUCTURATION OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN RURALBIHAR

In the preceding chapters we have tried to analyse the statics and dynamics of social inequality in general and the complex relationship between caste and class in India in particular. As stated in earlier chapters, a congruence between caste, class and power has remained both a historical and sociological reality in India and despite some alterations in the traditional patterns of inequality have not been eliminated altogether. The division of Indian society both on the caste¹ and class lines has remained a structural reality even in the present time.

Keeping this fact in mind, this chapter analyses the statics and dynamics of social inequality in rural Bihar with reference to the complex relationships between caste, class and power. The analysis based exclusively on the existing literature revolves around three fundamental

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1. The Marxist scholars argue that the caste system is a remnant of the feudal mode of production which is being replaced by the capitalist mode of production. Consequently the caste system is being replaced by the class system. For details see A.R. Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism, Popular, Bombay, 1966 and his Rural India in Transition, Popular, Bombay, 1979; Nirmal Sengupta, "Caste as An Agrarian Phenomenon in Twentieth Century Bihar", in A.N. Das and V.Nilkant (eds.) Agrarian Relations in India, Manohar, Delhi, 1979, pp 83-93.

questions. First relates to the structuration of social inequality in rural Bihar. The second tries to analyse the changes which have taken place in the traditional patterns of social inequality. Finally, the third relates to the forces and mechanisms that have been responsible for the change and maintenance of social inequality in rural Bihar.

In order to analyse the structuration of social inequality in contemporary Bihar, it would be proper to identify the existing mode of production because it has important bearing on the patterns of social inequality, the nature of social relationships and the related social processes. But the identification of the mode of production in Indian agrarian structure in general and Bihar in particular is a very much debated topic and there is no consensus among the social scientists. However, the existing views can be categorised into three broad types.² The first view identifies the existing mode of production as a capitalist mode of production, whereas the second characterises it as a colonial mode of production. The third view is quite different from the first two. It argues that the present mode of production is 'semi-feudal' in its nature. But before reaching to any conclusion it is essential to have

2. Arvind Narain Das, Agrarian Unrest and Socio-Economic change in Bihar, 1900-80, Manohar, Delhi, 1983, pp 3-9.

a brief exposition and critical examination of all the views. This may enable us also to provide a better understanding of the statics and dynamics of social inequality in rural Bihar.

The first view is based on the assumption that several changes have taken place in the traditional mode of production due to the advancement in the production technology, especially after independence. Industrialization, urbanization, commercialization of crops and the penetration of market forces in rural areas have introduced the elements of capitalism in Indian agriculture. On the basis of their empirical investigations and theoretical formulations the proponents of this view³ argue that the elements like generalized commodity production, capital accumulation, motive of profit maximization and the expansion of market suggest that the Indian mode of production must be analysed

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3. For an overview see, Utsa Patnaik, "Capitalist development in Agriculture", Economic and Political Weekly, 30 September, 1972, pp A 145-51; idem, "The Agrarian Question and Development of Capitalism in India", Economic and Political Weekly, May 3, 1986, pp 781-93; Ashok Rudra, "In Search of the Capitalist Farmer", Economic and Political Weekly, June 27, 1970, pp A 85-87; also his "Capitalist Development in Agriculture" Economic and Political Weekly, November 6, 1971, pp 2291-92; R.S. Rao, "In Search of the Capitalist Farmer", Economic and Political Weekly, December 29, 1970, pp 2055-56.

in terms of the capitalist mode of production. Since the adherents of this view perceive the changes in terms of the law of the capitalist development, they consider caste logically as a feature of the feudal structure and ignore its role in structuring the design of social inequality in the present time. In other words, the feudal mode of production, according to them, has been replaced by the capitalist mode of production and the traditional caste system has also been replaced by the class system. Hence, any analysis of social inequality in their view should centre around the class analysis.

But this strand of view seems simplistic because it ignores the internal dynamics of Indian society in general and Bihar in particular. Secondly, it seems that the proponents of this view have generalized the findings of their micro-level researches. The trends of capitalist development are absent in several areas of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. If the advancement in production technology has taken place in some parts of India, it cannot be assumed that this trend is uniform through out the country. Thirdly, this view hardly recognises the lack of capital accumulation and drain of agricultural surplus. Moreover, this type of view is based on a wrong conceptualization of the mode of production itself where it has been conceptualized in terms of the forces of production. The production relations and

corresponding social structure have, in one way or the other, been subordinated to the forces of production.

The second view advocates that the Indian agrarian structure can best be understood in terms of the colonial mode of production. Taking too much from the thesis of underdevelopment⁴ (particularly from Andre Gundre Frank), the adherents of this view⁵ argue that there is a lack of capital accumulation in Indian agriculture as a whole which is causally related to the colonial economic formation. The lack of capital accumulation in Indian agriculture is a result of the drain of agricultural surplus. The core-periphery or metropolis-satellite relationship is of central importance. According to the underdevelopment thesis, there exists a chain of exploitation between developed and underdeveloped regions. The developed regions

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4. The underdevelopment thesis has remained an important approach in the analysis of backward regions with a reference to the world capitalist system. For details see, Andre Gundre Frank, On capitalist underdevelopment, Oxford University Press, 1975; Wallerstein's analysis of the world system also resembles with this perspective. For an overview see, Immanuel Wallerstein, Modern World System : Capitalist Agriculture and the origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century, Academic Press, New York, 1974.
 5. See for details, Andre Gundre Frank, "On Feudal Modes, Models and Methods of Escaping Capitalist Reality", Economic and Political Weekly, January 6, 1973, pp 35-36; Hamza Alvi, "India and Colonial Mode of Production", Economic and Political Weekly, August 1975, pp 1235-62; Jairus Banaji, "For a Theory of Colonial Mode of Production", Economic and Political Weekly, December 23, 1972, pp 2498-2502.

are characterised as metropolis or core whereas the under-developed regions are identified as satellites or peripheries and there is an exploitative relationship between the core and peripheries. The surplus generated in peripheries flows to core. The drain of surplus, thus, results into under-development of the subordinate areas.

This relationship of super-ordination and sub-ordination is not confined to the field of economy only but is also extended to other areas like the design of political, social and cultural life, etc. The political authority has to play an important role in this regard which, in fact, is controlled by the developed region countries. However, it is not free to act according to its own will or volition as it has to follow the rules of the game otherwise it would be difficult to remain in the privileged position for a long time. Due to the external pressure and for self-interest, it constitutes an important unit in the chain of exploitation. In order to exploit economic resources, it revitalizes and reinforces the primordial ties and loyalties. This results into underdevelopment of the backward areas. The third view asserts that the semi-feudalism can best characterise the existing mode of

production in Indian agrarian structure. The proponents of this⁶ view arrive at such type of conclusion due to their distinct conceptualization of the mode of production. They emphasize equally both on the forces of production and production relations. They consider the fact that some advancement has taken place in the agricultural technology but no capitalistic relationships have evolved in rural areas. There is relative absence of a thorough-going capitalist revolution in the production technology. Secondly, numerous instances of share-cropping in Indian agriculture go against the proposition of the capitalist development. The age-old institutions like caste, joint family, religious beliefs, etc. still dominate the rural life. In this situation the proposition of semi-feudalism

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6. Their empirical findings are based on the studies of a number of villages of the Eastern regions - West Bengal and Bihar. For details see, Amit Bhaduri, "An Analysis of Semi-Feudalism in East Indian Agriculture", Frontier, Vol. 6, Nos. 25-27, pp 11-15; 1973; Nirmal Chandra, "Farm efficiency under semi-feudalism", Economic and Political Weekly, August, 1974, pp 1309-32; Pradhan H. Prasad, "Production Relations : Achilles Heel of Indian Agriculture", Economic and Political Weekly, May 12, 1973, pp 869-72; idem, "Reactionary Role of Userers' capital in Rural India", Economic and Political Weekly, August, 1974, pp 1305-08; Ranjit Sau, "Political Economy of Indian Agriculture : What is it All About", Economic and Political Weekly, May 19, 1973, pp 911-12.

is quite logical. Bhaduri⁷ accounts the following reasons for such type of characterisation :

- a. an extensive non-legalised share-cropping system;
- b. perpetual indebtedness of the small tenants;
- c. the ruling class in rural areas operates both as land owners and money-lenders to the small tenants;
- d. rural tenants have incomplete access to the rural markets and are forcibly involved in involuntary exchanges through distress sales; and
- e. the labourers' conditions are, more or less, semi-slave which add some extra economic power to the landlords in rural areas.

These propositions on the semi-feudalism have been challenged by different scholars. For instance, Ashok Rudra,⁸ doubts the applicability of the very concept of feudalism in India. Presenting a critique to the followers of this view Gupta writes, "...The scenario they sketch is a static and stagnant one, where even if capitalism has

7. Amit Bhaduri, Ibid, pp 11-15.

8. See Ashok Rudra, "Against Semi-Feudalism, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XVI No. 52, pp 2133-46.

made a tentative entry, capitalistic feature can never develop beyond a certain limit. The capitalistic forces seem to be subordinated here to the feudal one".⁹

The above expositions clearly show that all the three views suffer from some corresponding lacunae. The first two, for instance, have undermined the role of internal dynamics of society and the third view hardly takes into account the external factor. It is an ignorance of the modern world capitalism and its inherent logic. In fact, we cannot talk about a uniform mode of production through out India. The states like Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, some parts of Tamilnadu, Western U.P., etc., show some sorts of capitalistic trend whereas Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa contain some elements of feudalism as stated earlier. Even in Bihar the different regions show different trends. For instance, the areas surrounding Patna show the capitalistic trend in agriculture and allied activities. In these areas the technological advancement, production of generalized commodity, commercialization of crops and motive of profit maximization can be recognized as capitalistic trend to some extent. Other areas of south-central Bihar exhibit some

9. Dipankar Gupta, "Formal and real sub-assumption of labour under capital : The instance of share cropping" in Amit Kumar Gupta (ed.), Agrarian Structure and Peasant Revolt in India, Criterion Publications, New Delhi, 1986, p 5.

other trends which resembles more or less, with the feudal mode of production. This means, the different modes of production may exist in a particular social formation - some more advanced than the social formation, some corresponding to it and some even more primitive.¹⁰

Taking a cue from Laclau¹¹ who argues that "there exists an indissoluble unity between capitalist and feudal structures", we can say that the same reality is operative in Indian situation. The capitalism has, no doubt, made an entry into the agrarian structure but it has not brought a radical change in the traditional political economy. However, despite the existence of the different modes of production in rural areas, the dominant mode of production in Bihar can best be understood as 'semi-feudal' or pre-capitalist corresponding to the similar structuration and pattern of social inequality. Thus, we find both the elements of feudal and capitalist structures inextricably interwoven in the society of Bihar. Both caste and class,

10. Arvind N.Das also makes a similar difference between social formation and the modes of production especially in the case of Bihar. See, Arvind N.Das, op cit., p 9.

11. Ernesto Laclau, Politics and ideology in Marxist Theory, New Left Books, London, 1979, p 33.

with their two different structures, exist side by side as two forms of social inequality. Moreover, "class interests in the pre-capitalist society never achieve full (economic) articulation. Hence the structuring of society into castes and estates means that economic elements are inextricably joined to political and religious factors".¹² This gets confirmed in the political economy of rural Bihar. Due to some internal and external factors the composition of land, caste and politics and their relationships in rural Bihar have been changing from time to time but the changes have followed the pattern of some continuities. Amidst the process of social transformation during the post-independent period, the traditional patterns of social inequality have also changed. In order to get an insight of the problem we have to glance diachronically over both pre and post-independence developments.

The Political Economy of Bihar during the Pre-Independence
Period

In pre-independent Bihar there was almost a congruence between economic, social and political hierarchies. The agrarian hierarchy created by the permanent settlement of

12. George Lukacs, History and Class-Consciousness, Merlin Press, London, 1971, p 55.

1793 was well fitted into the existing caste hierarchy. The Brahmins, Bhumihars, Rajputs and Kayasthas were economically better-off with their corresponding higher positions in the caste hierarchy. They constituted upper castes in Bihar. The Brahmins, Bhumihars and Rajputs were mainly landowning castes and most of the Zamindars were drawn from these castes. The Kayasthas were dominating in the field of education. Since they were the first to receive English education, they dominated in both professional and administrative works. All these upper castes constituted only about 13%¹³ of the total population but they were dominant in almost all fields of supremacy. In fact, their numerical weakness was compensated by their higher ritual status and economic and political power.

"... Before coming of the British, the influence which dominated village community was that of a particular kind, especially of Brahmins and Rajputs, who owned most villages either as village Zamindars in the upper provinces and parts of Bihar or as Taluqdars in Bengal, as mirasdars in the south or inamdars in the West. The other occupational groups worked in subservience to the dominant landed interest of a village".¹⁴

13. See H.W. Blair, "Rising Kulaks and Backward Classes in Bihar : Social change in the late 1970's", Economic and Political Weekly, January 12, 1980, pp 64-74.

14. B.B.Mishra, The Indian Middle Classes : Their growth in Modern Times, Oxford University Press, London, 1961 p 55.

More than hundred castes of lower rungs in caste hierarchy, were either tenants or agricultural labourers in the pre-independence period. The Kurmis, Yadavs and Koeris were both numerically and economically sound among the backward castes. In the pre-independence period, these were more organised than any other backward castes. But economic differentiation was very much operative among them. Most of these and lower castes were obliged to enter in the exploitative Jajmani relationship. Due to the caste-based restricted interactional pattern, they had to follow the rules of ritual observance directed by the upper castes. The Kurmis, Yadavs and Koeris were basically agriculturist and most of the tenants were drawn from these castes. However, they also constituted the agricultural labourers.

The Chamars, Dusadhs and Mushars were numerically significant among those castes who formed the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy. They were primarily agricultural labourers or were engaged in the allied activities. Most of them were considered as untouchables and, thus, their interaction with the upper castes or even middle castes was very restricted. They were the most oppressed section of the society. Manifestly or latently, they were merely an object of exploitation, oppression and repression

in all respects. The concept of compulsory or bonded labour was very much applicable with these caste. Despite their numerical significance, they were socially, economically politically or otherwise most deprived. So, they were living, more or less, in the semi-slave conditions.

It is true that social inequality has remained a fact as well as value in the traditional Indian society¹⁵ in general and Bihar in particular. This has been operative through an intricate ruling class ideology legitimized and institutionalized in the form of religious doctrine of 'Karma and Dharma' as stated in chapters 1 and 2. Although the hierarchical design of Indian society as whole was based on caste ideology and was in existence since the very beginning of Indian history, the colonial policies of the Britishers gave it the concrete shape and aggravated the whole situation. In fact, this was a strategic move in the direction of 'divide and rule policy'. Traditionally, the operations of castes were confined to small regions. But the census surveys and other government policies brought the numerous castes of the different regions in the light and provided a comparative framework.¹⁶ Due to the government policies, caste awareness and consciousness aroused very much in the early years of this century which gave a new dimension to the problem of

15. Social inequality is a fact in the sense that it is universal and it is value in the sense that it is regarded as proper, legitimate and desirable. For details see, Andre Beteille, Studies in Agrarian Social Structure, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1974, pp 194-200.

inequality.

The census of 1901¹⁷ resulted into caste based movements in Bihar and elsewhere. In Bihar the Bhumihars and Kayasthas were accorded the position similar to that of the Kurmis, Yadavs, Koeris, etc. This led to the widespread dischancement among them and the caste-feeling reached to its height. Both the castes challenged the government decision. Dr. Sachchidanand Sinha became the leader of the Kayasthas to carry on the struggle for higher social position in the caste hierarchy. Likewise, Sir Ganesh Dutta Sinha became the reformer of the Bhumihars. But the most important movement in 1920s was of the Bhumihars in the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. The Swami opposed the government decision and with the help of Hindu scriptures and literary texts¹⁸ he proved Bhumihars as pure Brahmin. Latter on he transcended the narrow boundary of caste and started the first class-based agrarian movement in Bihar through the establishment of the Kisan Sabha. Though he withdrew himself from the caste based narrow loyalty, the caste consciousness in the state did not disappear; rather, it was reflected in the formation of caste mahasabhas or any other caste based organizations.

16. Nirmal Sengupta, op. cit., p 86.

17. Ibid, pp 83-90.

18. See Sahajanand Saraswati, Bhumihar Brahman Parichay, Banaras, 1916.

The caste-feelings instigated by the British government were not confined to the upper castes only. There were many other castes also who were insisting, through organized movement, for the higher status in caste hierarchy. For instance, the Kurmis, Yadavs and Koeris, both the class of tenants and agricultural labourers, were fighting for higher status. The Triveni Sangh¹⁹ was a natural outcome of this trend. In fact, the government policies provided condition for the horizontal consolidation of the different castes. "The Awadhias of Patna district, Dhanuks of north Bihar and Mahatos of Chotanagpur region were, for instance, distinct castes separated by geographical distances. Even today, in religious, martial and traditional social functions they maintain distinction. But in politics they regard themselves as a single caste named Kurmi".²⁰ Such trend was operative also among the lowest castes like Dusadhs, Doms, etc.²¹

Thus, instead of class consciousness, caste consciousness took a deep root in the society of Bihar. Moreover,

19. The Triveni Sangh an organisation of the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris was very much active in 1920s. See Hiranmay Dhar, et al, "Caste and Polity in Bihar" in gail omvedt (ed.), Land, Caste and Politics in Indian states, Guild Publications, Delhi, 1982, pp 103-04.

20. Nirmal Sengupta, op.cit., p 86.

21. Ibid, pp 84-85.

the British government in India granted some economic and political privileges on the basis of caste. This was the objective condition for the concretization of caste hierarchy. The census operation and economic privileges together caused the growth of caste-feeling not only during the colonial period but also remained instruments for continuation of the same even in the post-independent period in Bihar. Simultaneously, the economic differentiation was also very conspicuous. Due to the high level of economic differentiation based on land, the class formation was also taking a definite shape coupled with both objective situation and subjective condition. This was reflected in the sporadic²² as well as organized²³ agrarian movements in rural Bihar. But in order to get a comprehensive picture of the situation we have to review the agrarian structure of the pre-independent period in Bihar.

In pre-independent Bihar the agrarian structure was very much inegalitarian in its design as well as in its

22. The Santhal and Munda uprisings were mainly sporadic in nature. See K.S.Singh, Tribal Movements in India, Manohar, Delhi, 1982.

23. The Champaran Satyagraha (1917), for instance, appeared as an organized movement both in terms of leadership and organizational set up. See Girish Mishra, The Agrarian Problems of Permanent Settlement : A Case Study of Champaran, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1978. Also Jaques Poucheapadass, "Local Lenders and the Intelligentsia in the Champaran Satyagraha", Contributions to Indian Sociology, New Series, No.8, November 1974. pp 67-87.

spirit. There was an intricably stratified system in agrarian structure in terms of relationship of people to land. It becomes clear from an analysis of the evolution of land systems in Bihar that, through the successive Kingdoms and empires, the ruling authority exercised its rights over a share of the produce of the soil. And in this sense no absolute ownership of land existed in Bihar. Thorner²⁴ argues that even Britishers did not introduce the private property in land. Though these points are highly controversial, we may agree with Thorner who writes, "To no holder was granted the exclusive right to occupy, enjoy and dispose of land which, in practice, is the hallmark of western private ownership".²⁵ While the Britishers introduce rights normally associated with the ownership of private property, e.g. rights of transfer, mortgageability and heritability, these were always subordinate to the rights of the state. In fact, the state acted as a 'super landlord'²⁶ claiming a rent-share of produce from the actual cultivators of the soil. The provisions made in the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 were intended to assume the absolute right to share the

24. Daniel Thorner, The Agrarian Prospect in India, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1956.

25. Ibid, p 7.

26. Jannuze F. Thomasson Agrarian crisis in India : The case of Bihar, Sangam Books, New Delhi, 1974.

produce from the land. However, the provisions conferred certain subordinate rights to the Zamindars of this period. The Zamindars were in reality the right in perpetuity to collect rent from lands considered to be under their control and were expected to pay a fixed amount in cash to the company and later to the British government in India. It is another thing that the Zamindars were given absolute authority to dictate their own terms with their tenants. Thus, the Permanent Settlement, in one way or the other, perpetuated and aggravated inequality in the agrarian structure in which the actual cultivators were compelled to share their produce with an essentially parasitic class of non-cultivating intermediaries.

The parasitic class of non-cultivating intermediaries was composed mostly of the upper castes. Though the relative size of the Zamindari in Bihar was mostly small in spite of the existence of mammoth estates like Darbhanga, Bettiah, Banaili, Dumaraon, etc.,²⁷ the degree of exploitation and oppression was very high. The tenants and agricultural labourers were drawn generally from the lower castes and were the common target of exploitation. For instance, the tenants were bound to pay the fixed rent on the land to the landlords and in the case of their failure

27. Arvind Narain Das, op. cit., p 25.

they were forcibly deprived of the land through the Bakasht mechanism.²⁸ Apart from this they had to pay Salami (consideration money to be paid to the landlord in the case of transfer of holdings), Bhusavan (supplying husk for Zamindar's cattle), Motoravan (for purchasing the Zamindar's car), Hathiavan (for purchasing the Zamindar's elephant), Bagavan (for planting the Zamindar's orchard), Petpiravan (when the Zamindar's wife conceived), Janmavan (when the Zamindar was blessed with an offspring), Holiyavan (when the Zamindar celebrated the Holi festival), Pakavan (when the Zamindar got a boil), etc.²⁹ There were numerous other pretexts such as marriage in the Zamindar's family, cost of the son's education abroad, etc. for the illegal extractions of agricultural produce of the tenants.

The lower caste peasants were totally dependent on the lands of their upper caste maliks (landowner masters) for their residence and cultivation and on their wells, ponds, etc. for drinking water and irrigation of crops.³⁰

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

29. See Arvind N. Das, *op. cit.*, pp 42-45.

30. The similar situation has been observed by Rajendra Singh in his study of Eastern Uttar Pradesh; for details see his "Caste, Land and Politics in Uttar Pradesh" in Gail Omvedt, *op. cit.*, p 79.

For this they had to pay not only in cash but had generally to do the begar (unpaid labour). Their forced condition was not better than semi-slave as mentioned above. This high handedness of the Zamindars became more oppressive for tenants and agricultural labourers with a passage of time. The new legal and judicial institutions were introduced by the British government of India with the intention of maintaining law and order and distributing justice but in effect these helped in the reinforcement of influence of the landlords and moneylenders. The loyalty of the upper stratum of society shown to the British Raj in the post-revolt (1857) period also helped the Zamindars and money-lenders in their repression of the tenants and labourers. That is why, Moore³¹ calls the post-revolt period as "Landlords paradise".

The influence and power of the upper castes was not confined to the agrarian structure only. They also enjoyed the fruits of modern structure created through the contact with the outside world. They were the first who took modern education which perpetuated the system of inequality in the way that they almost monopolized the

31. Berrington Moore Jr. Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, Penguin, 1969, p 353.

professional and administrative works. This added some additional power to them as they enjoyed again the monopoly of political power. The leaders like Late Babu Jagjivan Ram from the lower castes had hardly any independent base and, by and large, they had to depend on the upper castes leaders for their supports. The formation of Khet Mazdoor Sabha, one of the first agricultural labour organizations in the country, which was led by late Babu Jagjivan Ram and was motivated to pose a challenge to the Kisan Sabha³² was backed by the Congress Party dominated by the upper castes in the state. Even the movement for national independence was headed by the upper castes. This was due to their higher position in both the agrarian hierarchy and castes hierarchy. Thus, in the pre-independent Bihar like other north Indian states the nature of social inequality was cumulative.

The Political Economy of Post-Independent Bihar

In the post-independent period the picture has slightly changed. The traditional cumulative inequality is getting disturbed due to both internal dynamics and external environment. The monopoly of the upper castes in every

32. Hiranmay Dhar et al, op.cit., p 106.

field is getting challenged by the emerging middle castes peasants like Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris. The traditional bases of social inequality are under the process of alteration though they still operate in very subtle form. The hegemonies of the upper castes in the fields of politics, economy, education, etc. are also in the process of change. Despite these changes, there is no indication of radical transformation in the traditional forms of social inequality and in their mode of operation. These changes, in fact, show some sorts of continuity with the social situations existed in the pre-British period. For the analysis of emerging patterns of social inequality, we have to examine the interplay between land, caste and politics in rural areas of Bihar. In this context, the patterns of ownership, control and use of land can be taken which provides one of the most important sources of social inequality in rural Bihar.

We have seen that in the pre-independence period there was congruence between caste hierarchy and agrarian hierarchy and there was almost complete monopoly of the upper castes on lands. This is evident from the fact that as late as in 1951 about 80% of the land was under the control of three castes of Brahmins, Bhumihars and Rajputs.³³ The rest

33. See Ramashray Roy, "Caste and Political Recruitment in Bihar" in Rajni Kothari (ed), Caste in Indian Politics, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1970, p 232.

was in the hands of Muslims and the middle and lower castes peasants. This high concentration of land has, to some extent, been broken now. The abolition of the Zamindari and the land reforms are important in this regard. Despite the opposition of the Zamindari Abolition Act 1948 by the Zamindars and landlords, the Zamindari was abolished through the Bihar Land Reforms Act 1950 which can be regarded as a milestone against the traditional mechanism of oppression and exploitation. With the abolition of the Zamindari a vast number of oppressive intermediaries and parasitic landlords have been sacked down in the rural areas.

Besides the Zamindari abolition, the implementations of the other land reform measures give a very pessimistic picture. Many efforts, except the abolition of Zamindari, to bring change in the agrarian structure have almost been failure. That is why, no significant change has occurred in the agrarian structure Thomasson³⁴ observes that though Bihar was the first state to initiate the agrarian reform, through the enactment of legislation, and the abolition of the Zamindari system, its efforts to implement other agrarian reforms were least successful. In fact, even after independence the radical language of land reform followed by the conservative action had hardly benefited the

34. Jannuzi F. Thomasson, "An account of failure of Agrarian Reforms and the Growth of Agrarian Tensions in Bihar, 1940-1970" in Robert Fry Kenberg (ed) Land Tenure and Peasant in South Asia, Manohar, New Delhi, 1977, p 209.

toiling masses and landless labourers. The reasons for improper implementation of the land reform measures are mainly the lack of political will on the part of the politicians representing the interests of big landlords, inefficiency of the bureaucracy and loopholes in the land reform measures themselves. The different clauses of the land reform measures are misinterpreted and manipulated for the benefits of the landlords. The Land Ceiling Act 1961 has also been misutilized in the name of Benami, cooperative forming, etc. Even if some lands have been collected through this Act and through the Bhoodan (gift of the land) movement, these have hardly been distributed among the landless labourers. These lands, in one way or the other, remain in the possession of Maliks. The Gairmazarua land (the government land) is also controlled and utilized by the upper and middle castes landlords. The consolidation of land holdings, a part of land reform measures, has also been misutilized by the landlords with the help of the political authority and bureaucracy.

Besides these land reform measures, some other efforts have also been made in order to reduce the gap between the poor and the rich in rural areas. The green revolution movement is one of them which has benefited only to the

upper stratum of society. Even the different rural development programmes carried out by the government have been articulated and manipulated by the dominant sections of society. The agrarian structure in the state is still very unequal. The percentage of population living in rural areas and depending upon agriculture has declined only marginally whereas the share of agriculture in the Gross National Product has declined sharply. Thus, the per capita income of the cultivators and agricultural labourers has lowered down.³⁵ Thus, the rural masses, still live in the miserable conditions.

In spite of these limitations of land reforms and developmental programmes, a new section of the rich peasants and urban bourgeoisie drawn from the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris has emerged in the recent years. This is one of the most important developments in the post-independent period in Bihar. Though the economic differentiation among these backward castes was very much operative even in the pre-independence period as mentioned above, its intensity has been increasing in the post-independent era. After the abolition of the Zamindari, some persons of the backward castes have become owners of the

35. J.D. Sethi, "Middle Peasantry Power cannot be ignored", The Times of India, March 23, 1988.

substantial land and some middle and poor peasants have been pushed down to become the agricultural labourers. Since the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris are both numerically and economically better-off in comparison to other backward castes, they have emerged as the powerful force in Bihar. Their dominance has resulted from the benefits of the abolition of Zamindari, land reforms, developmental programmes and the adoption of the modern economic opportunities provided by industrialisation, urbanization and technological development. The rising economic power of the backward castes has gradually reflected in the fields of politics, education, bureaucracy and administration also. This becomes more evident from the analysis of the relationship between caste and politics.

The post-independent developments in the political arena suggest that the traditional dominance of the upper castes over state politics is getting challenged by the trinity of the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris. In this sense, we encounter with the phenomenon of gradually enlarging circle of political competition³⁶ in Bihar. This has happened due to the introduction of the adult franchise, modern democratic politics, constitutional guarantees coupled with some sorts of socio-political consciousness. This, in turn, has resulted into the breakdown of the monopoly of the upper castes in the political power and

36. Ramashray Roy, op.cit, p 240.

authority. In fact, in the middle of 1960s the new peasantry consisting of the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris achieved equivalence in politics with the old rich constituting of the Brahmins, Shumihars, Rajputs and Kayasthas.

However, there is a trend of little decline in dominance of the upper castes. But this does not mean that the upper castes have lost all types of control over the state politics. This becomes clear from the analysis of the caste composition of the M.L.As (Members of Legislative Assembly) at the time of different assembly elections in the state.³⁷ In 1960s the different leaders from the backward castes came into existence but, more or less, they were the product of the upper castes' rivalry and were mostly identified with a particular political faction of the upper castes.³⁸ In fact, as late as in 1976 they were generally operating in the state politics with the help of and in collaboration with the upper castes leaders. But in recent years the situation has largely changed. The reservation issue has provided a common platform for the backward castes. Late Karpoori Thakur, belonging to a numerically insignificant caste of Nai (barber), became the leader of the backward castes. Now, the leaders from the

37. For detail see Kiran Shukla, Caste in Indian Politics, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1987, p 48.

38. See Hiranmay Dhar, et al op.cit., p 108.

backward castes are not just asserting themselves in the state politics and rural power structure but are trying to establish their hold in the power structure. They have become major rivals of the upper castes in the electoral politics. The challenge posed by the backward castes especially Yadavs and Kurmis is not confined to the politics alone; rather, it extends to other fields as well. Now, they are competing with the upper castes for greater share in the state administration and job market. While their number was negligible in the field of education in the pre-independence period,³⁹ they have at present considerably better access both in general and technical education in the state.

However, the upper castes are still in the dominant position in spite of their numerical inferiority and they try to maintain their traditional hegemony and position intact. They still occupy better positions in the state administration and bureaucracy. The key functionaries in different departments of the state come mostly from the upper castes. This is due to the fact that they were economically dominant in the pre-independence period and

39. See Ramashray Roy, op.cit., p 233.

their better economic position provided them better opportunities in other fields as stated earlier. Due to their such historical legacy they have better contacts with the state machinery which sometimes functions as their ally and makes their positions more strengthened. This is so as "The object of all these machineries of control, it should be noted, has not been primarily profit maximization or even pre-capitalist accumulation, but rather maintenance of position, for the larger farmers are more than anything else by fear of loosing control, of being sucked under by the huge undermass in the countryside. For them risk is not measured in terms of possible financial gain and loss, or opportunity cost considerations, so much in terms of possible loss of social, economic and political control over the rural areas".⁴⁰

So far as the basic condition of the scheduled castes in the post-independent period is concerned, no basic changes have taken place. Even today a major portion of agricultural labourers in rural areas comes from the scheduled castes. The government policy of the "protective discrimination" has hardly benefited the scheduled castes masses and has led only to the elite formation among them.

40. H.W. Blair, op.cit., p 70. Almost similar observation has been made in P.H. Prasad, "Caste and Class in Bihar", Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number, February, 1979, pp 481-484.

The lofty slogans like land reforms, minimum wages, removal of bonded labour, Garibi Hatao, etc. have not brought any remarkable change in their condition. "The benefits of these programmes, in fact, are articulated by the members of the dominant castes"⁴¹ in their respective regions.

The universal adult-suffrage has, no doubt, provided importance to the numerical strength. But in every real situation, politics is articulated by the upper strata of society as mentioned above. In most of the cases in remote villages in rural Bihar the universal adult-suffrage has fitted to the old patron-client relationship where patrons manipulate votes for their own benefits. Some members of the scheduled castes who were economically better off and, to some extent, socially conscious earlier have been benefited from the privileges given by the government. Though they constitute the category of elite as stated above, their number is still insignificant. Moreover, those who constitute the elite group hardly identify themselves with the masses of their caste and on most of the occasions they join hands with the upper castes and the emergent dominant castes of Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris.

41. In the post-independent Bihar the Bhumihars, Brahmins, Rajputs, Yadavs and Kurmis generally constitute dominant castes in terms of their numerical, political and economic strength in the different regions.

The relationship of the scheduled castes with the upper castes and the new rich backward castes has basically been of superordinate and subordinate types. Since most of the scheduled castes are agricultural labourers, they have to depend upon their maliks for their subsistence. The maliks are exploitative in their attitude, orientation and behaviour and the labourers are bound to remain in the sub-human conditions of work. If they raise their voice for their genuine rights, they are suppressed through all mechanisms. But the ongoing exploitations and oppressions are resulting into the growth of consciousness among the agricultural workers from the below. In recent years they have started resisting against their exploitation which have resulted into the outbursts of violence at the different places in rural Bihar. However, this issue will be taken up in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF INEQUALITY : CONTINUITIES
AND DISCONTINUITIES

In recent years tension, conflict and violence have become a common practice in Bihar. Although tension has manifested in the different forms since the very beginning of the colonial rule, its intensity has got a tremendous momentum in the recent past. An alarming intensity of the problem has tightened the nerves of the political elites, ruling authority and bureaucracy, on the one hand, and has led the social scientists to construct new ideological framework, theorization and characterization of the problem on the other. As it has been mentioned in the earlier chapter, the theoretical and ideological formulations available for the analysis of the problem are mainly of two types i.e. class analysis and caste analysis but these types of formulations fall in the reductionist perspective. Though we have examined the relationship between caste and class in Indian society in chapter 3, we again emphasise that caste and class are inextricably interwoven in the society of Bihar. In other words, "society in Bihar is not articulated only in caste terms but also in terms of class".¹

1. A.N. Das, "Class In itself, Caste for Itself : Social Articulation in Bihar", Economic and Political Weekly, September 15, 1984, p 1616.

When we examine the social implications of inequality, we come across the fact that the social stratification system, the mutual reinforcement of social and economic inequalities and the culture and ideology of repression in the semi-feudal structure of Bihar have been major factors of tension, conflict and violence. So, the structural root of the problem lies, in fact, in the system of social inequality. This becomes clearer when we examine the issue diachronically and this chapter is an attempt in that direction.

We have discussed in the previous chapter that there was a close fit between agrarian and social hierarchies in Bihar. And this hierarchically arranged system had the seeds of tension, conflict and violence. Moreover, the colonial rule not only aggravated the situation but also perpetuated the seeds of exploitation, oppression, suppression and the resultant tension in society. The tenants and agricultural labourers were the worst sufferers in the unequally designed agro-social hierarchy as stated in the earlier chapter. They had to face the double-barralled economic exploitation and social oppression. But despite their economic and social oppression, they had to cooperate in advancing the class interests of the upper castes Zamindars and landlords on the one hand and their colonial masters on the other.

Moreover, the situation got more aggravated due to the economic transition brought about by the colonial rule that resulted into the break down of the traditional relationship between the landlords and their tenants. In this regard it has been observed that ".... previously the Zamindar-tenant economic relation was in accordance with the upper caste-backward caste social relations. But the age-old Zamindari system was already exhibiting more and more evils. By the end of the last century, once the tenancy acts were passed recognising the rights of tenants vis-a-vis the Zamindars, the latter turned more hostile to the cause of the tenants. A large number of Zamindars turned absentee and were interested only in the realisation of rents. Irrigation facilities in village stopped functioning because of the lack of maintenance. Subinfeudation and rack-renting worsened the plight of the tenants. The Zamindars and their employees let loose an orgy of repression. As a result, the tenants lost their respect for the Zamindars and this found its expression in the backward castes loosing their habitual respect of the upper castes.²

2. Nirmal Sengupta, "Caste as an Agrarian Phenomenon in Twentieth Century Bihar" in Arvind N. Das and V. Nilkant (eds.), Agrarian Relations in India, Manohar, Delhi, 1979, p 89.

Further, as stated in the previous chapter that the exploitation of the tenants and agricultural labourers by charging the excessive rent and a number of extra-legal cesses resulted into consciousness from the below which got its expression in the form of caste based movement in 1920s. Moreover, the agrarian movement of this period hardly took the issues of poor peasantry and the exploitation of the masses. For instance, the Champaran Satyagraha, the first organised agrarian movement in the pre-independence period, had major concern for the rich rather than the poor peasantry and exploited masses. The leadership of the movement was also in the hands of rich peasantry and peasant elites. The oligarchy which provided the leadership was consisted mainly of the high caste peasants : Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumihars, Kayasthas, Muslim Sheikhs, etc. But none of them enjoyed full proprietary rights, owing to the peculiar land-holding structure of the district, which was almost entirely made up of three large Zamindars of Bettiah, Ramnagar, and Madhuban.³

The peasant leaders like Rajkumar Shukla, Sant Rawat, Khendar Rai etc. of the Champaran Satyagraha broke the myth of the middle peasants' initiative in agrarian unrest on the

3. Jaques Poucheapadass, "Local Leaders and Intelligentsia in the Champaran Satyagraha", Contributions to Indian Sociology, New Series, No. 8, 1974. pp 67-87.

one hand and showed the inherent limitations of the movement on the other. The peasant elites were fighting with the planters not for the cause of the poor peasantry but for their own interests.⁴ Besides, the movement in its content, was an attempt to remove a number of hurdles in the way of profitable cultivation of food grains and sugar cane. The issues like forced cultivation of indigo, forced supply of labour and implements to factories, payments of abwabs, (extra legal cesses), fines, arbitrarily imposed by the European planters etc. were taken up but the underlying nature of the movement was its elite character. Moreover, the exploitative money lenders were also involved in the movement for their own benefits. Since they were not always an alien class of usurers but the members of the agrarian structure itself, a rustic money-lender was often identified as a successful cultivator.⁵ They were operating in a very subtle manner in the rural areas. O'Malley observes, "The money-lender does not want to ruin the ryot outright and drive him away from the village but to keep him there as long as possible and make as much out of him as he can".⁶ Thus, the whole objective reality

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4. Arving N.Das, Agrarian unrest and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar, 1900-1980, Manohar, Delhi, 1983, pp 98-99.
 5. Binay Bhusan Chaudhary, "The Process of De-peasanti-sation in Bengal and Bihar 1947-1985", Indian Historical Review, Vol. II, No.1, 1975, p 129.
 6. L.S.S. O'Malley, cited in Arvind N.Das, op cit., p 55.

was against the interests and causes of the poor peasantry and landless agricultural labourers as their interests did not get articulation in the agrarian movement.

Due to the inherent limitations of the agrarian movement, the discontents and resentments of the tenants and agricultural labourers were getting expression through caste associations and caste organisations, caste tension and caste conflicts as mentioned earlier. But these caste movements and resultant conflicts cannot be simply dubbed as caste tension or caste conflict. These inevitably had both the economic and social contexts. Since the economic and social exploitation and oppression were going on in the name of caste, the caste became the most easily identifiable category and, hence, economic issues got their expression as caste issues. But at the same time it is true that at several times social issues got precedence over economic issues which had both the historical and social contextuality.⁷ In fact, the economic and social policies of the colonial rule created the material base for class formation but the same colonialism, having arrested the growth of the economy, could not transform

7. Although the economic and social issues were inevitably inseparable, sometimes this trend was also obvious. See Hetukar jha, "Lower caste Peasants and upper caste Zamindars in Bihar (1921-1925) : An Analysis of Sanskritization and contradiction between the two groups", The Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1977, pp 549-559.

fully the nature of articulation. As a result, caste identities got dominance and caste associations flourished.⁸ And, thus, the horizontal extension of localized caste segments and the formation of associations comprising of different jatis like Ahirs, Kurmis and Koeris in the case of the Triveni Sangh in Bihar were elementary forms of class organization.⁹

The exploitation and oppression was, however, not confined to the backward castes only but the upper castes tenants also were exploited. In order to show the loyalty to the colonial rule the Zamindars exercised all types of oppression in the collection of unbearable rents and they always showed arrogance to the tenants irrespective of caste consideration. Sanskritayana observes that "Sale of daughters became a major source of livelihood of tenants belonging even to the higher castes".¹⁰ So, the deplorable socio-economic condition of the poor peasantry became both the objective and subjective factors for the replacement of caste conflict into class conflict.

8. Anjan Ghosh, "Caste Collisions", Seminar, No. 250, June, 1980, pp 26-28.

9. Pradip Kumar Bose, op cit., p 189.

10. Rahul Sanskritayana, cited in Das 1983, op cit., p 64.

The formation of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha¹¹ was a natural outcome of the poor socio-economic condition of the peasantry. The Kisan Sabha under the leadership of Sahjanand Saraswati became the common platform for the struggling peasantry belonging to both upper and lower castes as discussed in the previous chapter. In 1930s, the economic issues got precedence over the social issues of 1920s. Despite its upper castes leadership, the Kisan Sabha inculcated consciousness and confidence among the common peasants. In order to grow consciousness among the tenants about their exploited position and to provide resistance to the oppressive Zamindars, Sahjanand toured different places.¹² Right from the beginning, Sahjanand and his associates not only made extensive "lecturing tours" which tended to increase consciousness of the tenants but also urged the tenants to forge into action to resist the Zamindari oppression and gain their rights.¹³ The Kisan Sabha took the issues of Begari, Abwabs, Bakasht etc. and started movements in different parts of the state. The Bakasht was one of the most important issues of the movement since it was very much oppressive mechanism in the hands of the Zamindars. A chain reaction was involved

11. The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was formed in 1929 to fight against the exploitative Zamindari system, see Das, *Ibid*, p 88.

12. S.Soloman, cited in Das, Idem.

13. Das Idem.

in this (Bakasht) mechanism. The tenants were unable to pay in time the excessive increasing rents on lands and the resumption of land by the Zamindars was a quick response. As a consequence, the depeasantization of the tenants was bound to happen. The Kisan Sabha, thus, took the Bakasht issue and started movement in regions of south Bihar such as Barahiyatal, Rewra, Manjiawana and Anwari etc.¹⁴ But the Bakasht movement in Barahiyatal was more elementary because it marked the first victory of the Kisan Sabha in particular and the suffering tenants in general in the form of increasing consciousness and organised class action. The abolition of the Zamindari itself became a major concern of the Kisan Sabha in 1940s. So, in this sense the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha led the people for class action transcending the parochial and narrow boundaries of castes and other primordial loyalties.

The situation in Post-Independent Bihar

The patterns' of tension, conflict and violence in the post-independent Bihar have some continuity with these in the pre-independence period. This is due to the fact that the structural roots of tension, conflict and violence

14. Ibid, p 130.

at present are almost the same. The traditional exploitative caste system has taken an organisational form for the aggregation and articulation of interests and exploitation of the modern opportunities. At the same time the caste has become a common platform for mobilizing the masses to protest the ongoing exploitation and oppression. However, the basic point of difference between the two phases is that in the late 1960s and 1970s the participants in the agrarian movements came mainly from the lower orders of the peasantry. These were poor peasants, agricultural labourers, share-croppers etc. who generally belonged to the scheduled castes. They have been fighting not against the absentee landlordism as it was during the Zamindari period but against the new rich peasantry.¹⁵ Secondly, the aspiration for higher caste status is not a major issue of the sporadic or organised movement as the lower castes hardly bother about their caste status.¹⁶ In fact,

15. Arun Sinha, "Kulak Offensive", Frontier, August 13, 1977, pp 2-3.

16. It becomes evident when we go through the content of the different sporadic or organised movements which have taken place in the post-independent period in Bihar. The Movements like the Sathi Farms Struggle, the Jhakia movement, the Land grab movement and the Naxalite Movement are the testimonies of this trend.

their aspiration for high social and economic condition has subordinated the first. Thirdly, the lowest rung of the peasantry consisting of the scheduled castes has become more assertive to its economic, political and social rights. There is sharp growth of consciousness among them which has developed from the below due to their age-old social and economic exploitation. They have become more organised and resistant to the exploitative conditions.

After independence, there is also a sharp increase in the bitterness of relationship among the higher castes and middle castes particularly the Yadavas, Kurmis and Koeris. So, we have to examine the nature of the caste tension on the one hand and the agrarian movement on the other in a closer and more systematic masses. Since late 1970s a number of organised movements in the rural areas have also been carried out by the different Naxalite groups. This is the most important development of the post-independent era. In analysing the nature of caste conflicts and agrarian unrest the role of the state is also of vital importance. In other words, it is important to know the type of reaction does the state have to the problem of conflicts and unrest and how does it resolve or manage them.

In this context, let us first take the different agrarian movements which have taken place in the post- independent era. In the pre -independence period the Kisan Sabha provided a common platform for the poor peasantry to express its resentment as mentioned earlier. But after the death of Sahjanand the peasant movement got disorganised. However, the different sporadic and spontaneous movements as well as a few organised and militant movements (Naxalite Movement) have taken place in the post-independence period which falsify the view of the peasant apathy.

The faulty land reform legislations and their improper implementation have caused agrarian tensions to a great extent. The different land reform programmes have increased the land hunger among the poor peasantry. Since there is a huge gap between the theory of land reform and its actual performance, the poor peasantry is bound to be discontented. Even the different development programmes have not done anything in concrete term. In this situation tension in the agrarian structure becomes quite natural. It has been observed that "The programmes so far implemented are still more favourable to the larger owner farmer than the smaller tenant farmer. As for the sharecropper and the landless labourer, they have been more often than not out in the cold. In consequence ... disparities have widened

accentuating social tensions".¹⁷ Moreover, the application of the modern agricultural inputs and technology in limited areas have led the big farmers to acquire the economic prosperity. Contrary to this, the poor peasants have come under the influence of semi-market mechanisms which have forced them to sale their lands and become impoverished. So, in spite of agricultural prosperity based on new technology, the persistence of social and economic inequalities on the one hand and the widening gap between the relatively few affluent farmers and the large body of small land holders and agricultural labourers have been increasingly noticed in the post-independence period.¹⁸

Secondly, the abolition of the Zamindari and other socio-economic and political forces have turned the once upper sections of the tenantry, constituting mostly of the Yadav and Kurmi castes, into exploiters and oppressors. The semi-feudal social oppression, beside the economic exploitation, has remained a major reality. The new emerging middle peasantry, consisting of Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris, is more aggressive than the traditional exploiters. As a result, the increased social tensions have started exhibiting themselves in a number of sporadic agrarian

17. India, the Ministry of Home Affairs, "The causes and Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions" cited in Das, op cit., p 222.

18. Ibid, p 222.

movements, conflict and violence in different parts of the state. The Sathi Farm Struggle, the Jhaki movement started by the East Champaran Kisan Sabha, the land grab movement and the Naxalite movement¹⁹ are testimonies of the same.

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

of east Champaran during 1960's

The Jhaki movement was more fundamental because it was a direct manifestation of the ongoing exploitation and social oppression by the landlords on the poor peasants and agricultural labourers. The issues like Beth Begar (Forced unpaid labour), sexual exploitation of the poor's women-folk, abusing and beating up the labourers, non-payment of the prescribed minimum wages etc. were very much irritating for the rural poor. Under

19. For further details about these movements see Arvind N. Das, "Agrarian change from Above and Below: Bihar 1977-78" in Ranjit Guha (ed), Subaltern Studies : Writings on South Asian History and Society, Oxford University Press, New York, 1983, pp 197-227.

the dynamic leadership of Ramashray Singh, (Leader of the Jhaki Movement) they got organised and started resisting the traditional feudal, and unquestioned authority and hegemony of the upper castes. This movement took up first the social issues like the refusal of referring the intra-community disputes to the landlords, wearing shoes in their presence, continuing to sit on the cot, etc. whenever they were approached by the landlords. All these became the popular ways of registering the passive resistance to and defying the traditional authority of the upper castes landlords. Later on, the economic issues were also taken up and the passive resistance was transformed into an active resistance. This finally led to the victory of the landless agricultural labourers.

The aroused hunger for land among the poor peasants and landless labourers in the post-independence period manifested, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in the form of the Land Grab Movement led by the Communist Party of India. In the middle of 1970s the peasants were forcibly occupying the land. This movement was very much strong in Purnea, Muzaffarpur and Monghyr districts. The government was determined to suppress the movement through adopting the different repressive measures but, despite the repressive measures of the state, the peasant resistance

could not be checked. The peasants kept on occupying more and more surplus lands available through ceiling on land, from which they had been evicted in the past. But after sometimes the movement got disorganised due to both the state suppression and the disorganising role played by the left parties themselves. But what is more alarming for the state on the one hand and the landlords and rich peasants on the other is the Naxalite Movements. The Naxalites have been operating more strongly in seven districts of Gaya, Jehanabad, Patna, Aurangabad, Rohtas, Nalanda and Bhojpur in the South-Central Bihar. But before discussing the nature and task-force of the Naxalite movements it would be proper to give a brief account of the socio-economic conditions which have provided the ground for their emergence in these areas.

In the Zamindari period there were numerous Zamindars comprising mainly of the upper castes in these areas. But the decline of the Zamindari estates led to wide spread eviction of share croppers and tenants-cultivators who were the actual tillers of the land. This also resulted into the decline of absolute feudal power of the upper castes. A new class of landlords emerged from the middle castes as mentioned above. But in most of the areas the conditions of the scheduled castes have remained unchanged.

Since restructuring of the caste-class relationship has taken place, not only the Brahmins, Rajputs and Bhumihars are the dominant section of the society but the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris also have become powerful force in rural areas.

In spite of the emergence of a so-called modern democratic state this section of the society still enjoys and exercises the absolute feudal power in these areas. Sinha observes that "big landlords ... hold near-absolute economic, social and political power in their respective areas.... the big landlord is virtually the raja of his area. He possesses one-fourth or more of the total land of his village. He lives like an aristocrat in a large brick house. He employs the largest number of both slave and free labourers for domestic and farm work. He maintains a small private army equipped with guns, spears, lathis and other weapons and himself owns a licenced gun... The big landlord-raja.... (belongs) to the caste of the dominant section of landlords in the village. To the social, economic and military power of the raja, 'democracy' ... added political power. He has captured the instruments of local government. He now commands the panchayats and thus the various executive bodies at the block level. He has the services of an Absequious

police force at the local thana".²⁰ This absolute feudal power of the dominant section of society was and even today is used in suppressing the spontaneous movements of the poor peasantry and landless agricultural labourers through all means including the physical force and coercion. Repression and oppression are inevitable and inseparable part of the whole reality. Under this condition, the poor peasants and landless labourers have no option but to resist and revolt against the absolute feudal power of the landlords and the system of landlordism of which militancy has been the exigency of the time.²¹

In the beginning the resistance of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers was spontaneous and local in nature and was directed against their ongoing exploitation and oppression but later on the outside forces -the Naxalism - penetrated in these areas. Soon after their penetration, the Naxalites provided a radical left ideological and programmatic framework and mobilized the masses for class action. In fact, the growth of Naxalism is neither accidental nor transitory but a natural manifestation of the inherent contradictions in the society itself. Secondly, its growth can also be attributed to the failure of the state in managing the affairs of the poor peasantry and agricultural labourers through the normal political processes. This situation, thus, has created a ground

20. Arun Sinha, "Class war, Not Atrocities Against Harijans" in Arvind N. Das (ed), Agrarian Movements in India : Studies on 20th Century Bihar, Frank Cass, London, 1982, p 151.

for new forms of militant opposition to the existing order and as a result, the Naxalism, has come as a hope of radical politics and struggle for justice. In brief the Naxalites have taken the issues of minimum wages, occupancy rights of the poor peasantry and landless labourers on the land, absolute feudal power of the landlords or freedom from the bondage and the sexual exploitation (rape) of the women-folk of the rural poor. In tackling these issues, they have shown and used militancy.

In order to meet the challenges of the poor peasantry and landless labourers and counter the militancy of the Naxalites the landlords have organised their respective caste 'Senas' (private armies). For instance, in Bhojpur-Rohtas Region the Rajputs have formed the 'Kunwar Sena'; the Bhumihars of Gaya have constituted the 'Brahmarshi Sena'; the Yadavs of Gaya, Patna and Nalanda have formed the 'Lorrik Sena'. But the most notorious Sena is the 'Bhoomi Sena' formed as the Kisan Suraksha Samiti by the Kurmi landlords of Patna, Gaya and Nalanda districts in the early 1970s in Poon Poon. This Sena was formed to suppress the militant peasant movement of the area. These caste

21. This observation mainly comes from the Naxalite leaders who are working in these areas. For an overview of the whole situation, See Report from the Flaming Fields of Bihar : A CPI (ML) Document, Published by Prabodh Bhattacharya, Calcutta, 1986.

senas have acted brutally where ever the peasant resistance has grown. Equipped with large quantity of illegal explosive arms these senas perpetrate violence to supress the genuine demands of the poor peasants and landless labourers. Where ever the violence erupts or conflict takes place between the landlords and the poor peasants and landless labourers, the state manifestly or latently supports the landlords and their senas in the name of supressing the Naxalites.

In fact, the government cannot tolerate the Naxalite movement. For instance, the state government mounted a massive counter-insurgency operation known as "operation Task-Force" to quell the tide of peasant unrest in 1985. The specially trained armed forces were deployed in the six districts of central Bihar where the peasant organisations were active. Here, the state appears as an agent and institution representing the interests of the landlords and rich peasants instead of protecting the poor peasantry and landless agricultural labourers. The Arwal Massacre by the police force is an attestation of this fact it exposes that "The state government was no longer willing to tolerate the struggle of the landless and the poor peasants for their democratic rights (e.g. minimum wages for agricultural labourer) and was keen to perpetuate

landlord's rule in the region."²² Actually, the Arwal Massacre "was an act to terrorise and suppress the legal and democratic movement of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers in order to protect the landlords from their onslaught."²³ So, the state government and the landlords become aligned to each other and try to suppress the growing demands of the poor sections of the society. The perpetration of violence both by the state government and the private armies (senas) of the landlords becomes a quick remedy for removing any such type of demands.

But despite the repressive tendencies of the state the Naxalite movement in these areas in particular and other parts of the state in general has succeeded in exercising pressure on the landlords and rich peasants to raise wages substantially. The issue of social oppression has also been taken up by the Naxalite movements in these areas. Now, the landlords avoid unnecessary violence. This situation has developed due to the peasants militancy operating under the different radical left organisations i.e. different Naxalite groups divided in terms of their programmatic contents. There are three important Naxalite groups : first is the C.P.I.(M.L.) Binod Mishra group which

22. Report of the fact-finding team of the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR), Calcutta, Economic and Political Weekly, May 31, 1986, p 949.

23. Idem.

sponsors The Indian People's Front (IPF); the second is The Party Unity Group which works through The Mazdoor Kisan Sangarsh Samiti (MKSS) led by Vinayan; and the third is The Maoist-Communist Centre (MCC). Though their militancy has built up a substantial pressure on the landlords and rich peasants in recent years as mentioned above, there is a dangerous tendency of fission among them on the one hand and their shifting loyalty (class to caste) on the other. Now, the Naxalites are getting divided on caste lines and this is a severe threat of diluting the class war into caste war. The killings of Rajputs in Baghaura and Dalelchak villages in Aurangabad districts in May 1987 by the Marxist-Communist Centre (MCC) on behalf of Yadavs show the negative tendency of their diverting from the real issues. This situation prompted Umadhar Singh, a veteran Naxalite leader belonging to the Communist Organisation of India (Marxist-Leninist) led by Kanu Sanyal, to observe that "There is no class consciousness left among Naxalites in Bihar. The infection of caste virus in them has reached alarming proportions".²⁴ It is, however, important to note that the caste line of the movement may not be always intended. Though the corresponding social and economic hierarchy creates confusion about the caste question, the underlying current may be around the economic issue or feudal exploitation. Therefore, it would be wrong to assume that all the Naxalites groups operating for the economic and social

24. A Report "Naxalites enmeshed in Caste Politics", The Indian Express, January 5, 1988.

justice in south-central Bihar are essentially caste based organisations. Instead they still have class content.

Besides these spontaneous and organised movements, a number of caste conflicts have also taken place in the different parts of Bihar in the post-independence period especially since late 1970s. The frequent out bursts of violence at different places get manifested as 'caste tension' 'caste conflict' and 'caste violence' but their analysis reveals the different fact. The caste conflicts between the upper and the lower (scheduled castes) castes or between the middle (Yadavs, Kurmis, Koeris, etc.) and the lower castes are basically 'class-conflict' both in orientation and action. Even conflicts between the upper castes and the middle castes are not essentially caste conflicts. They also have economic and political interests which fall in the category of class. The emergence of the new rich peasantry constituting of the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris has not only provided a potential threat to the hegemonic positions of the upper castes but it has also replaced them in the different sectors. Since upper castes do not want to loose their hegemonic positions, their sense of insecurity and resultant arrogance have led them to take offensive steps with the help of their private armies and caste senas.

The conflicts between the upper and middle castes have also resulted from their clash of interests regarding the agricultural labourers. Both the upper and middle castes try to control and monopolize the agricultural labour-force. This has led, manifestly or latently, to caste conflicts. So far as the lowest rungs of peasantry especially the Scheduled Castes are concerned, both the upper and middle castes are equally repressive for them. For the purpose, they often collaborate with each other in a very subtle manner. Generally, the violence against the poor peasantry is perpetrated in a particular region by the economically dominant sections of the society and they are invariably the Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumihars, Yadavs and Kurmis. However, the economic content of the caste conflicts becomes clearer when we analyse the pattern of conflicts and violence that have taken place in the recent years. For instance, the on going fight between the Gangotas (a poor backward caste having militant posture and very much active in Bhagalpur diara) and Bhumihars in Bhagalpur district creates confusion about the caste nature of the conflict. But it is a fact that the Bhumihars are landlords in the areas whereas the Gangotas are landless labourers. The issue of conflict between them is basically economic but due to the lack of full-fledged class consciousness and ideological programmatic framework caste becomes the line of mobilization.

Table No. 1

Caste (Agrarian) violence in Bihar

S. No.	Attackers		Victims		Issue	
	Caste	Econ. status	Caste	Econ. Status	Demand for wage increase	
1.	Bajitpur	Bhumihar	Landlord	Harijans	Agricultural Labourers and sharecroppers	Sharecroppers right over land.
2.	Gopalpur	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijans	Agricultural labourers	Demand for wage increase
3.	Chanddano	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijans	Agricultural labourers	Demand for wage increase
4.	Parasbigha	Bhumihar	Landlord	Yadavs	Share-croppers	Sharecroppers rights
5.	Khujuria	Brahmin	Landlord	Harijan	Sharecroppers	Sharecroppers right
6.	Bishrampur	Kurmi, Bhumihar and Kayastha	Landlord	Harijans	Agricultural labourers, sharecroppers	Sharecroppers right
7.	Beniapatti	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourers	Demand for wage increase
8.	Peepri	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourers	Demand for wage increase and possession over land
9.	Balchi	Kurmi	Landlord	All caste	Poor peasants, agricultural labourers and sharecroppers	Social oppression
10.	Bharaspura	Brahmin	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourers and sharecroppers	Demand for wage increase
11.	Lohiya	Yadav	All classes	Bhumihar	Poor peasants and one big landlord	Retaliation
12.	Jarpa	Bhumihar	Landlord	Yadav	Poor peasants & sharecroppers	Land dispute
13.	Pipri	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourers	Demand for wage increase
14.	Dalalchak & Bhairpur	Yadav	Poor peasants, sharecroppers, agricultural labourers	Rajputs	Poor peasants, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers	Retaliation

*Adopted from Hiranmay Dhar "Bihar: Caste and Class tangle", Frontier, Vol. 12, No. 38, May 17, 1980, p. 4.
 * Additions mine.

The carnages or massacres taken place in other areas since 1977 reveal the same fact. This becomes more evident from Table No. 1 which shows the patterns of caste conflicts or caste violence. It is quite apparent from the table that the scheduled castes who are generally agricultural labourers have remained the victims in most of the cases and the perpetrator of violence have invariably been landlords drawn from the upper middle castes. Almost all the cases of violence and conflicts have occurred on the issues of wage, share cropping, land disputes, etc. Only two major cases have taken place on the issue of retaliation and the victims have been from the upper castes. In Dohiya, the Yadavas retaliated against the Bhumihars who had been responsible for the Parasbigha massacre of the Yadavs (villages of Jehanabad district). In May 1986, the Yadavs retaliated against the Rajputs and killed 42 members of the Rajput community in Baghaura and Dalelchak (villages of Aurangabad district). The retaliation is not confined to the middle castes poor peasants only but the scheduled castes and other agricultural labourers have also developed audacity to retaliate against their unquestioned master's feudal authority as stated earlier.

To sum up, it can be said that the incidents of conflict

and violence are structurally related to the system of social inequality. When ever changes or alterations have taken place in the system, different forms of tension, conflict and violence have grown correspondingly. Secondly, the issues of conflict have remained both economic and social. At a particular period of time, social issues have precedence over economic issues and in other times, the economic issues have appeared as the determining factors of the conflict and violence in different parts of the state. And the incidents of conflict and violence have appeared both as caste conflict and class conflict. Thirdly, over the time, the nature and issues of conflict have kept on changing. In different villages in Bhojpur district, for instance, the conflict occurred between the scheduled and the upper castes in 1970s was mainly on the economic issues but now the fight is directed also against the social oppression. The poor in this region have developed self-dignity and social respect and they characterise the ongoing struggle as a "Ijjat Ki Larai" (struggle for dignity). Their self-respect gets manifested as "If I do not get ijjat, what is point of living".²⁵

But it does not mean that the economic issues have altogether been replaced by the social issues. The over

25. Das, 1982, op cit., p 226.

time exploitation of the landless labourers has resulted into the consciousness from the below which is providing unity among them on the one hand and calling for class action on the other. In this situation, they are prepared even to sacrifice their life for the genuine cause. It is evident from the murder of Gambhira, a leader of the poor peasants and agricultural labourers who accepted the incident as the natural outcome in the process of establishing a Garib Raj (rule of the poor). The natural reaction of his young wife and old mother was, "He died for the Garib Raj".²⁶

26. Arun Sinha, "Murder of a Peasant Leader", Economic and Political Weekly, 30 July, 1977, p 1214.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

It has already been pointed out that an unequal distribution of wealth, power and prestige is almost a universal phenomenon which provides various meanings to social inequality and at the same time calls for conscious human intervention in reducing inequalities to its minimum level. At the theoretical level, the multi-dimensionality of social inequality provides ground for the claim of its universal scope. Though the different types of inequality can be reduced to its minimum level by establishing the people's democracy and decentralizing power, distributing equitably both inputs and out-puts and so on, it would be difficult to completely eliminate social inequality which is derived from the general ethos of the society. So long as the human mental faculty and the system of evaluation are alive, the social inequality as a mode of consciousness and differentiation is bound to exist. If the human civilization becomes successful in bringing about equality in the basic condition of existence, it would be the greatest achievement. In the foregoing chapters we have examined the different issues relating to social inequality and its statics and dynamics in the Indian society especially in Bihar. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to summarise the discussions made in earlier chapters and, based on these, draw some conclusions in regard to the nature, issues and

implications of social inequality found in the rural areas in Bihar.

As stated in chapter 1 and in almost all countries and social situations man confronts with the problem of inequality. However, its nature differs from society to society, from one type of social order to the other type of social order and from one stage of development to another. That is why, its nature differs from the one in the underdeveloped to that in the developed countries. It also differs from the one in the capitalist to that in the socialist countries on the basis of their ideological and developmental frameworks. Both the advanced capitalist and the socialist countries have the elements of power inequality. The "expert theoretical knowledge" and the emergence of "new managerial class" as a powerful force provide the major bases of power inequality in the advanced industrial society (post-industrial society) irrespective of its capitalist or socialist orientation. Besides, a complex of bureaucratic-authority structure also creates, sustains and perpetuates inequality of power. Though the economic inequality exists at its minimum level in the socialist society the power inequality is very much prevalent there. In such society some elements of power inequality becomes imperative in establishing the "dictatorship of proletariat" leading to the establishment of the communist social order where the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom converge together.

However, the tragedy of the human existence starts when the existing inequalities get legitimacy either by the value system in general or by the "ideological state apparatuses" in particular in the capitalist social order. In both the cases masses have to confront the problem of inequality even in their day to day life. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, inequality in the capitalist social order is maintained not only through the physical force and coercive state mechanisms alone but also through a 'false consciousness' among the masses created by the "ideological state apparatuses" i.e. mass media, educational institutions, etc. Through the process of "massive indoctrination" the capitalist ideas and inequalities are legitimized, maintained and perpetuated in the society. The reinforcement and inculcation of religious beliefs and ideas also strengthen the existing inequalities.

The hierarchically arranged Indian society lies in between the capitalist and socialist orders where social inequality is quite apparent. The Indian society has remained unequal, both in its design and spirit, from the very beginning but the British colonial rule added some new dimensions to the problem. As discussed in chapter 4, the most exploitative agrarian structure resulted from the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 created a vast inequality in the society and provided opportunities to the Zamindars and landlords to exploit the masses. The traditional caste structure was fitted

into the new agrarian structure and there existed a correspondence between the agrarian and social hierarchies. Those people who constituted the higher position in the caste hierarchy also owned major material resources. Hence, caste and class appeared as converging categories. The legacy of the British rule and its policies also perpetuated the system of inequality, both arising from the agrarian structure and caste structure.

In this situation, class and caste do not constitute opposite facts even today and there is a continual overlap between the two. Thus, in the analysis of statics and dynamics of social inequality none of the categories is absolute as we have discussed chapter 3. Neither the "caste model" nor "class model" alone is sufficient to analyse the whole gamut of social reality in India. In fact, we have to strike a balance between these two and this is possible only if we recognise the fact that caste is not only a system of ideas and values, but it is also a system of interests. Likewise, class is not a simple cataloguing category but it is an active economic and political process.

Moreover, the traditional and modern structures in India cannot be seen in a rapture as the diffusion of rational, secular, scientific and humanist (class humanism) norms have not taken place at the gross root level. If we assume that the traditional

structure has been replaced by the modern one then the whole analysis will suffer from the fallacy of a-priorism. Caste cannot be overlooked just by treating it as a feature of the traditional social structure. Despite industrialization, urbanization, westernization, etc. in some pockets of Indian society, caste still provides a major social matrix around which the different aspects of rural life revolve. It has taken an organisational and associational form which is utilized as an effective mechanism for the interest aggregation and interest articulation. Today, it is a base for the democratic political processes. Those who are economically better off revitalise and reinforce caste sentiment and caste consciousness for advancing their class interest. Thus, in the complex situation in India caste cannot be left aside just by treating it as a religious category. Class, on the other hand, has remained a structural reality in the Indian society. Sometimes it expresses independently and sometimes in the form of caste.

Power dimension of social inequality has also corresponded to one's caste-class position. As the cumulative nature of social inequality existed in the traditional Indian society it has hardly been changed even today especially in rural areas. There is still a congruence between class, caste and power. For instance, land holdings and the distribution of other material resources, on the one hand, and the effective participation and assertion in the political processes on the other, are mainly

confined to the upper and middle castes. Thus, this complex relationship between caste, class and power presents India as one of the most stratified systems in the world. Moreover, the intoxicating philosophical scheme of the 'Karma' and 'Dharma' has legitimised the existing inequalities and provided institutional bases for the maintenance and perpetuation of social inequality. In fact, in the traditional Indian society social inequality was manifested through the caste structure and the caste system used to express as a primordial and infrastructural reality. But despite the legitimised and institutionalized nature of social inequality society was not free from strain, stress and tension which used to express through the different forms in the preindependence period. Even in the post-independence period the inherent strain, stress and tension have not been radically altered.

The situation is more complex in Bihar. Since it constitutes an organic part of the whole Indian social reality, social inequality in the State appears in its most virulent form. It is due to the fact that the existing mode of production is 'semi-feudal' as stated in earlier chapters. Industrialization, urbanization, expansion of market the mechanized production and the motive of profit maximization have hardly changed the basic nature of social inequality since these are confined to a very limited areas. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood through out the state which itself is of semi-feudal type. No revolution has taken place in the production

technology. Apart from this, some other factors such as an extensive non-legalized share-cropping system, perpetual indebtedness of small tenants, incomplete access of tenants to the rural markets and appearance of the ruling class both as landlord and money-lender, attest the fact that the dominant mode of production in the state is semi-feudal ! Since the system of social inequality has correspondence with the semi-feudal mode of production in which socio, religious, political and economic factors overlap and converge on a number of points, the structuration of social inequality has both caste and class elements. This is not a reality only in post-independent Bihar but almost the similar trend was operative even in the pre-independence period. This fact is attested by a diachronic analysis of the problem.

A detailed analysis of the political economy of Bihar reveals that there was a congruence between the agrarian and social hierarchies as discussed in chapter 4. The Zamindars and landlords in the pre-independence period were drawn mostly from the upper castes, i.e. Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumihars and Kayasthas whereas the tenants hailed from the middle castes of Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris. The scheduled castes were mostly agricultural labourers. Although under the provision of the permanent settlement the Zamindars did not have absolute rights on the land and the state acted as a super landlord, they were given the right to dictate their own terms with the tenants in the collection of rents. The actual cultivators

were compelled to share their produce with a parasitic class of landlords and a number of intermediaries. The agricultural labourers, with the compulsory labour had to live in a semi-slave condition. Though the agricultural labourers were the most sufferers, both the tenants and agricultural labourers had to bear the economic and non-economic coercions of the Zamindars who used to charge the Abwabs, Salami, Begari and a number of other illegal lavies.

The relationship between the upper castes and the middle and lower castes was basically of dependency, exploitation, super-ordination and sub-ordination types. The higher castes Zamindars and landlords were not only economically better off but they also enjoyed limited power in the field of politics. Due to their historical legacy and higher economic position they also availed the modern opportunities in the fields of education, professional works and job market. On the whole, the cumulative nature of social inequality was very much severe in the pre-independence Bihar. Besides, a number of religious and the ritual disabilities, sexual exploitation and other social oppressions of the lower castes by the upper castes landlords were very much irritating in the mind of the former. These manifested in the forms of caste tension, spontaneous agrarian movement, etc.

In the post-independent period this situation has slightly changed. After the abolition of the Zamindari the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris, tenants of the pre-independence period, have emerged as a powerful force. In every fields like education, job market and professional works they have provided a potential competition and challenged the hegemonic position of the upper castes. The introduction of the universal adult-suffrage and modern democratic politics have resulted into the 'political radicalization from the above'. These have also led to the 'enlargement of the circle of political competition' in which the new rich middle castes have acquired important place due to their numerical strength and relatively better economic position.

But no substantial change has taken place in their position of the agricultural labourers. The different land reform measures and developmental programmes of the government have hardly provided any benefit to them. In fact, all steps for the welfare of the poorer section of society have their inherent limitations. Moreover, due to the lack of political will, inefficiency of the bureaucracy and illiteracy of the masses fruits of the developmental programmes are manipulated and articulated by the dominant sections of the society. The constitutional guarantees and the government policy of the 'protective discrimination' hardly bear any meaning to them. So long inequality in their basic conditions of life exists,

all such steps become futile. Any constitutional guarantee and government policy without bringing about a considerable amount of equality in the basic conditions of life simply means "everything for nothing".

Such unequally arranged agrarian, political and social hierarchies have the elements of tension, conflict and violence which get expressed in different forms in Bihar. These differ from one time and instance to others but their real issues and contents remain the same. For instance, in the early 1920s the different caste based movements were prevalent which resulted into caste tensions and caste riots. At the surface level, the caste question appeared as a basic cause of conflict but the real issues were economic exploitation and social oppression as discussed in earlier chapters. This was more so in the case of the backward caste movements. For instance the Yadavs' movement carried out in 1920s in the Patna district and it had included the following issues -

- i. aspiration to get higher status in the caste hierarchy;
- ii. refusal to do any Begar;
- iii. to sell their produce at higher rate;
- iv. demands for occupancy rights; and
- v. stoppage of menial labour and payments of Salami, Abwabs, etc.

Thus, the economic and social issues were closely related and the different caste based organisations had class character

also. This is quite natural in the pre-capitalist socio-economic formation since in such formation class interests do not get full economic articulation and operate with the help of socio-religious factors. This was very much present in the movements of 1920s. In fact, there was a lack of organised agrarian movement representing the cause and interests of the tenants and poor peasantry. But when the economic issues culminated in the form of Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha, the caste question got subordinated to the class question. The on going exploitation and oppression practised in the form of higher rents, Abwabs, Begar, Salami, Bakasht, etc. became the real issues of the Kisan Sabha Movement. The movement provided a strong resistance to the Zamindars and paved the way for the abolition of the Zamindari after independence.

However, the question of the agricultural labourers did not get any important place in the movement and their conditions remained the same as discussed in the previous chapter. The issues of their poor socio-economic conditions have surfaced in the post-independence period, in the form of a number of spontaneous and sporadic agrarian movements on the one hand and caste conflicts on the other. Even after independence the real issues of tension, conflict and violence remain the same as they were present in the pre-independence period. The emergence of the oppressive Kulaks from amongst the middle castes like Yadavs and Kurmis has added a new dimension to

the whole situation of tension and unrest in the agrarian social structure. Instead of fighting against the absentee landlords of the pre-independence period who are still present, the lowest rung of agro-social hierarchy has now to carry out the struggle of economic and social justice and also fight against the new rich exploitative and oppressive peasantry.

The Naxalite movement in different parts of the south central Bihar is a natural outcome and manifestation of the situation. The issues like minimum wages, occupancy rights on land, social oppression, etc. have organised the poor in the rural areas. A potential militancy, provided by the Naxalite movement has led the upper and middle caste landlords to form their respective caste senas as mentioned in the previous chapter. Thus, a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the incidents of conflict and violence in different parts of the state shows that the focal point of armed violence in Bihar is the institution of 'landlordism'. The perpetrators of violence in almost all cases have hailed from the upper and middle castes landlords and the victims are the lower castes agricultural labourers.

A close nexus between the landlords, police and the state government gets exposed in a number of cases of violence and conflict. The police and the state government seem to be determined to suppress any democratic and genuine movement of the agricultural labourers and appear to be protecting the

interests of the landlords. But the growing consciousness among the lower castes agricultural labourers has resulted into frequent outbursts of violence and conflict in different places in the state. Now, they are organising to fight against their on going exploitation and social oppression and this has resulted into 'horizontal solidarity' of castes among them. However, the line of mobilization to fight the economic issue is still caste. That is why, the clash of economic interests mixed with the feudal ethos of caste sometimes takes the character of caste conflict.

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