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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

PEASANT UNREST, COMMUNITY WARRIORS AND STATE POWER IN INDIA:

THE CASE OF PRIVATE CASTE SENAS (ARMIES) IN BIHAR

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE COLLGE

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Ashwani Kumar

Norman, Oklahoma

2003

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PEASANT UNREST, COMMUNITY WARRIORS AND STATE POWER IN INDIA:
THE CASE OF PRIVATE CASTE SENAS (ARMIES) IN BIHAR

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES VIII

ABSTRACT IX

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION 1

SUBJECT AND SIGNIFICANCE 1
THEORETICAL HYPOTHESES 5
LITERATURE REVIEW: CLASS STRUGGLES, CASTE WARS AND STATE POWER 7
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: STATE-SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE AND THE CASE OF BIHAR 17
RESEARCH METHOD 20
DATA SOURCES 22
FIELD WORK METHODOLOGY 22
CONCLUSION 24

CHAPTER II : SETTING THE STAGE: LAND, CASTE AND AGRARIAN STRUGGLES IN BIHAR 25

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE 26
DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BIHAR: CENTRAL BIHAR AND NORTH BIHAR 27
CASTE AND CLASS IN BIHAR 33
FROM LIMITED RAJ TO LOCAL RAJ IN BIHAR 43
AGRARIAN STRUGGLES, CASTE, AND SOCIAL VIOLENCE IN BIHAR: 45
(i) Gandhian Peasant Movement in North Bihar: 45
(ii) Backward Castes and Peasant riots: 46
(iii) Zamindars (Landlords), Tenants and Kisan Sabha: 49
(iv) The Failure of Land Reforms and the Impact of Green Revolution in post-independence era. 52
(v) The Dance of Shiva (Maharudra): Maoist Agrarian Struggles in Bihar 55
CONCENTRATION OF AGRARIAN STRUGGLES AND CASTE ARMIES IN CENTRAL BIHAR 62
(i) Capitalist Transformation in Central Bihar 62
(ii) History of Agrarian Struggles in Central Bihar 66
(iii) Social Oppression and Cultural Traits: 68

CHAPTER III: POLITICAL POWER STRUGGLES AND THE DECLINE OF STATE POWER IN BIHAR 74

DOMINANCE AND DECLINE OF THE CONGRESS PARTY 74
(i) Upper Caste Monopoly of Power and Factional Conflicts in the Congress Party 74
(ii) Dominance and Dissent in the Congress Party (1947-67) 79
(iii) Breakdown of the Congress Party dominance and Fragmented Governments (1967-1972) 84
(iv) Revival of Congress Dominance and the Crisis in the State Power (1972-77) 94
POWER STRUGGLES BETWEEN THE UPPER CASTES AND THE BACKWARD CASTES (1977-1989) 101
THE HEGEMONY OF THE BACKWARD CASTES AND THE COLLAPSE OF STATE POWER (1990 ONWARD) 111

CHAPTER IV : EMERGENCE AND PROLIFERATION OF CASTE ARMIES IN BIHAR 126

WHAT ARE SENAS? 127
THE DYNAMICS OF PRIVATE CASTE SENAS IN BIHAR 132
NAXALITES, SENAS AND THE STATE POWER: FROM SURROGATE ARM OF THE STATE TO VIOLENT POLITICAL ENTREPRENEUR 137
RISE AND DECLINE OF THE PRIVATE CASTE SENAS 145
Bhoomi Sena (Kurmi Caste Sena) 147
Lorik Sena (Yadav Caste Sena) 157
Kisan Sangh (Yadav Caste Sena) 162
Brahmarsi Sena (Bhumihar Caste Sena) 164
Swarna Liberation Front or Diamond Sena (Bhumihar Caste Sena) 166
Kuer Sena (Rajput Caste Sena) 171
Sunlight Sena (Rajput Caste Sena) 172

CHAPTER V: CASE STUDY OF A PRIVATE CASTE ARMY: THE RANVIR SENA 179

COMMUNITY WARRIORS VS. SUBALTERNS 179
WHO ARE BHUMIHARS IN BIHAR? 180
Construction of the Identity *180*
Political Identity of Bhumihars *186*
ORIGINS OF RANVIR SENA: POPULAR RENDERINGS 188
THE IDEOLOGY OF RANVIR SENA 194
Structure of the Ideology: Representation of the Identity *194*
The Ideologicals: Violent Political Entrepreneurs? *195*
The Utopians- Warrior Brahmin in a prison? *199*
Rationalists: Community Warriors or Criminals? *203*
RANVIR SENA'S ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE 205
Adoption of Maoist Principles: Guerilla warfare technique *205*
Personnel Structure *212*
FINANCIAL NETWORK 214
OPEN MASS ORGANIZATION (PUBLIC FACE OF THE SENA) 215
STATE, POLITICS, AND RANVIR SENA 216
ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE? 222
FACTIONAL STRIFE IN RANVIR SENA 224
War for supremacy? *224*
SENA IN CRISIS? 227
Arrest of Ranvir Sena Chief: Savior or Sinner? *227*
WHITHER RANVIR SENA? 230

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS 231

REFERENCES 252

BIBLIOGRAPHY 309

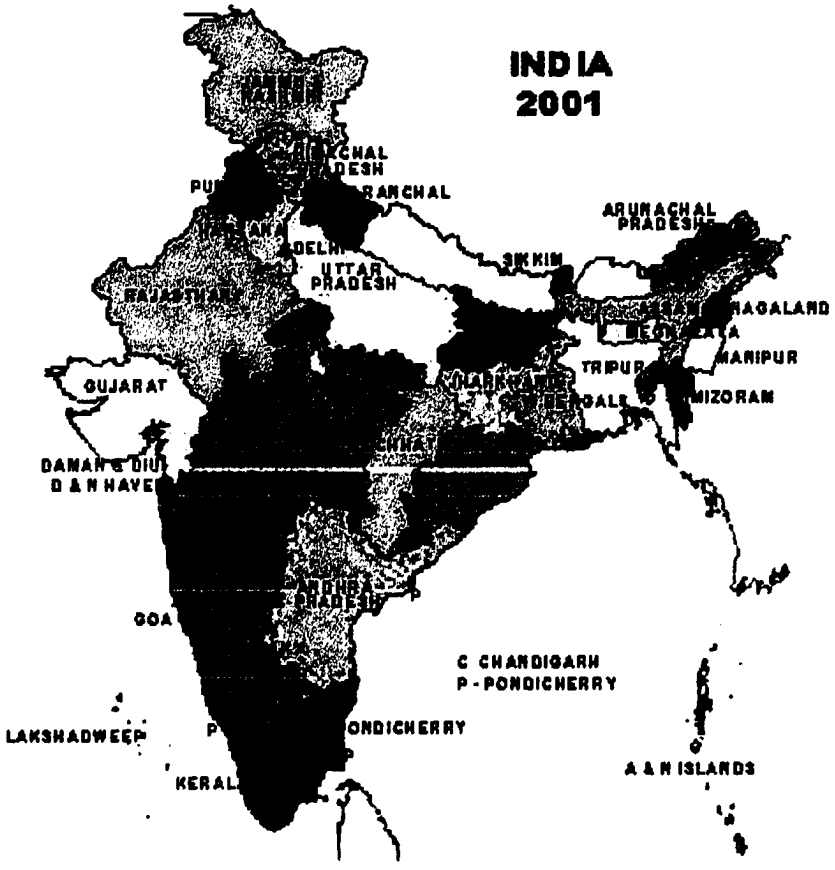
GLOSSARY 320

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:Percentage of Gross Area Irrigated in Central Bihar Districts in 1981-82 31
Table 2:Percentage of Gross Area irrigated in North Bihar Districts in 1981-82 31
Table3: Major Caste Groups in Bihar 35
Table 4: Land and Caste in the Bihar Plains: Caste-wise Breakup of each Landholding Category 43
Table 5: Literacy rate and Proportion of Scheduled Castes in total population in Central Bihar 63
Table 6 Literacy rate and Proportion of Scheduled Castes in total population in North Bihar 64
Table 7:Use of fertilizers (N, P, and N) per hectare of Gross Cropped Area in Metric Tones (For the Triennium Average 1984-1987) in Central Bihar 65
Table 8: Use of fertilizers (N, P, and N) per hectare of Gross Cropped Area in Metric Tones (For the Triennium Average 1984-1987) in North Bihar 65
Table 9: Major Private Caste Armies in Bihar 146
Table10: Bhumihars in the Agrarian structure 185
Table 11: List of people killed by Ranvir Sena since its inception in 1994 193

ABSTRACT

Using the case study of private caste armies in Bihar, a state in eastern part of India, this dissertation attempts to describe and explain the dynamics of caste, class and state power in post-independence India. This study revolves around a fundamental question: what are the causes and outcomes of emergence and proliferation of private caste armies in Bihar? Using a process oriented state-in-society perspective, this dissertation attempts to analyze interactions between state power and social forces in Bihar. The state and society are embedded in each other rather than being dichotomously related. In contrast to usual portrayal of the state as a monolith and the central actor of social transformation, the empirical evidence from Bihar presents an alternative interpretation. The emergence of private caste *senas* (armies) has resulted from the ineffectiveness of state power and the increasing peasant unrest in the state of Bihar since independence. Further, the emergence of Ranvir Sena, a caste army of the landed Bhumihar caste, as the ruthless and dreaded community warriors in Bihar also points to the continuing influence of caste in structuring state-society outcomes in post-independence India. Evoking the spirit of selfless piety, Ranvir Sena claims to protect the caste as a community of merit and worth against the so-called depredations of lower castes (Dalits). In this sense, the frequent outbreak of caste wars between landowning castes and landless lower castes is not brought about by ancient caste hatred but by the modernity of caste wars rooted in the dynamics of political and agrarian struggles in post-independence India. In many places in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, militias, guerrillas, terrorists, vigilante groups, mafias, paramilitary groups have emerged and defined themselves in terms of ethnicity, language, region or religion. Seen as "irregular armed forces", they have often challenged state's monopoly of coercion. From a comparative perspective, the case of private caste armies in Bihar suggests that the seemingly endless cycle of violence in many societies is rooted in the limited and fragmented nature of the state power to mediate power struggles; part political and part economic.


INDIA
2001
ARUNACHAL PRADESH
SIKKIM
UTTAR PRADESH
NAGALAND
MANIPUR
TRIPURA
MIZORAM
GUJARAT
GOA
C CHANDIGARH
P - PONDICHERRY
LAKSHADWEEP
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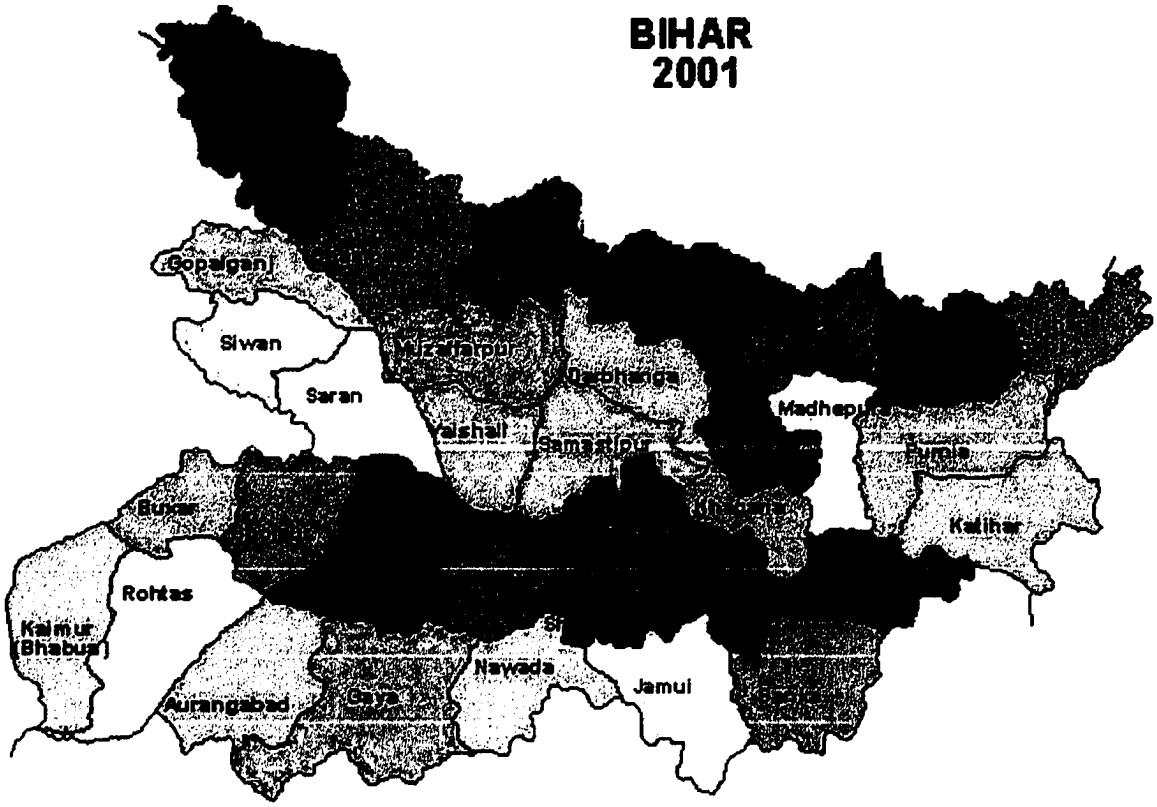
BIHAR
2001
Gopalganj
Siwan
Saran
Vaishali
Samastipur
Madhepura
Purnia
Kaimur (Bhabua)
Rohtas
Aurangabad
Gaya
Nawada
Jamui
Kaithar

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Subject and Significance

In the post-independence period, India has been a shining example of a vibrant and enduring democracy in South Asia. Valorized by post-modernists for "all the wonder and horror of life," India has also increasingly become notorious for a wide variety of horrific ethnic violence ranging around issues of religion, caste, language, race, and region.[1] While religious conflicts and peasant unrest or rebellions have been studied extensively, caste massacres, which routinely make headlines in national and international media, have not received as much scholarly attention. The caste armies or senas, which are the subject matter of this study, are uniquely quarantined in Bihar, a Central Eastern State in India. Ever since the various Maoist radical groups, popularly known as Naxalites advocated waging a violent class war against feudal oppression perpetrated by the landed upper castes in the late 1960s in India, Bihar has experienced vicious cycle of caste massacres and retaliatory killings.[2] For many observers, this has earned Bihar the epithet of India's most violent, backward and disorderly state. Ostensibly formed to eliminate violent Maoist groups, private caste armies have not only emerged as the surrogate arm of the state but also community warriors. Although the state government routinely bans them, it is no secret that most private caste armies operate freely, performing political and quasi- electoral functions.

Referred to as "unofficial civil wars" "caste wars", "gang wars", "atrocities on lower castes", caste conflicts in rural India have assumed the form of violent power struggles between landed upper/ backward castes and landless lower castes.[3] Terming these as "private dispute" or "law and order problem" the Federal Government of

India has persistently declined to get involved in these "localized, sporadic, not- so-spontaneous, and not -always- leaderless" cases of political violence.[4] Since issues of law and order and land reforms come under the purview of state governments, the Federal Government has conveniently avoided the problem of violent rural unrest in many parts of India especially since 1967. Though in a widely publicized report way back in 1969, the Central Government in Delhi had attributed the occurrence of violent agrarian disturbances in many parts of India to the "local issues of labor, landlessness, and lack of tenancy reforms", it has continued to regard violent peasant unrest as localized cases of law and order.[5] For instance, in 1988, the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi described incidents of clashes between caste armies and lower castes mobilized by Naxals as a state law and order problem.[6] According to a report released by the Central Government, in recent years, hundreds of murders were committed in Bihar, every year, and these were in "private disputes".[7] Adding to the intensity and brutality of rural conflicts is the emergence and proliferation of private caste armies in Bihar since the mid- 1970s. From 1976 to March 2001, 635 people have been killed in incidents of so-called caste wars only in Central Bihar.[8] Ruthless violent confrontations between armed militias of landed caste and rural poor in many parts of Bihar also point at the irrelevance of James Scott's image of rural unrest as everyday forms of resistance.[9]

Although militias (senas) made up of musclemen of feudal elite and "social bandits" have a long history in Bihar, the proliferation of private caste armies in post-independence Bihar is a qualitatively new phenomenon, demonstrating new patterns of engagements among State power, class and caste. During colonial rule, agrarian disturbances or riots were endemic in Bihar. They mostly revolved around issues of

everyday resistance "aimed at alleviating subsistence crises, removing specific grievances, or seeking assistance against superordinates that had exceeded the norms prescribed by the prevailing moral economy."[10] The target of violence often included the representatives of local landlord and the colonial police. Violent clashes between traditionally dominant upper castes such as Bhumihars and backward caste peasants also took place around issues of land and movement for social mobility in the local caste hierarchy. These disturbances were mostly spontaneous, sporadic, and leaderless. Reflecting official ideology as inscribed in the Criminal Tribes' Act of 1871, the colonial government viewed many instances of agrarian disturbances as issues of plain and simple crime. The colonial policy of declaring "any tribe, gang, or class of persons" a criminal tribe also started the practice of assigning crime as one of the fundamental characteristics of caste in India. For instance, the colonial government in Bihar frequently referred to Ahirs or Gowallas (Yadavs) as "adroit cattle stealers and burglars ...troublesome lot".[11] According to Anand Yang, "official ideology viewed the institution of caste not only as imperative to follow a life of crime, but also as a built-in network of support for continuing such an existence. And since it determined one's occupation, it explained why illegal activity persisted over time as illegitimate pursuit".[12] In this sense, the treatment of the agrarian disturbances as law and order issue or private dispute by the Central Government of India in the post-independence period reflects the legacy of the colonial government.

During colonial days, the feudal lords used militias or armed retainers (lathials) to extract agrarian surpluses, mitigate agrarian disputes and help maintain hegemony of the traditional social order. The armed retainers or lathials were recruited from a variety of caste interests, not limited to one specific landed caste. By

contrast, in recent years Bihar has come to witness caste based armies fighting a violent war against lower caste peasants mobilized by radical leftists known as Naxalites in popular parlance. Predictably enough, the rhetoric of class conflict has often accompanied violent clashes between caste senas and Naxals. Interestingly, the proliferation of private caste armies has coincided with increasing agrarian radicalism in Bihar especially since the late 1970s.

According to a rough estimate, about six to eight major private castes armies have emerged and operated as informal armed organizations of upper caste and landed backward castes at various points of time in Bihar since independence. Although most caste armies target Naxals as their common enemy, each caste army represents a specific caste in the local caste hierarchy. For instance, the Lorik Sena and Bhoomi Sena claimed to protect the interests of economically and politically powerful backward castes such as Yadavs and Kurmis. On the contrary, the Sunlight Sena, and Swarna Liberation Front belonged to upper castes Rajputs and Bhumihars respectively. Founded in 1993, the Ranvir Sena, the caste army of Bhumihars is the latest and most ruthless. Most of the recent massacres of lower castes in Bihar have been attributed to violent struggles for territorial and political supremacy between Ranvir Sena and Red armies (Lal Senas) of various Maoist groups in rural Bihar. Unlike traditional social bandits or armed retainers of feudal lords, these caste armies perform quasi- political functions ranging from calls for election boycott, booth capturing, to mobilizing voters in elections. Furthermore, the caste senas (armies) also perceive themselves as defenders of community honor and prestige leading them to justify massacres of lower caste men, women and children.

Theoretical Hypotheses

The ongoing violent conflicts between dominant landed castes and lower castes in Bihar raise fundamental questions; how and why do private caste armies (*senas*) emerge and proliferate? In other words, are private caste armies rooted in peasant unrest or in the increasing ineffectiveness of the state power to mediate violent power struggles? Do private caste senas construct their identity as "community warriors" seeking to avenge wrongs done to their idealized notions of purity and prestige? Why do private caste armies remain sporadic and localized in one region of Bihar? This dissertation is a modest endeavor to bring forth answers to these questions through a case study of private caste armies in the state of Bihar in India. The thesis of this dissertation can be put as follows:

1. The emergence of private caste senas in the state of Bihar in India is not a sudden phenomenon but has been grounded in the dynamics of agrarian struggles and the limited nature of the state power in the post-independence period in Bihar. Demographically speaking, most of the private caste armies have originated and proliferated in Central Bihar, a region known for a long history of agrarian struggles and a modicum of agrarian development. The class struggle thesis of Marxist analysts is an important causal variable but not sufficient to account for concentration of senas in Central Bihar. The specific ecology, the dynamics of peasant mobilization, the unusually high degree of caste oppression and the violent cultural traits of the region have also contributed to concentration of caste Senas in Central Bihar. Therefore, the exploration of what observers call increasing "incidents of caste-class" conflicts reveals the emergence, proliferation and uniquely localized nature of private caste armies in Central Bihar. [13]

2. Theoretically and empirically, private caste armies in Bihar have not arisen solely from the socioeconomic crisis. The private caste senas are also seen as a product of the increasing ineffectiveness of state power resulting from the unrestrained political struggles between upper castes and backward castes for the capture of state power in Bihar especially since 1967. This is best illustrated by the decline of the once dominant Congress Party, opportunistic factional feuds, increasing governmental instability, ineffective policy response, personalization of politics, and deprofessionalization of bureaucracy in the state of Bihar in India. In other words, the proliferation of caste senas points out that the state power in Bihar has not been monolith, all- powerful and decisive in establishing its control over society.

3. Although caste armies are rooted in ruthless political and agrarian struggles, they also frequently represent themselves as community warriors violently defending an innate and inviolable caste based community. This leads caste sena (army) to project itself as a righteous army using violence in a worthy cause against the so-called impure low-caste Naxalites. The appeal to what Louis Dumont calls "substantialisation" of caste is explored in order to explain the emergence of caste armies as community warriors. Noting the transformation of the caste system under conditions of democratic politics, the term "substantialisation", coined by Louis Dumont, refers to replacement of traditional hierarchical interdependence of caste by a "universe of impenetrable blocks, self-sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another, a universe in which the caste appears as a collective individual as a substance."[14] The shift to an idea of innate and fixed caste substance or identity points to the fluid and politically constructed

nature of the ideology and practices of the caste society in Bihar. An interpretive case analysis of the Ranvir Sena, a caste army of upper caste Bhumihars in Bihar demonstrates that caste armies are not a hangover from the primordial past or rooted in mere orientalist fantasy. On the contrary, caste senas reveal the dynamics of caste as one of the "master narratives" in structuring the engagements between state and society in Bihar.[15] Therefore, a multicausal interpretation is developed historically and inductively to explain the emergence of private caste senas in Bihar

Literature Review: Class Struggles, Caste Wars and State Power

There is little theoretical and empirical research on the activities, organizational patterns, and ideological orientations of private caste armies in India. Journalistic narratives, clichés, and stereotypes on caste violence have largely shaped the popular imagination on private caste armies in India and elsewhere. Inspired by the society-centric framework of Marxism, scholarly references to private caste armies often emphasize increasing class struggles in the countryside because these armies have arisen in areas of radical peasant movements. The genealogy of these society- centric explanations of peasant mobilization goes back to Adam Smith and Karl Marx. Concerned with the free play of capitalism, Adam Smith attributed the breakdown of peasant society and the resulting disorder to larger forces of history such as capitalism and industrialization.[16] The pessimistic assessment of the peasant was further refined and converted into a powerful theoretical tradition by Karl Marx. In "The Eighteenth Brummaire of Louis Bonaparte," he writes:

The great mass of the French nation is informed by simple additions of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes...In

so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organization among them, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name, whether through a parliament, or through a convention.[17]

Many modern scholars share classical Marxism's pessimism that peasants lack the conditions and independent motivations for class action and therefore, peasant radicalism is determined by class struggles in the arena of the market. The contributions of Barrington Moore, Eric Wolf, Keith Griffin, Joel Migdal, Jeffery Page, James Scott and Donald Zagoria and others, despite variations in their emphasis on specific factors, share the general consensus that radical peasant mobilization, revolutionary or non-revolutionary, is the outcome of direct and indirect effects of capitalism and other forces of modernization.

In Barrington Moore's classic analysis of transformation of agrarian society to industrial, differential spread of capitalism and the resultant "class struggles" undermined the peasant society leading to different routes to modernity and different forms of political regimes in the modern world, democratic, communist, and fascist. However, his excessive emphasis on the historical inevitability of capitalism to destroying the peasantry led him to conclude, "Peasant rebellions in India were relatively rare and completely ineffective."[18] Though recognizing the influence of political forces that shape peasant mobilization, Moore noted the influence of caste system as a barrier to mobilizing peasants in India.[19]

Although challenging Barrington Moore's proposition that Indian peasants are passive and peasant revolts in India are rare and ineffectual, many Indian analysts have used his society-centric framework to understand the spread of capitalism and rising cases of peasant unrest in the countryside. Noting a long history of agrarian

struggles, Kathleen Gough gave evidence of a long list of peasant revolts that occurred around class, caste and tribal issues in India. Citing evidence of 77 peasant revolts in India, Gough writes:

> About 30 revolts must have affected several tens of thousands, and about 12, several hundreds of thousands. The frequency of these revolts and the fact that at least 34 of those I considered were solely or partly by Hindus, cause me to doubt that the caste system impeded peasant rebellion in times of trouble.[20]

A similar thesis has been proposed and advanced by A. R. Desai, Dhanagare, Ranjit Guha, Balgopal and others. Noting the influence of the Telangana uprising in 1948, the Tebhaga insurrection in 1946, and the Naxalbari revolt in 1967, these authors argue that Indian agrarian society has frequently been rocked by major tribal and peasants revolts in the nineteenth and twentieth century.[21] Following these structural and economic interpretations of rising cases of rural unrest in India, scholars such as Francine Frankel, Pranab Bardhan, T. Byres, Arvind Das, Pradhan Prasad and others have found evidence of class polarization caused by the impact of market and other forces of modernization in the countryside of India especially since the late 1960s.[22] They blame the Green Revolution, the name of the new agricultural strategy adopted in the 1950s for improving productivity, for benefiting the big farmers, rich peasants and so-called kulaks in the countryside. According to them, this led to a differentiation of peasantry and growing landlessness and agrarian revolts in many parts of India. Frankel's explanation of commercialization of Indian agriculture has generated a lot of interest. According to her, introduction of new agricultural technology in India has increased economic disparities leading to political mobilization of rural poor along class lines.[23] Following Frankel's argument, Utsa Patnaik focused on emerging class contradictions in the mode of production in

agriculture that led her to propose a dualistic model of agrarian transitions in India. She argued that advanced regions such as Haryana, Punjab and parts of Uttar Pradesh have undergone the process of capitalist agriculture. On the contrary, semi-feudalism or Junker-style agrarian capitalism of the landlords prevailed in many backward regions such as Bihar, Eastern Uttar Pradesh.[24]

Most of the studies on private caste armies have been attempted in this manner postulating a false dichotomy between class and caste. The emergence of caste armies and the concomitant violence is attributed to the material contradictions between the "rural oligarchy" comprising upper caste and rich backward caste landlords and the dalits composed of landless lower castes.[25] Land, thus, emerges as a site of imminent class war between dalits, particularly those mobilized by Maoist groups, and the landed class. Commenting on the thesis of class struggle, Pradhan Prasad says:

> The present spate of agrarian violence in Bihar is a manifestation of intense struggle between the rural oligarchy and the direct producers, the latter comprising agricultural laborers and cultivators who use mainly family labor. The rural oligarchy enmeshed in the feudal mode of appropriation of surplus but is engaged in intensification of exploitation. The direct producers, who had been suffering on account of this for too long, have now decided to resist it. This antagonistic contradiction manifests itself in class struggle, which surfaced by late sixties and is now becoming bloodier every day.[26]

Observing the growing appeal of Naxals among agricultural laborers, Arun Sinha described the clashes between lower castes and landed castes as "class war, not atrocities against Harijans."[27] As one of the leading advocates of class war thesis, Sinha went on to announce:

> The new man found out new gods in Lenin, Mao, and Charu Mazumdar. It was not difficult to follow the new oracles: the line of Charu Mazumdar meant killing a Havildar Singh or a Dayalu Rai, while one thing which Lenin and Mao wanted to establish was a society where all men will be equal. Bhojpur's new man need not go into the details...He had grasped the quintessence of Marxism.[28]

In this class war thesis, caste armies are nothing more than a crude version of the armed gangs of the rural oligarchy. Describing caste armies as politico-military formation of the landed gentry to violently defend their class interests, B.N. Prasad says "senas have emerged in reaction to the rising intensity and magnitude of the radical agrarian movement, which has threatened the unquestioned domination in the socio-economic and political realms of the dominant castes/ class."[29] In the same vein, analyzing the nature of agrarian unrest in Patna district, Praveen Chaudhary writes "the present uprising in Patna, despite setbacks and sudden outburst of atrocities by local landlords, is thus firmly set on the route to a class struggle."[30] Failing to note the impact of state power, Prakash Louis' study of Naxal movement in Bihar interprets the emergence of caste armies as a mechanical response of the ruling class to prevent the radical mobilization of the agricultural laborers and peasants by the Maoist groups.[31] Similarly, the increased instances of massacres in the 1990s, according to Krishna Chaitnaya, is an articulation of the response of propertied classes from various dominant castes to crush the popular movement of landless laborers in Bihar.[32]

Most of these analyses assume that caste will be mechanically superseded by the formation of the economic classes associated with the spread of capitalism. Though recognizing the influence of State power in class struggles at the grass roots, Herring also argued that capitalist development in agriculture led to "labor- repressive and extremely exploitative social organizations of production." In this scenario, dominant landowners exercised tremendous power over subordinate classes. And the state rather than being autonomous became the handmaiden of dominant classes.[33]

The thesis of increased class contradictions between landowners and landless seems intuitively a plausible explanation for the violent conformations between private caste armies and rural poor organized by Maoist groups in Central Bihar, a region known for agrarian dynamism.[34] Looking at the historically patterned complex interactions among class, caste and State power in Bihar particularly, this explanation appears one-sided and partial at the best. Viewing landowning class as a monolith, this line of reasoning does not take into account acute power struggles between upper caste and backward caste in the arena of state politics.

By contrast, most non-Marxist scholars of Indian politics agree that although rural unrest is endemic it does not present evidence of impending class war or violent breakdown of state in India. They recognize the salience of the local issues of tenancy, wages and landlessness but emphasize State power and political institutions as well. They also agree with Barrington Moore's observation that peasant revolts in India have been localized, sporadic and peter out in long term. Reviewing major peasant movements since independence, Paul Brass notes that "it is clear that agrarian unrest in India is very much the exception rather than norm."[35] Criticizing Marxist identification of a hegemonic class of rural capitalists, Paul Brass notes that "the lumping together of all the landed castes in India into a united body under the hegemony of its leading segments, the so-called kulaks, reflects a deep-anti-peasant bias rather than the realities of the Indian countryside."[36] According to him, most of the violent incidents in Bihar do not suggest the beginnings of a revolutionary situation. Instead of class war, he noted the complicity of the Congress state government, the local police and local landlords with the increasing incidents of violence in Bihar.[37] Noting the correlation between "landlessness and radical

mobilization of peasants" Donald Zagoria also concluded that peasant rebellion is most likely when the rural dominant class loses its social power or when state authority collapses.[38]

Rejecting Frankel's thesis of class polarization and excessive focus on societal forces, Bouton's study of agrarian radicalism in Thanjavur also contends that sources of rural unrest or peasant rebellion "lie in the interaction of economic and political factors, both internal and external."[39] Agreeing with Bouton, Rudolph and Rudolph argue that "divided from each other by economic interest and world view and facing larger, more powerful groups of self-employed independent cultivators and large landholders, the rural poor are not in a position to become a dominant, hegemonic, or revolutionary class in the agricultural sector of the economy."[40] Describing the violent caste conflict and increasing atrocities on Harijans in India as "undeclared civil war", they point to the limits of state power. According to them "at the grassroots level, the state is too weakly articulated and too much influenced by local elites and factions to protect citizens' rights or effectively implement redistributional policies."[41] Inspired by Theda Skocpol's state–oriented interpretation of breakdown of state and peasant revolutions, Atul Kohli argues that emergence of private caste armies must be understood as a function of the increasing ineffectiveness of the government and the erosion of the established patterns of authority in Bihar.[42] Not denying the significance of increasing agrarian conflict between landowning castes and landless, Kohli focuses on the failure of state and political institutions to accommodate social groups that are mobilized by a complex set of social forces in order to explain the phenomena of private caste armies. Commenting on the governmental failure in Bihar, he says, "If Bihar were an independent country, such conditions of breakdown

would by now have precipitated a military coup or external intervention, or some combination of two."[43]

Although differing in theoretical orientation, both the class war interpretation and statist view tend to ignore the continued salience of caste in influencing state-society outcomes in Bihar. Recognizing the significance of caste in Bihar, Anand Charkarvarti's influential analysis points out "the massacres of men, women, and children of the underclass perpetrated by militias of dominant castes are closely connected to caste."[44] It is worth noting that changes have taken place in the traditional order of the caste system as a result of democratization of political life, new caste free occupations, modern education, increasing secularization, operation of modern economy etc. However, the capability of caste to survive has now become legendry in Indian society. Newer alignments and formations organized around secular, political and material interests have emerged in the caste. Considerations of traditional ritual hierarchy have diluted substantially. This, however, does not mean that caste has ceased to mean anything to many people in India. Although many Indians routinely inform sociologists that they do not practice caste any more, they continue to make reference to caste as a coded way of cultural distinctiveness, if not moral righteousness.[45] Noting the power of caste to withstand social vicissitudes, sociologist A.M. Shah says "In any case, castes are not likely to cease to be castes in the consciousness of people in the foreseeable future. No analytical gains are therefore likely to occur by calling them by another name."[46] This is best illustrated in Bihar where Maoist groups wittingly or unwittingly accepted the power of the caste to influence revolutionary peasant struggles. Recognizing the limitation of class war thesis, a prominent activist-theoretician of a Maoist group, Dev Nathan candidly

admits, "The class mobilized in the course of this struggle has been more or less confined to the dalit castes. The middle (backward) castes have not been drawn into movement in large numbers; that is particularly true with regard to the middle peasantry."[47] Exploring the phenomenon of caste wars in modern India, Susan Bayly points out:

> Predictably enough, these conflicts have also featured more "traditional expressions of caste, emphasizing sub-caste hierarchy and multi-caste interdependencies of service and exchange. Indeed, so-called "caste-war" is one of the key areas of contemporary life in which these two fluid variants of caste ideology have tended to intertwine and reinforce one another. Thus groups who share common interests as landlords, tenants or laborers often use both forms of caste language when they seek to recruit fighting allies. What has been said in such cases is, in effect, "join us as Bhumihars, Jats or Kshatriyas; restore dharma by avenging the wrongs done to you by impure and unrighteous Dalits." In these troubled regions those who might otherwise stand together on a basis of shared material interests will therefore tend instead to give priority to considerations of caste.[48]

Castes, particularly lower castes, are remarkably heterogeneous and highly fragmented. It is well known that Chamars (cobblers) often perceive themselves as superior to Bhangis (sweepers).[49] Commenting on the caste sectionalism inherent in the Indian peasantry, historian Christopher Bayly says, "Down almost to the very bottom of society every subaltern was elite to someone lower than him."[50] The lower castes face not only severe material exploitation, but also worst forms of caste discriminations. Throughout India, lower castes suffer ritual and social deprivation leading to their association with some form of irreversible impurity, caste impurity. Assigning priority to caste impurity, however, is problematic as it leads some scholars to project the violent conflict in Bihar as a manifestation of caste war evoking images of "ancient hatred".[51] For instance, Hindwan suggests that caste remains the fundamental basis of social and economic contradictions in Bihar. And private caste

senas are reaction of traditionally dominant castes to restore the traditional social order.[52] Although, Bindeshwar Pathak's portrayal of violence in Bihar leads one to recognize the growing importance of class polarization in some cases of violence, he emphasizes increasing assertiveness of backward castes as the major reason for caste war in Bihar.[53] Thus, as a unique and enduring Hindu institution, caste continues as a fixed presence in everything considered Indian.[54] This essentialist view of caste assigns state power a peripheral role in shaping institutions and outcomes.[55] Underlying this understanding is caste's supposed imperviousness to larger political struggles and processes. In this framework, caste appears essentially a religious system encompassing the political and economic realms of social life. [56]

It is true that caste wars have frequently featured the notion of caste as a community of merit, purity and prestige but these caste wars is hardly isolated from power struggles in the political or economic arena. Observing the resurgence of lower castes alliances in politics in the 1990s, sociologist Dipankar Gupta comments:

> ...caste alliances appear to emanate from secular and political and do not spring from primordial loyalties...What brings about such horizontal solidarities between castes, is the extent to which their secular interests coincide, which in turn depends on their structural location in society... If anything, caste alliances are shorthand ways of signaling a coalescence of secular interests... What needs to be approached is that these interests must really be powerful enough for castes to overcome their natural repulsion towards each other (in order) to form united fronts.[57]

Seen in this light, the so-called caste war acquires a crucial dimension in Bihar in the wake of intensification of agrarian conflict and the gradual ineffectiveness of state power especially since the late 1960s. Rejecting caste wars as an expression of primordial caste sentiment, Susan Bayly reminds us:

The rise of the Bihar caste senas have been brought about primarily by contemporary experience. The critical factor here has been the recognition that there are real gains to be made by those who act on a vision of caste as an bond of entitlement and moral allegiance...such ideas had come to be widely endorsed by "modern politicians and by the spokesmen for both " peasant" and "Kshatriya-model associations.[58]

Therefore, recognizing the multidimensionality of caste in Bihar, the present study contends that contrary to popular imagination, caste is neither static nor immutable. It is fluid, interacting with many different kinds of identity interests-political, economic, religious, ritual, agrarian, and class.[59] In this sense, the dissertation attempts to describe and explain mutually transforming links between state power, class and caste in India.

Theoretical Framework: State-Society Perspective and the case of Bihar

In contrast to society-centered explanations or exclusively state-focused analyses, this dissertation follows a state-in-society perspective to explore the emergence of private caste armies in the state of Bihar in India. Considering the high level of variation in the autonomy and capacity of state power across different regions in India, it is important to pay attention to state-society engagements in multiple contexts.[60] Migdal, one of the leading exponents of state-in–society perspective, argues, "states are parts of societies. States may help mould, but they are also continually moulded by the societies in which they are embedded.... Societies affect states as much as, or possibly more than, states affect societies."[61] Using Skocpol's notion of state power, the state is defined here "as a set of relatively differentiated organizations that claims sovereignty and coercive control over a territory and its population... The core organizations that make up a state include the administrative, judicial, and policing organizations that collect and dispense revenues, enforce the

constitutive rules of the state and society and maintain some modicum of domestic order especially to protect the state's own claims and activities."[62]

As indicated in the review of literature on peasant mobilization, analytically speaking, both developmental and Marxist (including neo-Marxist) intellectual traditions emphasize socioeconomic forces in shaping social outcomes disregarding the autonomous significance of state power. The autonomous role of the state is rejected in favor of a society-centric explanation of social change and political mobilization. As it is well known in the comparative politics that the failure of these theoretical traditions to explain sufficiently the pace of social change and emerging crisis of political order in the developing countries led many scholars to abandon social determinism and recognize in various ways the significance of political variables in the late 1970s and 1980s. [63]

The increasing attention to political context led to the discovery of the state as autonomous actor standing above society and determining outcomes of power struggles. However, like system or society- centered approaches, many state-centered explanations of state power are also partial; underemphasizing the role of socioeconomic forces.[64] Therefore, "bringing the state back in" analytically separated state and society and emphasized the autonomy of state from dominant classes and social forces. But the excessive concern with the autonomy of political authority (state) created a rigid disjunction between state and society. This has unfortunately led to the portrayal of state and society interactions as a zero-sum game. The classical Weberian formulation that state and society influence each other has been neglected by statist literature. Furthermore, disregarding the empirical reality in many contexts,

the statist theorists have portrayed the state as a monolith and ignored the need to "disaggregate the state" and recognize the limits of state power.[65]

The necessity to move beyond the monolithic, undifferentiated, and stand alone picture of the state forces one to pay attention to how different parts of the state engage and disengage themselves with various elements of civil society. Steeped in historical institutionalism, some recent interpretations of the crisis of autonomy and legitimacy of the state suggest that state actors are never fully autonomous from social forces and are limited by their mode of engagement with social forces.[66] Though state retains a certain degree of autonomy, the boundaries between state and society are fuzzy. Thus, a state's so called strength or weakness is a "function of the varied forms in which state-society relations are interwoven."[67]

Using the case study of private caste armies in Bihar, this study's theoretical concern is to emphasize the historically contingent crucial instances of interactions of state and social forces in India. However, the recognition of increasing ineffectiveness of state power in Bihar leads to the recognition of the Indian State's "self-determined autonomy in a variety of policy arenas and historical contexts."[68] This is best illustrated by the way the state power succeeds in preventing the religious riots but not so-called caste wars between landowning castes and landless in Bihar. State power, class and caste are seen continuous rather than dichotomously related. In other words, by way of looking at the patterns of state-society engagement, this study proposes to offer a notion of "limited state" to examine patterns of class and caste engagements with state power in India.

Abandoning a freestanding portrayal of the state leads us to emphasize mutually transforming linkages between state and society. It is argued here that state-society interactions vary over a huge range of possibilities ranging from conflict, bargaining, stalemate, collaboration, accommodation, etc. Thus, the increasing fragmentation of state power in Bihar is discovered in the balance of political forces and their historically determined mode of negotiations with larger social and ideational forces. By drawing attention to multiple levels of state–society interactions, this view of state-society relations challenges the image of state as a monolith operating in a rational and instrumental fashion. According to this state-society perspective, the origins of private caste armies are rooted in the dynamics of state power, class struggle and caste war in Bihar. In this sense, both state and society are independent variables. Yet they influence the behavior of each other, facilitating and constraining the patterns of outcomes. In this synthetic theoretical perspective, as Atul Kohli says "not only can states influence socio-economic struggles, but power struggles are not reducible to socio-economic struggles. Conversely, it would be absurd to underemphasize the significant impact that cultural and class variables have on a society's politics."[69]

Research Method

This study follows a qualitative analysis of private caste armies in Bihar. As this dissertation attempts to relate caste to the material and political world, the qualitative perspective helps us gain interpretative understanding of the social actors. Thus, a certain amount of story telling is both necessary and important to convey the thick meaning of the case under investigation. In this genre, description and explanation are complimentary to each other. As opposed to "stylized facts"

technique, this dissertation prefers to rely on "thick description" and a discursive analysis of private caste armies. Historical and cultural details form essential part of analysis. Special attention has also been paid on the politically constructed nature of the caste identity. The case study of the Ranvir Sena makes it clear how historical events, myths and legends and political processes help construct the collective identity of a community. This leads us to focus not on meta-narrative but on specific histories of caste and class struggles at the sub national level.

This is a study of a single case but this study's findings are set in comparative framework. The Maoist groups are not unknown to many parts of India. Similarly, the atrocities on rural poor by dominant landed castes have been common in almost all parts of India but caste armies are uniquely localized in Bihar. Interestingly, most private caste armies are concentrated in Central Bihar and they do not spill over to other regions of Bihar. More importantly, caste armies are short-lived; they either disintegrate quickly or re-emerge in different shapes depending on the historical contexts. At the time of writing this dissertation, only Ranvir Sena, the caste army of Bhumihars has been in existence in Bihar since 1994. Therefore, much of the ethnographic analysis of caste armies in India has come from an in –depth analysis of Ranvir Sena, comparing and contrasting with earlier caste armies. The interactions among state power, class and caste are understood over time and space. In tune with historical sociological analysis, the study focuses on what Skocpol terms "the interplay of meaningful actions and structural contexts, in order to make sense of the unfolding of unintended as well intended outcomes in individual lives and social transformations."[70]Therefore, although methodologically set in a single case study of the private caste armies in Bihar, the dissertation attempts to yields significant

insights into the dynamics of state power, radicalization of peasants and continuing influence of caste in India.

Data Sources

Following qualitative methodology, this dissertation uses "multiple sources of data" on the activities of private caste armies. The data used in this research include both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources involve fieldwork based on personal interviews (open-ended and partially structured), observations, local land records, unpublished governments records, and census reports. Other primary documentary sources include pamphlets, leaflets, and reports prepared by political parties, caste organizations, various civil liberty groups and other grassroots organizations in India. Secondary sources also constitute a major part of the research. Much of the secondary sources rely on analysis of print media (English and native), works of various authors and findings of prior literature in the area of this research. These data collection sources constitute the empirical base of the research.

Field Work Methodology

It is an open secret in Bihar that although banned by the state government, private caste armies operate freely, if not openly. Aside from communist parties, especially of Maoist persuasion, most of the political parties have informal connections and unofficial electoral ties with private caste armies. Additionally, police and civil bureaucrats also allegedly hobnob with these armies for the purpose of maintaining "peace" in the rural areas of Bihar. Therefore, through personal in-depth interviews with local politicians, civil and police officials, cadres of caste armies, local intellectuals, journalists, lawyers related to caste armies' cases, non-

government organizations, and ordinary people, the data has been generated. Carrying out ethnographic research on caste armies proved to be more rewarding than orthodox techniques of survey research or statistical methods. Since private caste armies are banned by the government, most activists and patrons refuse to open up easily for fear of police arrest and legal persecution. Plus, the no-holds-barred violent operational style of caste armies does not encourage the possibility of conducting "participant observation".

Building trust with those that knew or were familiar with cadres, leaders and patrons of private caste armies was the first step to enter the world of private armies. For this to work, the researcher spent a great deal of time in Patna, the capital of state of Bihar, observing the phenomenon and cultivating links, and contacts in the field. Though left parties especially Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) have a great deal of information on the activities of caste armies, the real details of the dynamics of the caste armies came in a trickle for fear of political and legal consequences. Many politicians, administrators and police officials refused to be tape-recorded forcing the researcher to rely on paper notes, and inferences drawn from sustained observation. The data collection methodology was supplemented by "a hit and run" tour in the districts, and villages affected by private caste armies. This not only strengthened the narrative scheme but also brought a grassroots perspective, helping make a detailed description of the case and its setting. Also, this resulted in a greater appreciation of native categories, contexts and experiences.

Conclusion

To restate our objectives, after having introduced the subject, the significance, theoretical hypotheses and the state of literature in this chapter, the next chapter will set the stage for understanding the dynamics of caste and class society in Bihar. This is reflected in the analysis of a long history of agrarian struggles, and the concentration of private caste armies in Central Bihar region. Chapter III will examine the political context of the increasing power struggles that has resulted in the gradual ineffectiveness of the state power to mediate ruthless social and political conflicts in Bihar. Focusing on the political power struggles between traditionally dominant upper castes and the emergent backward castes will lead us to recognize how the growing powerlessness of the government contributed to the emergence of private caste armies especially since the mid-1970s. Chapter IV will explain the dynamics of caste senas and rise and decline of some of the major caste armies such as Bhoomi Sena, Lorik Sena and etc. This yields crucial insights into understanding the connections between caste, class and state power in Bihar. Chapter V will examine the organization, leadership, and ideology of the Ranvir Sena, the only existing private caste army in Bihar. It will explain how and why caste armies not only operate as violent defender of class interests but also perceive themselves as community warriors. This discussion will add to our understanding of the fluid character of caste ideology in influencing the state-society relations in Bihar. Chapter VI will summarize the findings of the study.

CHAPTER II

SETTING THE STAGE: LAND, CASTE AND AGRARIAN STRUGGLES IN BIHAR

This chapter begins by describing the land called "Bihar" and explores the social and economic background of Bihar especially since the colonial days. The purpose of this chapter is to recognize the influence of historical developments on the changing patterns of class and caste society in Bihar. This is reflected in the close interaction between caste and land. Most big landowners belong to upper castes or forward castes, and most of the scheduled castes (Dalits) or Harijans are poor and landless.[71] The numerically preponderant and heterogeneous backward castes occupy a messy middle position in the social and caste hierarchy. The three most powerful backward castes such as Yadavs, Kurmis, and Koiris have increasingly become substantial landowners, but many smaller backward castes such as Tellis are small landowners and landless laborers. Noting continuity and change, the chapter explains the long history of agrarian struggles and their impact on the state power and increasing radical peasant unrest in Bihar. The agrarian struggles in the early twentieth century during colonial rule were conservative and reformist involving dominant caste tenants against the landlord system (Zamindari). By contrast, various Maoist groups have mobilized the radical peasant movements that have emerged since the late 1960s. The lower castes landless have challenged the dominance of various landowning castes around issues of land, wage, and also social oppression. Furthermore, the exploration of Central Bihar and North Bihar as two qualitatively different ecological and social regions sets the stage for understanding the uniquely

localized nature of private caste armies in Central Bihar. In sum, focusing on the dynamics of caste, class and agrarian struggles, an analysis of the emergence of private caste armies is developed historically and inductively.

The Land and the People

Once described admiringly as the "heart of India" by British Civil Servant John Houlton, Bihar is India's poorest and visibly most violent state.[72] Commenting on the construction of the identity of Bihar in modern India, historian Gyan Prakash says that "Agriculturally relatively backward and stagnant, socially mired in caste oppressions and class exploitation, its political structure eroded by corruption and wracked by landlord and the state terror, Bihar today often evokes revulsion in other parts of India. It is looked upon as a region where feudal domination continues unabated, in violent conflict with agents of modernity and progress."[73] Beneath these widely held negative images, as Walter Hauser passionately argues, lives a state that has a vibrant history of change and deeply sensitive people concerned about the issues of equity, justice and izzat (prestige), the stuff of modern life.[74] Ironically, the name "Bihar" is the corrupt form of "Vihara" which means a Buddhist monastery, abode of eternal peace. Hundreds of miles away from the gaze of New Delhi, this geographical heart of India lie in the eastern part of India. The entire state is landlocked. Bihar has not always suffered from the "history of marginality". Its present capital Patna, which was known as Patliputra in the ancient days, had been the seat of imperial Maurya and Gupta kingdoms. Eulogized as the land of Buddha and Mahavira, the founders of Buddhism and Jainism, Bihar has been the home of protest movements since time immemorial.

During most of the colonial period, Bihar was linked with Bengal and Orissa. However, in the first decades of the 20th century, the rising middle class, leÿ0bÿXd upwardly mobile Kayastha caste started an agitation to end the domination of Bengal. This demand was articulated through two journals –"The Biharee" and "The Kayastha Messenger". In the backdrop of rising militancy of Indian National Congress, the British Government conceded the demand of the Bihari-subnationalism. On April 1, 1912, Bihar and Orissa were separated from Bengal and eventually Bihar became separate province on April 1, 1936.

Demographic and Social Characteristics of Bihar: Central Bihar and North Bihar

Before the formation of Jharkhand, Bihar was the second most populous state of India, next to Uttar Pradesh. However, after the bifurcation of Bihar, the rank of Bihar among the states has slipped down to third place. Patna, the capital of the state is the most populous district in the state. Bihar is a predominately rural society.[75] After the separation of Jharkhand from Bihar, Bihar is easily one of the most economically backward and rural states in India.[76] Before the bifurcation of Bihar in 2000, the state of Bihar was divided into three ecological and demographic zones, North Bihar Plains, South Bihar Plains and Plateau region, which became a separate state in 2002. Broadly speaking the river Ganga, whose length is about 550 kms, divides the plains regions in two unequal parts, the North Bihar and South Bihar. Linguistically, there are three major dialects; Maithli, Magahi, and Bhojpuri. Maithili and Magahi are Bihar specific languages but Bhojpuri speakers are spread over between Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Magahi and Bhojpuri speakers dominate the landscape of Central Bihar. Interestingly, as Paul Brass notes, Magahi speakers are

the most socially and politically advanced segment in the state of Bihar.[77] The official language of the state of Bihar is not the mother tongue of any major population group in Bihar. The status of Hindi as the official language of the state is largely the outcome of the efforts of Central Bihar based Magahi speakers to adopt Hindi as the language of administration and education.[78]

However, any discussion of Bihar is flawed if it does not recognize the economic and ecological variation in the state. It is significant to note that Bihar, the old Bihar after the formation of Jharkhand as an autonomous state in 2002, is divided in two neatly marked ecological zones, north Bihar and South Bihar. Central Bihar here refers to the region between south of the river Ganga and north of the plateau region of Bihar. Demographically speaking, the private caste armies have originated and proliferated in the Central Bihar, a region described by Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) as the "flaming fields" of Bihar.[79]

The districts of Central Bihar consist of Patna, Gaya, Nalanda, Aurnagabad, Nawada, Roth's, Bhojpur, South Munger, and South Bhagalpur. North Bihar is a huge rectangular plain, crisscrossed by many rivers, emerging from the Himalayas such as Kosi, the Gandak, etc. These rivers have made the soil very fertile. However, North Bihar has also come to be known as "sorrow of Bihar" for being routinely afflicted by heavy floods leading to heavy damage to crops and property. The density of population is very high and predominantly rural with a very small urban base. The major districts of North Bihar are Saran, Siwan, Gopalganj, Sitmarhi, Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, Begusarai, etc. North Bihar constitutes such a distinct cultural, linguistic and

political entity that there had been a movement, largely unsuccessful, to declare north Bihar a separate state in the 1950s and the 1960s.[80]

Like Central Bihar, North Bihar has also been predominately rural society. During colonial rule, North Bihar was known as the land of big Zamindars and Rajas (kings). The biggest landlord in North Bihar was Rameshwar Singh, Maharaja of the Dharbhanga Raj. Rameshwar Singh was also the leading family of the Maithili Brahman community of Bihar. His property covered about 11 percent of the total area of north Bihar.[81] The other big Zamindars in the region were Maharaja of Hathwa, Maharaja of Ramnagar, Zamindar of Madhuban, and Bettiah Raja. In North Bihar, Brahmans, Rajputs and Bhumihars maintained near monopoly over the land. Interestingly, the upper caste groups were not spread all over. They were concentrated in few areas. For instance, Bhumihars constituted about one-fifth of the population in Begusarai. In Saran, Rajputs formed about 10 percent of the population. The Kayastha also exercised a great deal of influence by virtue of their dominance in legal profession and local bureaucracy of the Rajas.[82] Like Central Bihar, the Yadavs, Kurmis, and the Koiris were preponderant among backward castes. Facing utmost social and economic discrimination Dusadhs and the Dhanuks constituted the two largest groups among lower castes (scheduled castes). In the post-independent era, the region has witnessed some industrial activity in the form of Barauni industrial complex in Begusarai district.[83] However, large disparities in irrigation, power, and rail and road communications exit vis-a vis Central Bihar. This area of Bihar has long experienced agrarian stagnation causing a large number of agricultural workers to seek employment in advanced regions in India such as Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi.[84]

By contrast, Central Bihar is semi arid receiving rainfall just sufficient for the type of agriculture practiced traditionally in the region. Unlike the new alluvial soil of North Bihar, its water retaining capacity is low. It dries up soon after the rains. Additionally, the water table of the Central Bihar plains is deep compared to North Bihar. The shortage of water is met by the indigenous natural drainage system in the region which involves creating surface drainage tanks (nahars or pynes) to collect rainwater in the plains and preserving them for future agricultural use. The issue of proper distribution of water from this artificial system of irrigation often led to violent clashes in parts of Central Bihar in pre and post independent era.[85] Central Bihar is also noticed for wet paddy cultivation instead of wheat cultivation. This forces even small cultivators to hire labor force for agricultural operations, creating pressure on wages, one of the central issues in ongoing radical agrarian struggles in the region.[86]

Central Bihar is also known for distinctive practice of agricultural rent. Aside from cash rent, the practice of produce rent (bhaoli) is widespread in this region. According to British officials, produce rent enabled local landlords to benefit from the rising prices of agricultural commodities in the early twentieth century.[87] By contrast, cash rent was predominant in North Bihar. This practice of rent was also connected with the artificial system of irrigation in the region. In the colonial days, the landlords provided capital for the construction and maintenance of reservoirs and water channels etc. In return, the tenant gave a fixed share of the actual produce to the landlords. This practice was more acceptable in Central Bihar because the maintenance of indigenous irrigating system was least expensive. The practice of produce rent, according to Grierson, resulted in a system of mutual dependence between peasants and landlords.[88] In contrast, organizing irrigation facilities required

heavy investment in preventing flood in North Bihar.[89] Hence, the absentee Zamindars (landlords) here were hardly interested in providing irrigation benefits to their tenants to extract agricultural surplus. The existence of better irrigation system has contributed to growth of agriculture in Central Bihar. The soil of Central Bihar is more fertile as opposed to North Bihar. The assured irrigation in Central Bihar is a distinctive feature of Central Bihar and noticed in the colonial records. As far back in 1929, Central Bihar districts such as Shahabad, Gaya, Patna, Bhagalpur, and Munger accounted for 71 percent of the total area irrigated in Bihar.[90] The legacy of assured irrigation still continues. Table 6 and 7 show the contrast between Central Bihar and North Bihar in terms of irrigated area.

Table 1[91]: Percentage of Gross Area Irrigated in Central Bihar Districts in 1981-82

Districts	Percentage of Gross Area Irrigated
Patna	61.31
Nalanda	75.23
Nawada	76.88
Aurnagabad	68.28
Bhojpur	68.35
Gaya	74.19
Rohtas	73.72

Table 2: Percentage of Gross Area irrigated in North Bihar Districts in 1981-82

Districts	Gross Area Irrigated
Muzaffarpur	23.84
Saran	41.49
Siwan	42.96
Gopalganj	45.18
East Champaran	28.50
West Champaran	52.16
Vaishali	23.86
Dharbhanga	16.89
Madhubani	11.98
Samastipur	26.72
Begusarai	31.47

Although some parts of Bihar have experienced modest agrarian growth, overall Bihar's economy is in shambles. Commenting on the dismal performance of the economy, one observer says:

> The rate of economic growth in Bihar has always been slow from the beginning. In 1960-61, Bihar was at the bottom among all the sates of India in terms of per capita income. At present also it is at the bottom but with increased distance...in 1960-61, Bihar's per capital income was about two-thirds of India's average per capita income: it declined to less than half towards the late 1980s.[92]

According to one estimate, Bihar's per capita income stands at a mere Rs. 2, 904 ($60) as against Rs.5, 781 ($118) for the country. The literacy rate is also among one of the lowest in the country- 47.53 percent as against the national average of 65.38 percent.[93] The economic backwardness of Bihar is further reflected in the incidence of poverty. According to official estimate, in 1887-88, about two-fifths of the state's population was below poverty line which was the second highest in the country. However, the incidence of poverty during the period 1983-84 and 1987-88 did register a decline due to a variety of factors such as good weather conditions, growth in agricultural productivity, increase in the use of modern inputs and above all remittances from migrant laborer working elsewhere in the country.[94] This has produced what is called the "Green Revolution" especially in Central Bihar.[95]

Bihar is notorious for high population density, which also contributes to the rural discontent. The population density is very high –880 people per square kilometer in 2001 as compared to national average of 324.[96] With a poorly developed industrial base, the crux of economic activity lies in agriculture. In the absence of developed industry, surplus rural labor is unable to find employment in industry. This leads to depression in rural wages and consequent struggles between rural laborer and landowners. The landowners often find few secondary and tertiary opportunities for

investing the rural surplus. This context of severe poverty and modest economic dynamism in the midst of overall economic stagnation must be kept in mind in order to understand the dynamics of peasant unrest and private caste armies in Bihar.

Caste and Class in Bihar

In popular imagination, caste identities are so deeply embedded in the social, economic, political and cultural life in Bihar that other identities are almost non-existent. However, a closer look at the caste configuration reveals a fluid multifarious social segmentation than the more simplified picture of varna (order, class or kind) system. The term caste is derived from the Portuguese word *casta* meaning pure breed. The English word caste is interpreted variously and often in contradictory ways in India. For instance, the term caste also refers to "distinctions of species or kinds amongst gods, animals, and even inanimate objects and substances."[97] The most popular way to describe caste is varna, which refers to a notional all-India fourfold functional division of Hindu society into Brahmans (priests), Kshatriyas (warrior-rulers), Vaishyas (traders) and Shudras (artisans). Although most Hindus refer to caste in varna sense, this simple picture of varna system does not represent the sociological reality of caste society. In reality, the caste manifests itself in a locally defined myriad of endogamous communities practicing norms of kinship, marriage, and occupation and ritual purity. This social groping is referred to as jati (birth group) by Hindi speakers in North India. Therefore, according to anthropologist R.S. Khare, the concept of jati refers to the "concrete and factual domain" of social life rather than the ideal type expressed by varna scheme.[98] It is true that automatic correspondence between varna and caste is contested in many contexts; varna is often used as an overarching concept to organize the complexity of the caste system. Noting the

relevance of varna, M.N. Srinivas comments, "To the average peasant...the names of castes in other linguistic areas are pure abracadabra. They make sense only when they are fitted into to the Procrustean frame of varna."[99]

Most sociologists view caste system as being marked by hierarchy, interdependence, and separation. However, it goes to the credit of Louis Dumont who regarded the principle of hierarchy as the bedrock of the caste system in India. According to him, the caste system is a hierarchy not expressed in a liner ranking in which each caste stands above one and below another. In other words, the hierarchy of caste system does not simply refer to a system of super ordination and subordination based on the exercise of power. On the contrary, according to Dumont, hierarchy of castes is articulated as a structure of oppositions; opposition between pure and impure and opposition between ritual status and power. Therefore, the enormous variety of local manifestations of caste is explained by a holistic principle of hierarchy, which pervades the entire system of caste system.[100] Challenging Dumont's excessive emphasis on the dissociation between status and power, eminent Indian sociologist Andre Beteille observes that caste system is not only based on the ideology of ritual purity, but also embedded in a system of economic, social and political domination.[101] Therefore, from a comparative perspective, the caste system exhibits not only ideological opposition between pure and impure but also material and political differences. Priests and Kings, Brahmans and Shudras, dominant and subalterns, coalesce into each other leading to a very fluid and contentious framework of everyday social life in India. A brief exploration of the changing experience of caste in Bihar shows that the conventions of caste society have continually been

shaped, challenged, modified, and reinvented. Table 3 gives a rough estimate of the caste distribution in Bihar.[102]

Table3: Major Caste Groups in Bihar

Category	Caste Group	Percentage of Population
Upper castes or Forward castes in popular parlance	Brahman Bhumihar Rajput Kayastha Bania	4.7 2.9 4.2 1.2 0.6
Upper Backward Castes or Upper Shudras	Ahir (Yadav) Kurmi Koiri	11.0 3.6 4.1
Lower Backward Castes or Lower Shudras	Barhi Dhanuk Kahar Kandu Kumhar Lohar Mallah Nai Tatwa Telli Others (less than 1%each)	1.0 1.8 1.7 1.6 1.3 1.3 1.5 1.4 1.6 2.8 16.0
Muslims		12.5
Scheduled Castes(Harijans or Dalits)		14.1
Scheduled Tribes(Adivasis) Total		9.1 100

The Hindus of Bihar have been spread across three hierarchical layers, namely, the upper caste or forward caste, the backward castes and the scheduled castes or Dalits. The first layer includes only four castes, namely, Brahman, Bhumihar, Rajput, and Kayastha. This layer constitutes the elite twice-born (dvija entitled to wear sacred thread) who traditionally enjoyed predominantly high ritual status. Due to their high ritual status and control over land, the upper castes enjoyed

the status of "Lords of the Land" during the colonial rule. The Brahmans occupied the top position in the caste hierarchy as a result of their monopoly of rituals and priestly functions. Brahmans can be found almost in every village. They mostly worked as temple and family priest. The Brahmans were also found in secular occupation such as teacher, physician. Some Brahmans also worked as cook to big Zamindars and Rajas. Many Brahmans were big landlords such as Dharbhanga Raj in north Bihar. The Brahmans are internally differentiated into three groups; Maithli Brahmans, the Paschima (western) Brahmans and the Magadh or Sakadwipiya Brahmans.[103] The Maithili Brahmans, mainly concentrated in north Bihar, are known for their distinct Brahmanical practices and political influence especially in the Congress Party in Bihar.[104] Their political influence has been eroded by the emergence of backward caste politics in Bihar.

Many upper-castes are also tenants and agriculturists, especially Bhumihars. The Bhumihars are upper castes and claim to be Brahmans, a claim often disputed by other castes. They take pride in being militant and mainly involved in agriculture as landowners and tenants as well. A detailed analysis of Bhumihars is undertaken in chapter V in order to explore the dynamics of the Ranvir Sena. The Rajputs are considered elite caste by virtue of martial history and links with Kshatriya, (warrior-noble) the highest varna (rank) in the caste system. They are mostly landlords and do not cultivate the land themselves. They control the land with the help of tenants and sharecroppers. Like Bhumihars, Rajputs are also prone to taking arms at the slightest provocation to defend their traditional notions of honor and privilege. Most of the former Zamindars were Rajputs. Historically, the Kayasthas were among the most urbanized, literate and mobile caste in Bihar.[105] Though identified with state

administration and considered educationally advanced, the Kayasthas have faced a great deal of controversies as regards their status in the hierarchy of the caste system in Bihar. As the term Kayastha denotes an official or scribes, they were not accepted as upper caste for long. Many ancient Hindu scriptures referred to them as Shudras, the lowest of the four varnas. During colonial rule, census officials and judges also at times assigned Kayasthas lower ranks in the caste hierarchy. However, by a court decision in 1927 in Bihar, the Kayasths came to be recognized as one of upper castes.[106] The Kayasthas played leading role in the movement for social mobility and separation of Bihar from Bengal. The most prominent leader of the movement for the separation of Bihar from Bengal, Sachchidanand Sinha was from the Kayastha caste. Facing the domination of Bengali elite in the matters of jobs, education, and government, the educated Biharis of who most were Kayasthas actively participated in the "Bihar for Biharis" movement.[107]

The Kayasthas also were front-runners in the activities of the Congress in Bihar. In the celebrated Champaran movement of Mahatma Gandhi in 1917, many Kayastha professionals provided the leadership. Prominent among them were Braj Kishore Prasad, Rajendra Prasad (who later became the first president of independent India), Ram Naumi Prasad, Shambhu Sharan and etc. They also controlled the leadership of the Bihar Congress in the pre-independent era. However, the influence of Kayasthas in politics came to be increasingly challenged by the Bhumihars and Rajputs especially after the elections for the local government bodies in the 1920s. The Kayasthas in a bid to prevent the monopoly of power by the Bhumihars entered into an informal alliance with the Rajputs. This also laid the foundation of protracted factional struggles in the politics of Bihar.

The backward castes constitute the most numerous caste group in Bihar. They occupy middle position in the ritual status in the caste hierarchy; lower than upper castes and higher than Dalits. This is a very heterogeneous grouping, which is generally divided between upper shudras and lower shudras. The upper shudras comprise Yadavs (ahirs or gowlas or gopes), Kurmis and Koiris. The Yadavs are traditionally agriculturists, herdsmen and milkmen. They are the single largest caste in Bihar that explains their influence in the democratic politics. They also command large landholding in certain areas such as Patna, Gaya, Saharsa, Muzaffarpur etc. The Yadavs are generally regarded socially inferior to twice-born castes. They, however, often claim their origin to the Lord Krishna (one of the most popular incarnation of Lord Vishnu in Hinduism).

In the late nineteenth century, Yadavs attempted to raise their social status in the caste hierarchy. Their attachment to Lord Krishna took them to Vaishnava ideas. Gradually, they claimed to be placed in the Kshatriya varna and adopted the surname "Yadav" leading them to drop using the existing surnames such as "Ahir" or "Gwala". They are regarded as pioneers in the formation of caste association, giving a fillip to horizontal mobilization of caste. The All- India Yadava Mahasabha came into existence in 1922 to advance the social and political interests of Yadavs. The Sabha (association) made an appeal to Yadavs to refrain from drinking liquor, child marriage, dowry, Casteism, and untouchability.[108] The attempt to seek a higher status in the Hindu society led Yadavs to participate in the prevention of the cow-slaughter movement and forge a tenuous agrarian unity with the upper caste landowning castes in the late nineteenth century.[109] Slowly, Yadavs came to challenge the dominance of the upper castes resulting in caste riots against upper caste Zamindars in many parts of

Bihar in the early twentieth century.[110] The Kurmis have traditionally been hard working agriculturists. They are mainly responsible for the agricultural dynamism in various districts of Central Bihar. They were considered a tribe in the nineteenth century as the name Kurmi refers to tortoise, a tribal totem. They were even declared a criminal tribe by the colonial authorities due to their alleged predatory practices. In fact, in 1894, Kurmis started a movement to get accepted into caste society.[111] Responding to the social mobility movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Kurmis also claimed to belong to Kshatriya (warrior-noble). They formed All India Kurmi Mahasabha (Sadar Kurmi Kshatriya Sabha) and held its first session in 1894 to raise their social and political status. One of the major decisions of the Kurmi Sabha was to challenge the order of the colonial government, which debarred Kurmis from being recruited in colonial police service.[112] The politicization of Kurmis led to the gradual expansion of the Kurmi caste. Soon, the Awadhiyas of Patna, the Dhanuks of North Bihar and the Mahtos of Chotanagpur started calling themselves Kurmis disregarding social and ritual restrictions.[113]

The Koiris are known as great horticulturist and engage primarily in agricultural operations. They are mainly small landowner and poor peasants. They also attempted to attain higher social status by claming as descendants of Lord Ram's son Kush. They formed the Kushwaha Kshatriya Mahasabha as their nodal caste association and held first session of the association in March 1922.[114] Unlike caste associations of upper castes, the caste associations of backward castes increasingly took up the demands of socio-economic justice. The formation of Triveni Sangh comprising Yadavs, Kurmis and Koiris in the 1930s was a pointer in this direction whose implication will be discussed later in the chapter. Not only was demand made

to end the practice of forced unpaid labor (begar), the backward castes' associations went further and even demanded reservation in the jobs for the backward castes. They resented their almost non-representation in the government jobs. Babu Swaymber Das, a Yadav leader, moved a resolution in the legislative council on 21 August 1931 to demand reservation for the Yadavs, Kurmis and Koiris in the Bihar and Orissa Provincial Civil Service.[115] Therefore, the recent controversy over reservation of jobs in government services in Bihar is not new.

By contrast, the lower backwards include a large number of castes consisting either of craftsmen or men pursuing certain types of professions such as Kumhar (potters), Nai (barber), Barhi (carpenter) Mallah (boatman) and others. Both upper and lower backward castes have traditionally enjoyed lower ritual status and were not permitted to wear sacred thread. In the third category comes scheduled caste or former untouchables, also referred to as Dalits or Harijans engaged in crafts or professions considered menial or unclean by the Hindu Orthodoxy, such as Dom (disposer of the dead), Dusadh (village watchman), Musahar (rat-eaters), Dhobi (washerman), Mehtar (sweepers) etc. The scheduled castes are mostly landless laborers and occupy the bottom place in Hindu society. They are the worst sufferers of routine caste massacres. However, gradually they have become assertive and radicalized by Maoist groups in Bihar.

What aggravates the acute poverty and economic stagnation in Bihar is that caste hierarchy and class disparities work almost in tandem. The correspondence between caste and landownership is high, revealing the existence of deep-seated economic inequalities.[116] The dominance of the caste is mainly measured in terms of

land. It is no surprise in Bihar that dominates castes acquires dominant position by their control of land.[117] Biggest landlords belong to the upper castes such as Bhumihars, Rajputs, Brahmans, while majority of middle level landlords are backward castes such as Yadavs, Kurmis, and Koiris etc. On the other hand, most of the lower castes (scheduled castes) are landless and live in abject poverty. Dalits or lower castes as a class are found at the bottom of the social and economic order. Land distribution is strongly skewed against the Dalits. According to one observation, two-thirds of the scheduled castes in Bihar are landless.[118] Even a cursory look at the caste configuration reveals the dominance of upper castes and upper backward castes in the local power structures in Bihar.

Agrarian Class Structure in Bihar

It is true that old forms of feudal bondage are increasingly vanishing but new forms of social oppression have also emerged. Though the dominance of upper castes is undeniable, any simplistic conflation of large landowners with upper castes is misleading. In contemporary Bihar, upper backward castes such as Yadavs, Kurmis and Koiris have emerged equally if not more ruthless and despotic than the ex-landlords.[119] The powerful sections of backward castes have joined the class of landlords. Therefore, the landlords form two distinct sections; feudal landlords and capitalist landlords (or Kulaks). The feudal landlords comprising mainly traditionally dominant upper castes resort to old methods of cultivation through tenants. By contrast, the capitalist landlords generally divide their land into two parts with one part being leased out and the other part being cultivated by hired laborers using modern means. The rich tenants from the upper castes and the upper backward castes

such as Yadavs, Kurmis and Koiris constitute the ranks of capitalist landlords. The middle peasants are found mainly among the backward castes of Yadavs, Kurmis and Koiris. Bhumihars have also increasingly joined the ranks of middle peasants in many parts of Central Bihar. The middle peasants mainly operate with the help of family labor employing wage labor occasionally. The lands operated by them are either fully owned or partly leased in from the upper caste landholders. Middle peasants are linked with the landlords through numerous economic and caste ties.

The sharecroppers (bataidars) are another important class in the agrarian class structure in Bihar. Most of the sharecroppers belong to the lower backward castes and scheduled castes. They are mainly small and marginal farmers. There are various forms of sharecropping ranging from cash (nagdi) to produce based (one-third rule or one fourth of the produce). Most of the sharecropping practice is oral leading to arbitrary hike of rent. Majority of the sharecroppers sell their labor for subsistence. At the bottom of the agrarian hierarchy are agricultural laborers. Their number has increased since the late 1960s due to large-scale eviction of erstwhile tenants in the wake of the various land ceiling acts. According to a rough estimate, they account for 35.50 percent of the total population of the work force in rural Bihar.[120] Most of the agricultural laborers belong to lower backward castes and scheduled castes and are either attached laborers or landless laborers. They suffer the worst excesses of class and caste injustices. They have come to provide the backbone of the radical peasant movements in the Central Bihar. Table 4 reveals the usual picture of the powerful correlation between caste and the very unequal pattern of landholding especially at the top and the bottom of the agrarian class structure. However, it is the messy middle that defies a crude class or caste explanation. Many upper castes are middle and small

landowners. Similarly, not all-backward castes are middle peasants. Notwithstanding the messy middle, caste, land and social power are to a great extent correlated in Bihar.

Table 4[121]: Land and Caste in the Bihar Plains: Caste-wise Breakup of each Landholding Category

Size of Holding in acres	Upper caste	Upper backward	Lower backward	Scheduled castes	Muslims	All
Landless	2.9	13.1	23.00	43.9	17.1	100(43.1)
Less than 5	29.3	30.6	13.00	17.6	9.5	100(47.0)
5-10	9.0	20.7	0.0	0.5	9.7	100(5.8)
Above 10	77.4	11.6	6.0	0.0	4.9	100(4.1)

From Limited Raj to Local Raj in Bihar

Historically, Bihar had been associated with Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism and various sects of Islam in the ancient and medieval times. No ruler ruled Bihar as a single political entity until the advent of British colonial government in the early nineteenth century. The British rule generated social and political upheavals leading to reinvention of Brahmanical order in Bihar. This resulted in a scramble among various castes to seek ascendancy in the social hierarchy. The impact of British rule was profound but not deep. The local agrarian conditions forced the British rule to share kingly powers with existing upper caste Rajas (small kings) and Zamindars in Bihar. This in turn led to creation of what Anand Yang calls "the limited Raj" in Bihar.[122] The foundation of the colonial system of governance was erected on the notorious Permanent Settlement of 1793. By this settlement Zamindars came to control the land. Most of the Zamindars were from upper castes. Therefore, the penetration of British Raj in Bihar, according to Anand Yang, "induced virtually no changes in the exiting indigenous controlling structures of the district."[123] As a result

of imposition of Permanent Settlement, the local upper caste Zamindars became the crucial connections linking the British Raj to local society. The relative stability in local agrarian landscape led to flourishing of local structures of dominance and control. "The social foundation of the new set up of 1793 was the old landed aristocracy, with a sprinkling of the new men here and there."[124] The acceptance of locally powerful landlords as "collaborators" led to the strengthening of indigenous system of dominance and subordination, obviating the need for a strong colonial presence in the local society. Summing up the architecture of colonial rule in local society, Anil Seal writes:

> Local bargains of this sort were of great advantage to the British because they reduced Indian politics to the level of haggles between the Raj and small pockets of its subjects, a system which kept them satisfactorily divided...In return, the British had to acquiesce in an arrangement where strong local intermediaries could block them from meddling in the affairs of those who owned land, or controlling the others who tilled it.... At these levels it might be the British who governed, but it was Indians who ruled.[125]

One of the major consequences of this structure of power turned out to be very low presence of colonial state in the local society of Bihar. Though it provided a semblance of law and order throughout the region, the colonial government came to share governance with local allies, upper caste Zamindars and village notables. This not unsurprisingly allowed continued supremacy of landholders over his tenants. In this situation, not much change was effected in existing land tenure practices and extraction of rural surplus. Tenants and landlords perpetually clashed over sharing of agrarian surplus. Forms of rent such as "produce rent" became increasingly contentious.[126] Peasants expressed their grievances against the exploitative practices in "individual and sporadic acts of revolts. The tribal uprisings such as Santhal insurrection of 1855-56, Munda uprising of 1899-1900, and series of Indigo riots

between 1867 and 1907 characterized as "subaltern insurrection", flashed as instances of open rebellion against the intrusions of the local representatives of the colonial state, especially police and money-lenders who were widely perceived as intruders in the moral economy of the peasants.[127] In this, village level controllers, the rich upper caste and backward caste peasants led them. It is this situation that provides a context for the emergence of a series of agrarian struggles in Bihar in pre and post – independence India. Contrary to nineteenth century peasant uprisings, the wave of agrarian struggles in Bihar especially after the First World War of 1914-18 "took a less sporadic, more sustained and continuing form."[128]

Agrarian Struggles, Caste, and Social Violence in Bihar:

(i) Gandhian Peasant Movement in North Bihar:

The most celebrated agrarian movement in pre-independent Bihar was the Champaran movement of 1917 in North Bihar. Considered Mahatma Gandhi's paradigmatic effort to mobilize Indian peasantry into the Nationalist movement against British rule, Gandhi's campaign against the oppressive indigo planters in Champaran started what many historians call the beginning of "reformist peasant movement" under a modern leadership in India.[129] However, an alternative interpretation of Champaran movement suggested the limitation of Gandhian peasant politics revealing the power of village–level powerful "high caste rich peasants" in shaping and constraining the outcomes of peasant movements. Commenting on the role of local leadership in Champaran movement, Poucheapadas writes "This (anti-factory) oligarchy consisted for the greater part of high-caste peasants: Brahmins, Rajputs, Babhans (Bhumihars), Kayasthas, Muslim Sheikhs, etc. Most of these

leaders were well –off or rich peasants.... Many of those men, like Shukla himself, were money –lenders."[130]

Therefore, it becomes clear from different historical accounts that Champaran movement of 1917 did not affect the poor lower caste peasants and landless labor. It succeeded in replacing European planters but continued the dominance of upper caste rich peasantry on local power structures that took in a major way to the cultivation of sugar cane- a cash crop. As Arvind Das mentions that in one of the folk songs, villagers in Champaran poignantly express the outcome of Gandhi's Champaran movement, "Nilhe gaye, milhe aaye" (The Planters have gone and in their place have come the sugar mill-owners).[131]

(ii) Backward Castes and Peasant riots:

The next wave of peasant politics emerged in the garb of cultural regeneration movement of socially emergent backward castes comprising Yadavs, Kurmis, and Koiris in the 1920s. This manifested in the fast proliferating caste associations in Bihar signaling the horizontal mobilization of caste in order to secure social and political goals. This was beginning of a protracted struggle for political power by the so-called backward castes which ultimately culminated in the installation of the charismatic Yadav leader Laloo Yadav as the chief Minister of Bihar in 1990.

What began as separate caste-based movements for social uplift in the caste hierarchy among the backwards castes especially Yadavs, Kurmis and Koiris, very soon turned into a challenge to the social power of upper caste Zamindars and rich peasants. Interestingly, the aspiring cultivating backward castes used Vaishnava culture and rhetoric to redefine their identities from lower caste to higher caste

Kshatriya status.[132] In many districts, the dominant caste-whether Bhumihars, Rajputs or Brahmins- resented the Yadavs attempt to wear sacred thread and perform the rituals prescribed for Dwija (twice born) status. It is as important that "richer sections of yadavs" used their economic power to blunt the call of social boycott organized by upper castes.[133] Therefore, at the root of the assertion of backward castes was "strained agrarian relations" between upper caste landlords and lower caste tenants.[134]

Unorganized and sporadic as it was in the beginning, gradually it started taking on the character of an organized agrarian protest movement. Colonial police accounts give a vivid account of the agrarian basis of increasing caste hostilities between upper caste and backward caste elite. The increasing tension eventually led to a serious caste riot at LakhoChak village near Lakhisarai town in Monghyr District between Yadavs and Bhumihars on the 27th May 1925. The records indicate clearly that the LakhoChak riot was precipitated by the decision of local Bhumihar Zamindars of the district to attack a caste council meeting of Yadavs, which had assembled to discuss ongoing reforms in their caste.[135] Significantly, these caste riots took place in Central Bihar and parts of South Bihar where most of the present day caste armies are concentrated.[136] The description of LakhoChak riot reveals the tradition of quickly resorting to violence by the Bhumihars to punish anyone attempting to challenge their real or imaginary social and ritual status. In a letter to Secretary to the Government, Commissioner J. D. Sifton writes:

> On the morning of the 27th, before the arrival of the armed police at LakhoChak, a large body of rioters advanced upon the village. The local police intervened to expostulate and were at once surrounded, the sub-Inspector and Chaukidar (Village Watchman) received grievous injuries and other constables of the party were hurt. After ill-treating the local police, the rioters retired temporarily but returned to the attack soon after the arrival of the S. P. (Superintendent of Police)

with his force. The superintendent and S.D.O (Sub Divisional Officer) went out to meet the advancing rioters and attempted to parley with them. The attacking party, however, to the number of about 3000 armed with lathes (heavy, metal tipped bamboo truncheons), axe and spears continued to advance and the police were forced to fire to protect themselves and the Goalas. Although temporarily checked by the fire, the Babhan, party continued to advance as they outflanked the police on both sides; the police were forced to retire fighting to the village site three or four hundred yards to their rear. The retirement was effected in good order and after the defending party reached the village the rioters withdrew.[137]

After LakhoChak incident, the leadership and location of Yadav movement moved away from Yadav Zamindars of North Bihar to rich Yadav tenantry in Central Bihar. This resulted in the formation of Triveni Sangh, a caste federation of Yadavs, Kurmis and Koiris on 30th May 1933 in Shahabad district in central Bihar.[138] Essentially a caste- based organization, Triveni Sangh opposed not only upper caste dominance in Indian National Congress but also claimed to represent a larger coalition of oppressed classes and castes in the countryside. In its second conference in 1936 near Ekwari in Shahabad district, the Sangh declared that it would fight for the interests of Kisans, Mazdoors, and Small traders.[139] Therefore, it is no coincidence that Ekwari would later become the nerve center of the Maoist radical peasant movement in the 1970s.

The Sangh also protested against the social oppression especially the rape of lower caste women. The Triveni Sangh became instantly popular with lower caste peasants. It also marked the first serious organized involvement of lower caste peasants in broad anti-colonial and anti-feudal struggles in Bihar. In many Central Bihar districts, Patna, Shahabad, Gaya, Triveni Sangh fast emerged as the symbol of rising political ambition of backward castes. In the District Boards elections between 1927 and 1933, the Sangh fielded candidates mainly against upper caste candidates without much success.[140] By the time of independence in 1947, the Triveni Sangh had

folded up partly because of the success of Kisan Sabha of Swami Sahajanand and partly due to the Congress Party's policy of co-option of rich peasants. However, the mobilization of backward castes by Triveni Sangh clearly indicated that the dominance of upper caste landlords and peasants was fragile and not permanent.

(iii) Zamindars (Landlords), Tenants and Kisan Sabha:

From 1929 onward, agrarian struggles in Bihar acquired a mass movement character. This was made possible by the emergence of "The Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha" led by legendary peasant –monk leader Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. The origins of Kisan Sabha are often traced to the movement for social upgradation among Bhumihars, which gradually acquired the nature of class struggle between landlords and tenants. Though there were some big landlords among Bhumihars, (Sir Ganesh Dutt being one of them) most of the Bhumihars constituted substantial tenantry especially in Central Bihar, and parts of South Bihar. Swami Sahajanand, a Bhumihar by caste, originally had set up an Ashram at Bihata to assert and upgrade Bhumihars' social and ritual position in the caste hierarchy. For years Sahajanand worked in "Bhumihar Brahmin Mahasabha", a caste association of Bhumihars. Soon he incurred the dislike of pro-British Bhumihar landlords leading to his split from the Bhumihar Sabha. He set up an ashram in Bihar near Patna, which became the headquarters of Bihar Kisan Sabha in the early 1930s.[141] So what had started as an organization of "class collaborationists" developed quickly into a vanguard forum of oppressed tenants of Bihar.

The Kisan Sabha attacked the prevailing Zamindari system and land tenure practices and put not just the British Government on notice but also criticized leaders of Indian National Congress for ignoring peasants in Bihar and elsewhere.

Sahajanand, although a Bhumihar himself, was so opposed to the Zamindari system that he minced no words in his attack on Zamindars. He announced that Zamindari system was "an obstacle to the way of economic and social advancement of society" and that "zamindars were parasitical elements fattening on the blood of the toiling peasantry".[142] This showed a shift from social upgradation movement to radical class struggle in Bihar. Assisted by committed grassroots peasant activists such as Yadunandan Sharma, Karyanand Sharma, and others, the Kisan Sabha launched various peasant struggles against the exploitative practices of Zamindars. Some of the best known struggles were those directed against the Dalmia Sugar Factory at Bihata in 1938-39, the Rewara Struggles in Gaya in 1933 and 1938, the Bakashat movements in Barahiya Tal (Patna) and others between 1936 and 1938. Though on occasion the colonial government recognized Shajanand's efforts toward improving the lot of the peasantry, the Government also detected a larger conspiracy of class struggle. Reflecting on Sahajanand, one British official noted that he was "a dangerous individual engaged in a sinister conspiracy to set up the cultivator against the landlord and initiate a communist revolt on the Russian Model."[143]

The various agrarian struggles waged by the Kisan Sabha gradually forced the newly Independent Congress Government led by peasant leader Sri Krishna Sinha to initiate the process of reform of the agrarian structure in Bihar. This culminated in the passage of abolition of the Zamindari Act in 1950 which, in the words of then Chief Minister Shri Krishan Singh, led to the dawn of a day when the "permanent settlement in Bihar was permanently unsettled."[144] The abolition of the Zamindari Act, however, faced stiff opposition from within the Congress Party and the feudal class leading to social and political unrest in Bihar. Many top nationalist leaders such as Sachidanand

Sinha, Shaymnandan Sahay, and Sir Chandreshwar Prasad Narayan Sinha and others themselves were big zamindars. The Raja of Ramgarh, Kamakhya Narain Singh led the attack on the Zamindari abolition legislation. A series of violent clashes also took place between supporters of Zamindars and peasant leaders in Bihar during 1947-1950. In many parts of Central and North Bihar, several peasants were killed. A few Zamindars and their armed retainers were also killed.[145] Alarmed by the attacks by the "social bandits" such as legendary Nakshatra Malakar, Some zamindars appealed to top Congress leaders to drop Zamindari abolition legislation in order to "save the country from civil war."[146] Many Zamindars also organized "private armies" to terrorize their tenants and peasant activists of Kisan Sabha. Therefore the first reference to "private armies" in Bihar emerged in the aftermath of Zamindari abolition movement.[147] Despite the turbulence in the countryside, and legal challenges in the courts, the government of Bihar passed the legislation and ended the Raj of zamindars in 1950.

Though this act abolished the parasitic "lords of the land", the Kisan Sangh could not solve the emerging contradiction within the peasantry. The demise of "Limited Raj" and the end of Lords of the Land, set the stage for shift in power in the countryside of Bihar in which "substantial raiyats and the petty landlords comprising Bhumihars, Rajputs, Yadavs, Kurmis, and Koiris, emerged as the new force or key to control and conflict" in the rural life of Bihar. Swami Sahajanand was not unaware of the class basis of Kisan Sangh. By 1944, he had come to the realization that the Sabha was largely used by the middle and the rich peasants. With his characteristic bluntness, he admitted

They (middle and big cultivators) are using the Kisan Sabha for their benefit and gain, while we are using or rather trying to use them to strengthen the Sabha, till the lowest strata of the peasantry are awakened to their real economic and political interests and needs and have become class conscious...It is they, semi-proletariat or the agricultural labors who have very little land or no land at all, and the petty cultivators, who anyhow squeeze a most meager living out of the land they cultivate and eke out their existence, who are the kisans of our thinking... and who make and must constitute the Kisan Sabha ultimately.[148]

Realizing the failure of Kisan Sabha to mobilize landless labor and bataidars (sharecroppers), Sahajanand, just before his death pointed to the direction the future agrarian struggles would take; landless poor rising against the new maliks (a traditional expression denoting employers of labors belonging to dominant castes). Calling agricultural labor the Shiva, (the God of Destruction in Hinduism), he said that "the rural proletariat...is becoming aware of its rights, duties, and responsibilities...when it becomes fully aware, there will be the final "dance of destruction" and then the present iniquitous agrarian system will start crumbling."[149]

(iv) The Failure of Land Reforms and the Impact of Green Revolution in post-independence era.

By the time of independence, the once mighty Kisan Sabha had disintegrated into various smaller factions led by Congressmen, Socialists, Communists and followers of Sahajanand. However, a few scattered movements such as the Sathi Farms Struggle continued to rock the countryside.[150] Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the Sathi Farms struggle remained almost the sole voice of organized peasant resistance in Bihar before the arrival of the "spring thunder" of Maoist peasant movement in Bihar.

The effect of various Land Reforms Acts including Zamindari Abolition Act, Privileged Persons Homestead Tenancy Act of 1947 and the Minimum Wages Act of 1948 permanently unsettled the land relations but could not resolve the contradiction

emerging from the agrarian reforms from the top. "The gentleman's persuasion" known as "Bhoodan Andolan (Land Donation Movement) launched by Vinoba Bhave in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Bihar, generated some euphoria among some sections of peasantry, especially landed caste. The relative quiet in the countryside, however, led some observers to conclude that agrarian crisis has been solved forever in Bihar. A Bihar veteran Jannuzzi, during his field work in Bihar also noted the condition of rural poor as demoralized and "their conditions was one of apparent apathy as if they were devoid of feeling concerning the forces acting upon them."[151] The apathy of peasants turned out to be a mirage, and the so-called condition of hopelessness was soon transformed into a radical politics of dissent by the Naxalites.

The efforts at land reforms from the top including the voluntary efforts of Vinoba Bhave and Jai Prakash Narayan (JP) failed miserably to address the fundamental issue of land, wages and social prestige of landless caste.[152] It came as no surprise that various land reforms were implemented half- heartedly partly due to strong influence of old landlords in the Congress Party and party due to the loopholes in the laws. As a result of this, land remained in the hands of a small group of upper caste and backward caste cultivators. Even some old Zamindars managed to retain their hold over on the land by circumventing the laws and using caste connections in the local bureaucracy. Daniel Thorner, on a visit to Bihar in 1956 remarked "eight years after the Bihar legislature voted its acceptance of the principles of Zamindari abolition, the majority of the zamindars of Bihar were in legal possession of their lands."[153] Various reports on land reforms also indicted the Government of Bihar, particularly the bureaucracy for its failure to implement land reforms laws and

ameliorating the conditions of rural poor.[154] Bitterly criticizing the performance of the Bihar government on the front of land reforms, a Union Home Ministry report said:

> By their abysmal failure to implement the laws, the authorities in Bihar have reduced the whole package of land reforms measure to a sour joke...In Bihar; the landowners do not care a pittance for the administration. They take it for granted. Their approach is defiant, their modus operandi open and insolent.[155]

Of late also many observers have pointed out the correlation between this failure of land reforms and rural unrest in Bihar.[156] According to one perceptive analysis, by the end of 1990, the state claimed to have acquired only 3,85,013 acres of land as surplus land under the Land Ceiling Act of 1962. Out of the land acquired 2,62,476 acres are said to have been given away to landless. Therefore, according to government, the land relations are no longer iniquitous. However, analysts have disputed the claim of the government and presented a dismal picture of the outcome of governmental efforts to remove inequities in the land relations.[157] It is a common knowledge in Bihar that various land reforms laws have failed to remove acute disparities in the land. Commenting on the scandalously dismal performance of the government on land reforms, Prakash Louis writes

> A confidential report prepared by the Department of revenue and Land Reform in 1993 noted the existence of landlords like Mudith Nath Chaudhary and Umar Farookh of Purnea district. The former owned 977.04 acres of land of which 603.12 acres of land were declared surplus. Umar owned 954.18 acres, out of which 474.28 acres were declared surplus. But in neither case the surplus land was taken over by the government. Even in Central Bihar, where massive landholding is not unusual, Maharaja Kumar Singh of Bhojpur owned 719.24 acres in 1993; Tilauthau estate of Rohtas owned 719.24 acres... These data are from official records. Neither the state nor the central government machinery has been able to institute any legal proceedings against these defaulters... It is reported that in 1975, the Revenue and Land Reform Department conducted a state-wide survey to ascertain the extent of big landholding and came out with the startling revelation that about four hundred big landlords were possessing over 16,10,000 acres of land (about 4, 025 acres average) under various farzi(fictitious) names and titles, trusts, etc. The list disappeared from the office of the department the same year![158]

In this scenario of failure of land reforms, the introduction of what is popularly called the "Green Revolution" in Bihar exacerbated the existing inequity in the countryside in the 1960s and the 1970s. Based on strong governmental intervention in the agricultural, the Green Revolution promised to trickle down the benefits of increase in agricultural productivity to all the sections of rural world including the landless labor. The capital- intensive agricultural strategy created conditions of prosperity by widening the gap between landowners and landless labor. Landejinsky found not only rural rich becoming more rich but also saw the emergence of a new class of agrarian entrepreneurs comprising doctors, lawyers, businessmen, retired military, and civil servants who, with their unaccounted money took to farming as a supplemental source of income free from tax burdens.[159]

The increasing disparities in Bihar came to be noticed by the Union Government of India in the middle of the 1960s. In a widely known analysis of the nature of current agrarian tension in the country, the report of the Union Home Ministry candidly pointed out the "persistence of serious social and economic inequalities and the widening gap between the relatively few affluent farmers and the large body of small landholders and agricultural workers."[160] Furthermore, the report admitted that "the programs so far implemented are still more favorable to the larger ownership than the smaller tenant-farmer...As for the sharecropper and the landless laborer; they have been more often than not left out in the cold. In consequence...disparities have widened accentuating social tensions."[161]

(v) The Dance of Shiva (Maharudra): Maoist Agrarian Struggles in Bihar

Thus, the stage was set for the "dance of Shiva" as prophesied by Swami Sahajanand. In this sense, the arrival of "spring thunder" and the newly formed

Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) in 1967 in Bihar was no historical accident.[162] Following Maoist principles of revolution, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) that came to be popularly known as "Naxals" started guerrilla warfare and an "annihilation campaign" against landlords, moneylenders, and the police in Bihar.[163] In contrast to the earlier agrarian struggles, the main participant in Naxal uprisings in Bihar was the lower caste peasants mainly landless labor, and poor sharecroppers. The main target of the Naxal uprising were not absentee landlords but emergent rich peasantry and village level landlords comprising of Bhumihars, Rajputs, Yadavs, Kurmis (collectively termed as Kulaks). In total contrast to earlier agrarian struggles, the armed struggle of Naxals emphasized the violent dissolution of all vestiges of feudal authority in the countryside leading to the capture of political power in the country. The armed mobilization of lower caste peasantry by Maoist groups in Bihar has gone through three distinct phases: the first phase between 1967 and 1971 and the second phase from 1972 to 1975, and the third phase from 1977 onwards.

(A) The First Phase of Naxal Movement in Bihar

In the first phase, the Naxal presence was restricted in mainly north and some parts of South Bihar. The Naxal revolt in Bihar started in July 1967.[164] The Mushari village in Muzaffarpur in North Bihar became the epicenter of the Naxal uprising in Bihar. The movement started in April 1968 when lower caste peasants led by Maoist-communist leaders seized the land of local landlord Bijli Singh and forcibly harvested the crop. The open confrontation with the landlords quickly changed into a guerrilla warfare that led to killing of class enemies, seizure of the properties of the landlords. By September 1969, Mushari hit the headlines for guerrilla actions of Naxals.

Satyanaryan Singh, one of the top leaders of Naxal movement in Bihar, emphasized the need for annihilation of class enemies and seizure of power in the village.[165] Many parts of North Bihar such as Dharbhanga, Saharsa, and Purnea etc. came under the influence of Naxal movement. The Naxal movement gradually spanned hilly districts of Bihar as well. Jamshedpur, Dhanbad and many other parts of South Bihar also came under the influence of Naxal movement. Barring the Central Bihar districts, the Naxal movement had spread far and wide in Bihar. The state's reaction was orthodox and predictable; unprecedented use of force to crush the movement. Between January –July 1970, the police arrested 954 suspected Naxals in the state.[166]

Mushari became not only famous for the first full scale Naxal uprising in Bihar but also for the intervention of Jaiprakash Narayan, the former revolutionary Socialist leader who had then become one of the leading lights of Bhoodan Andolan. To achieve justice for the downtrodden through peaceful means, Jaiprakash Narayan (JP), the veteran socialist leader, went to Mushari and camped there. He made the declaration that he would not leave the area until he had not been solved the Naxalite problem.[167] As a result of his presence in the area, Mushari attracted the attention of national and international development organizations. Funds came pouring in. This led to some improvement in the socioeconomic conditions of the rural poor in the area. However, by 1973 it became evident that Jaiprakash Narayan had failed in his efforts and he left thereafter having spent about a year and half. With this, Mushari disappeared from the map of agrarian unrest. The first phase of Naxal-led agrarian struggles failed for a variety of reasons; ranging from intra party factionalism, lack of organization, romantic adventurism, lack of grassroots leadership, misplaced understanding of agrarian classes, and coercive action of the state.

(B) Second Phase of Naxal Movement

In the second phase, the Naxalite movement took shape in Central Bihar and parts of tribal areas, which have now become a separate state. The movement consisted of many Maoist groups and has seen many up and downs. There are around 17 Maoist Left groups in Bihar. However, in terms of influence, three groups are significant, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)-Liberation Group or Maale in popular parlance, Maoist Communist Center (MCC) and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Party Unity. The legendary Maoist leader Charu Mazumdar who was rumored to have visited Bihar in the 1970 to inspire Naxal movement in Mushari and Ekwari is still remembered by all these groups. The Party Unity and the MCC, banned by the government, have been waging violent war against the governmental machinery and the dominant landed castes/classes in the countryside in Bihar. These Maoist groups are also involved in a war of supremacy with each other triggering killings and counter killings. In 1998, Party Unity merged with CPI (ML) People War Group (PWG). The unified Party is renamed as CPI (ML) People's War. However, most villagers identify it as People's War Group. MCC, Party Unity and PWG advocate the use of violence against the dominant landed castes/classes in mobilizing the lower castes.

The spread of Naxalite movement in Central Bihar came at a time when the Maoist radial movement was coming to an end in other parts of Bihar. From a small village called Ekwari in Bhojpur (earlier a part of old Shahabad district), Naxal movement got a fresh lease of life and has been reinvigorated.[168] Ekwari came to symbolize the radicalism of lower caste peasantry in Bihar. On May 20, 1971, Naxals led by Master Jagdish Mahato, a legend in Bhojpur, killed Sheopojan Singh, a

mercenary of local landlord. In contrast to the earlier phase, grass roots leaders and the active participation of lower caste landless have sustained the Naxal movement in Central Bihar. From 1971 to 1975, the Naxal movement in Central Bihar especially in Bhojpur, Patna, and Nalanda districts witnessed significant upswing leading to violent clashes between supporters of landlords and the Naxals. The police as usual come to rescue of the embattled landed castes in the garb of fighting "Naxal insurgency".

Sahar in Bhojpur district came to symbolize Swami Shajanand's prophecy of the "dance of Shiva" as Naxals launched a successful violent campaign against the tyranny of local landlords and also fought the oppression of police. Using "Gohar" (armed gathering for confrontation), the Naxals created parallel government of the peasants in many parts of Bhojpur district.[169] However, the proclamation of National emergency and suspension of democracy by the Central Government led by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in May 1975 dealt a heavy blow to the Naxal uprising in Bihar. It was during the emergency that the Bhojpur police launched "operation Thunder" in May 1976 in order to crush Naxalites and their parallel governments. Many top leaders such as Master Jagdish Mahato, Rameshwar Ahir, Nirmal Kumar, Narayan Kavi, Fagu Mahato and others were killed in police encounter or by the armed retainers of the locally dominant landlords. The repression by the state coupled with fratricidal warfare within various Naxals groups led to temporary loss of momentum in the Naxal movement.

(C.) Third Phase of the Naxal movement: Contemporary Scenario

Following lifting of the national emergency and holding of elections in 1977 Naxal movement resurfaced with a renewed vigor and more focus on mass politics.

Contrary to the earlier phase, in this post-emergency period, the Naxal movement in Bihar is concentrated largely in Central Bihar, especially in Patna, Bhojpur, Jehanabad and Gaya districts, a region known for a history of agrarian struggle and social oppression. Contrary to the mindless violence of the first phase, Naxals adopted a new perspective on social violence. In this phase, the prime organization representing the Naxalites, the Communist party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation groups stated unequivocally "first of all, we do not subscribe to any theory of excitative violence and still less to individual assassination."[170] Further, the party said, "everywhere in Bihar, it is the landlords who are armed, they derive a sadistic pleasure by beating and killing poor peasants, burning their houses, and raping their women. Secondly, by any human logic whatsoever, the rural poor cannot be denied their right to organize their own "resistance force" to counter the attacks of landed armies. Thirdly, if peasant struggle takes violent forms in Bihar, the root must be sought in the forms of oppression.[171] The Naxalites in this phase acknowledged the potency of democratic politics and decided to join the electoral process following the path of established mainstream communist parties such as of Communist party of India (CPI) and Communist party of India (Marxist-Leninist).

The evolution of Communist party of India (Marxist-Leninist) as a major force in parliamentary and peasant politics in Bihar has largely been attributed to its movement away from "excitative and class liquidation" to adaptation of mass movements and parliamentary politics. In 1970s, claiming continuity with legendary peasant leader Swami Shajanand's Kisan Sabha, the CPI (ML) liberation revived Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha, set up mass bodies such as Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti (MKSS). Jan Sanskriti Manch (JSM), All Indian Students Association (AISA)

etc. In 1982, these mass organizations came together in an umbrella organization called the Indian People's Front (IPF) to enter parliamentary politics. Under the banner of the Indian People's Front, the Communist party of India (ML) participated in the parliamentary elections of 1984. The IPF secured only one seat in the parliament but became the first Maoist group to enter the parliament of India. However, in the state assembly elections of 1989, 1995, and 2000, the IPF secured 7, 6, and 6 seats respectively. Aside from electoral gains, one of the major achievements of CPI (ML)-Liberation's participation in elections was their opposition to controversial practice of "booth capturing" in Bihar. This allowed many lower castes and landless laborers to caste their first ever vote freely. Beyond electoral participation, the new Naxalites in this phase also emphasized mass movements. For instance, The Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha (The Bihar Provincial Peasant Association) was formed in February 1981 as one of the mass organizations of CPI (ML)-Liberation. They also took up "constructive activities" like the restoration of village commons, and participation of women in the process of social change. "The mass and open nature of the New Left" being largely represented by CPI (ML)-Liberation, has effectively been mobilizing poor and lower caste peasants in the countryside of Bihar. In this sense, CPI (ML)-Liberation claims to represent the continuing legacy of Swami Shajanand's radical mobilization of poor peasants in Central Bihar.

Significantly, not all "Naxalites" in Bihar have come under one umbrella organization and accepted the logic of electoral process and mass movement. The two other major Naxal groups, the Maoist Communist Center and Party Unity, still follow the line of "insurrectionary revolution". This has led to continued fratricidal conflict among various Naxal groups for dominance in a particular region. In spite of this, the

Naxal movement has come to assume the character of a mass movement especially among the lower caste agricultural laborers. This explains why wage struggles have emerged as the major issue in the plains of Central Bihar provoking a violent reaction from landed castes. Furthermore, the participation of CPI (ML)-Liberation in the electoral politics has also challenged the dominance of mainstream political parties in the region. The private caste armies of the landed castes in Naxal affected areas have to be seen in this context. Most of the caste armies have emerged as a violent response to the mobilization of the dalits and landless by the Naxal groups in the region. In this sense, the caste armies emerge out of the radical agrarian struggle in Central Bihar. This also leads us to an apparently intriguing dimension of radical Maoist movement that it is mainly concentrated in Central Bihar region. Therefore, it is important to explore the socioeconomic and cultural differences between Central and North Bihar in order to explain the concentration of private caste armies in one region of Bihar

Concentration of Agrarian Struggles and Caste armies in Central Bihar

(i) Capitalist Transformation in Central Bihar

Central Bihar, like other part of Bihar is predominantly rural. However, Central Bihar is better placed in terms of economic development. Though as Pradhan Prasad has rightly pointed out, the agrarian economy of the Central Bihar is still sunk in the semi-feudal relations of production, this region has seen a modicum of economic progress.[172] Note that this development took place in overall situation of economic stagnation in Bihar. Between 1960-70 and 1983-84, the agricultural productivity in Bihar increased at a compound rate of only 0.5 percent. As others sectors of the economy have not registered any growth, this extremely low rate of

growth of the agriculture meant very low per capita income in rural Bihar.[173] This has led to ruthless struggles over whatever surplus in agriculture is available.

In 1972, the Bihar government had declared fifty-two blocks covering 90 police stations as "extremist affected" areas where violent Maoist groups known as Naxals established almost parallel government.[174] Interestingly, forty-one blocks are located in the contiguous districts, namely Patna, Nalanda, Bhojpur, Rohtas, Gaya, Jehanabad and Aurnagabad in central Bihar. The Central Bihar districts have a high density of population compared to North Bihar. The districts have high concentration of scheduled castes (Dalits) and high degree of literacy as compared to North Bihar. See table 6 and 7.

Table 6[175]: Literacy rate and Proportion of Scheduled Castes in total population in Central Bihar

Districts	Percentage of Literate Population	Percentage of SC population
Patna	39.71	15.43
Nalanda	33.04	19.12
Nawada	26.66	24.52
Gaya	29.02	25.54
Aurnagabad	28.42	22.88
Rohtas	30.69	18.78
Bhojpur	30.93	14.52
Munger	26.42	15.78

Table 6[176] Literacy rate and Proportion of Scheduled Castes in total population in North Bihar

Districts	Percentage of Literate population	Percentage of SC population
Begusarai	24.63	14.17
Saran	23.77	10.84
Gopalganj	21.25	12.11
West Champaran	19.79	13.24
East Champaran	18.96	13.24
Sitamarhi	19.39	12.41
Muzaffarpur	24.14	15.62
Vaishali	24.52	19.39
Samastipur	24.71	17.65
Darbhanga	23.78	14.60
Madhubani	21.95	12.81
Saharsa	20.18	16.3
Purnea	19.18	12.61
Kathihar	20.76	9.13

Commenting on the linkage between agrarian progress and increased violence in Central Bihar, Paul Brass observes:

> Throughout the 1970s up to the present, Bhojpur district, located in the most agriculturally advanced region of Bihar, served since the late nineteenth century by the Sone Canal system and by the IADP (Intensive Agricultural District Program) and HYVP since the Green Revolution, has been a recurrent scene of agrarian violence. There is some evidence that agrarian violence in this district has been connected to attempts by landowners to increase their gains from the Green revolution though reneging on or reducing traditional payments to attached laborers in the form of land and grain and through labor-displacing tractorization.[177]

This is reflected in Bhojpur being close to the top in growth rates in the years just before and just after the Green Revolution. Noting the increasing capitalist transformation in Central Bihar, Shaibal Gupta points out:

> Not all districts in Central Bihar were under the IADP, but as natural fertility of the soil and irrigated facilities were comparatively higher in all those districts, seed fertilizer technology was extended to the area subsequently. The effect of this strategy of agricultural development was very similar, namely increased productivity, higher marketable surplus and polarization of the peasantry...Thus the agrarian divide and consequent peasant movement that has emerged in Central Bihar is largely due to the fall out of capitalist transformation.[178]

The indicators of agricultural growth such as per acre fertilizer consumption, proportion of area irrigated, and higher concentration of tube wells indicate that Central Bihar has experienced a modest degree of agricultural growth compared to stagnant agricultural productivity in North Bihar.[179]

Table 7: [180]Use of fertilizers (N, P, and N) per hectare of Gross Cropped Area in Metric Tones (For the Triennium Average 1984-1987) in Central Bihar

Districts	N	P2O5	K2O	Total
Patna	75.07	11.22	4.57	90.86
Nalanda	65.64	15.36	8.26	89.25
Gaya	41.55	8.46	3.33	53.33
Aurangabad	41.55	11.69	5.35	53.33
Nawada	49.77	13.84	7.22	70.83
Bhojpur	55.44	13.21	6.25	74.87
Rohtas	59.63	17.39	8.88	85.89

Table 8: Use of fertilizers (N, P, and N) per hectare of Gross Cropped Area in Metric Tones (For the Triennium Average 1984-1987) in North Bihar

Districts	N	P2O5	K2O	Total
Muzaffarpur	30.64	11.8	4.55	46.37
Saran	44.12	9.18	5.27	58.57
Siwan	54.92	17.29	7.88	80.08
Gopalganj	54.92	17.29	7.88	80.08
East Champaran	34.93	9.17	4.80	48.89
West Champaran	31.16	9.07	3.47	43.68
Vaishali	32.77	11.72	3.52	48.89
Sitamarhi	22.91	3.84	1.83	25.58
Darbhanga	23.51	6.49	3.03	33.03
Madhubani	11.98	4.94	1.45	18.28
Samastipur	45.88	18.49	8.95	73.30
Saharsa	24.63	9.40	4.38	38.41
Purnea	23.07	9.45	4.64	37.15

Interestingly, the prime movers of growth are not big landlords but the "Kulaks" in Marxist terminology, or what Rudolphs call "bullock capitalists." mainly comprising rich sections of Yadavs, Kurmis and Koiris.[181] The upper caste Bhumihars and Rajputs peasants have also contributed significantly to it, though a majority of them do not themselves work on the farms. Therefore, the agricultural dynamism

brought about by the green revolution produced unintended consequences, quickening of social and economic struggles between landowners and landless castes (dalits). The emerging peasant unrest has further been sharpened by a long history of dissent and agrarian protest in the region.

(ii) History of Agrarian Struggles in Central Bihar

Historically speaking, Central Bihar has been a zone of agrarian struggles in pre and post-independent India. Bhojpur, the hub of caste senas and Naxal movement, has been in the center of agrarian protest ever since the rebellion of 1857 against the British rule. The impoverished Zamindar Babu Kunwar Singh led the peasantry of Bhojpur in 1857 who is still revered as a folk hero by many in the region. After the rebellion was crushed, Bhojpur became the first area in Bihar where colonial administration initiated the process for the modernization of Indian agriculture. This was sought to be done by the construction of the Sone Canal that provided "tremendous rental incomes to the zamindars" of the area and also created a small class of rich peasants.[182] The offsprings of commercialization of agriculture increasingly became more militant and violent toward both the British Raj and local Zamindars.[183] The neo-rich peasants belonging to backward castes such as Yadavs, Kurmis, and Koiris joined not only Kisan Sabha of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, but also became involved in Triveni Sangh, the first confederation of backward castes in Bihar, as discussed earlier. Another far-reaching consequence of commercialization of agriculture in Bhojpur was the migration of poor landless labor to big cities. This also led to the development of what is popularly called money-order economy (remittances from outside labor). The money-order economy helped certain lower caste groups to resist the everyday exploitation of the landlords. The tradition of migration has

resulted in an ambiguous pattern of escape from the feudal exploitation in many parts of Bihar.

The society of North Bihar in the colonial period was "generally quiescent, but nonetheless open conflict did occur. Many riots erupted over "agrarian disputes."[184] Most of these riots involved great and small landlords, rich peasants, indigo planters (Europeans) and thikadars (rent-farmers) competing with each other for control over local power. One of the significant features of local conflict in North Bihar was factionalism within the local society. Faction leaders mostly belonging to high castes rallied their caste men and clients in their struggles over local affairs. This does not mean poor peasants remained unaffected. They, however, participated mostly as clients and retainers of the village elite. These local struggles frequently disrupted the order in the villages but never posed any serious challenge to the "stability of the social order".[185] Unlike in central Bihar where the British attempted to modernize the agrarian economy to ward off any potential peasant unrest, the British rule in north Bihar continued to rely on the great landlords and "acquiescence of the village elite without any effort to modernize the agrarian economy of north Bihar. The traditional patterns of deference, allegiance and leadership continued" in North Bihar[186]

It is true that Mahatma Gandhi's historic Champaran movement took place in North Bihar. However, as we noticed earlier, Gandhi's movement could not inspire peasants elsewhere in Bihar. In contrast, the Kisan Sabha led by radical Hindu monk Swami Sahajanand was strongest in the region of Central Bihar. One of the factors in the rise of Kisan Sabha in Central Bihar was the extreme exploitation by Zamindars of

their tenants. In Bhojpur, the peasant movement has a long history from spontaneous outbursts to organized agrarian struggles. As historian Arvind Das says that "peasant movements in Bhojpur have gone from the leadership of the zamindars to that of Junker to that of kulaks and finally that of poor peasants", all within one century."[187] Linking Naxal movement with the peasant activism of Swami Shajanand Saraswati, Walter Hauser remarks

> ...in this sense we are not witnessing a "new agrarianism' but a new expression of an agrarianism that was already wide and deep in the 1930s. In the 1980s and 1990s that agrarianism has moved deeper yet, in social terms, in those very districts of Central Bihar where most active and most successful in the 1930s, namely old Patna Gaya, Shahabad and Monghyr districts...In an interview with Smithu Kothari in 1986, Dr. Vinayan, the founder of the Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti and then underground, attributed the origins of the MKKS and the success of peasant activism in the Central Bihar districts to the force of earlier movements... Similarly, *the Report from the Flaming Fields of Bihar*, the most complete CPI (ML) treatment of peasant activism in the 1980s begins its story with a consideration of Sahajanand and the Kisan Sabha in the 1930s.[188]

(iii) Social Oppression and Cultural Traits:

In contrast to North Bihar, Central Bihar is known for militancy and acceptance of violence as generalized mode of social intercourse. Most people in Bhojpur, part of the old Shahabad district, lend legitimacy to militancy as part of accepted social behavior. One often hears this saying in Bhojpur that "Arah zila ghar ba, kone baat ke dar baa" (My home is Arah District, so what am I afraid of!)[189] Historically speaking, Central Bihar had been subjected to aggression between warring kings for the control of southern mineral and northern granary of Bihar. This converted the whole region into a major site of war in the 17th and early 18th centuries.[190] During Colonial times, the Grand Trunk Road which crosses the Central Bihar region from one end to the other was the only land route via Bihar for the movement of "foot passengers" from Delhi to Bengal. "The one group that relied

heavily on the Grand Trunk Road was the military. Generations of soldiers tramped these highways in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries en route to great military stations...principally situated in the north-western provinces, and especially the frontier".[191] This exposed the people of the region to violence and social turbulence. Furthermore, most non-upper caste groups in this part of Bihar have always challenged the social superiority of upper castes. Much has been observed on the militancy of people in this region. British Surveyor Grierson described the people of Bhojpur as "curiously different from the others...dearly loving a fight for fighting's sake."[192] This attitude perhaps explains high number of people from this region joining British Army and later forming backbones of many regiments of the Indian Army.

Many observers have noted the association between recruitment in Army and emphasis on physical prowess in the region, which led to development of a distinct "brashness" in the culture of the region as opposed to the "soft culture of North Bihar."[193] Francis Buchanan's survey in the nineteen century also reveals unusual degree of independence of the backward castes in this region. Many backward castes followed heterodox Hindu sects such as Nanakshahi, Dasnami, Vairagi, and Kabir Panth.[194] These sects not only challenged the caste system but also emphasized the legitimacy of the use of arms for achieving social goals.[195] Concurring with the tradition of social violence in Central Bihar, Hetukar Jha comments: "...the practice of organizing against upper caste groups is fairly established among the non-upper caste groups in Bhojpur...In Mithila (North Bihar), such as practice has not grown due to the long-tradition of Brahmanical hegemony over the non-upper caste groups."[196]

Related to cultural traits is the relevance of social oppression for an understanding of the concentration of radical peasant unrest and proliferation of caste armies in Central Bihar. In fact, most of the peasant struggles in the past and in contemporary Bihar have considered the issue of social oppression as a crucial part of agrarian movement. Maoists, including Maoist groups have also made struggle of izzat (prestige) as one of the fundamental issue of their resistance. The issue of social oppression figured prominently in the Triveni Sangh and Bihar Kisan Sangh movements in Central Bihar. The complex pattern of interactions of class and caste made it impossible to detach the issue of social exploitation from the anti-feudal struggles in the plains of Bihar. The general condition of agricultural labor was subhuman in many districts of Central Bihar. Observing the extreme poverty of lower caste labor in Jehanabad in 1873, J.A. Bourdillion, an Assistant Magistrate of Gaya, writes:

> The inhabitants of the district are among the poorest in Bihar. The one-day meal which was noted as the sign of great distress among the poor classes of North Bihar epitomizes the ordinary condition of many of thousands in this subdivision. Few but the exceedingly well-to-do eat two full meals a day and the majority of population content themselves with a handful of Sattu (coarse grain) and a drink of water at mid-day, leaving their principal meal till the night-fall.[197]

The social oppression of lower caste peasants has been aggravated by the prevalence of bonded labor practice in Bihar. The practice called "Kamiyauti (bonded labor) was widespread in many districts of Central Bihar and hilly districts of Bihar in pre-independence India. In north Bihar, although the general condition of peasants was woeful, steeped in poverty and indebtedness, the practice of Kamiyauti was not widespread. In contrast, in the districts of Patna, Gaya, Munger, the practice of

Kamiyauti virtually institutionalized a form of slavery and social oppression. In 1873, the British Subdivision Officer of Gaya records:

> Among the laboring classes, remnants of slavery are still discernible, being confined to the **Kahar and Kurmi castes**. The words **Hira** and **Ghulam** indicate the relations of master and servant. The Kahar, whose father or even grand father was a purchased slave, is compelled to serve his lord on the occasion of festivals and ceremonials or is liable to send some one to render service in his place. Prevalence of serfs was not peculiar to Gaya alone. **Patna, considered to be a richer district** than Gaya, had serfs, though they were lesser in number. According to Dr. Buchanan Hamilton, the slaves were called *nafir* and *laundi* and were large in numbers.[198]

It is a common knowledge in Bihar that the women and children were considered the property of the lords as part of the Kamiyauti system. The British government attempted to abolish the practice but the practice continued. Oppression of the wives and daughters of the lower castes became a serious issue in the agrarian struggles. Swami Sahajanand himself became aware of the widespread use of rape by the landlords in many districts. In Masaurha village of Patna district, according to Sahajanand, the issue of rape had become so widespread that it became difficult to marry off girls belonging to this village.[199] The atrocities on women by landed gentry in Bihar became so engrained in the social structure that it continued even after independence. The dola pratha (palanquin tradition) in which the local landlord considered it rightful to deflower the new bride of the lower caste continued in many parts of Gaya, Patna and Shahabad districts.[200] In an interview with an analyst, the elder brother of legendry Naxalite Rameshwar singh Ahir stated that Bhumihar landlords in Ekwari (the hub of Naxal movement in Bhojpur district) regularly forced lower caste women to submit to their sexual lust.[201] In contrast, North Bihar, although equally notorious in terms of economic exploitation witnessed social oppression of lower caste men and women on a lower scale. This contrast is reflected in the survey

of Naxal affected areas of Bhojpur district by a team of investigators in May 1978. The report of survey says:

> ...The dignity of the employee (*Banihar* or landless agricultural laborers) is continuously threatened in this district. The life of *banihar* is controlled both on the field and off the field; for instance, even till this day, low caste laborers are not permitted to sit on charpoys (bed) outside their houses in the presence of Rajput or Bhumihar landlords. Even the wearing of a clean *dhoti* (loingird drape) can provoke animosity or appear to be threat superiority in the eyes of the upper castes. In the eyes of his employer, the *Harijan* (Dalits) or *Mushahar* laborer is an object, a pair of hands that will tirelessly plough the land; an outsider to the "civilized" order, who is condemned to inhabit the sunless, southern fringes of the villages. The fact that even his wife and daughters are not his own is bought home to him by the sexual tyranny of landlord mercenaries (lathials) and the debauched scions of landlords. One of the main reasons for the emergence of the extremist movement in the district is the erosion of dignity.[202]

The rise of the three backward castes Yadavs, Kurmis and Koiris as emergent new landlords in the villages of Central Bihar led to perpetuation of social oppression of lower castes. Following the tradition of Rajput and Bhumihar landlords, they also asserted samant vichar (feudal mentality) and rangdari (extortion) on the lower caste agricultural lobar. In many instances, Kurmis and Yadavs have committed atrocities on women of lower castes to demonstrate their newfound social and political power.[203] Therefore, besides increasing capitalist transformation of Central Bihar, a long history of radical agrarian struggles, social and cultural trends have also influenced and conditioned the concentration of radical peasant unrest and private caste senas in Central Bihar. The societal struggles structured around land, caste and class have not remained in isolation from power struggles being waged in arena of state. The slow but steady rise of backward castes has also been accompanied by a ruthless political power struggle with the upper castes in Bihar. By 1967, it started becoming clear that though agrarian conflicts have been causally connected to growing class distinctions in the countryside, they have also been exacerbated by

political struggles. As the next chapter shows political and agrarian struggles almost run parallel to each other resulting in uniquely volatile environment of caste and class war in Bihar. The increasing powerlessness of the state not only intensified the agrarian conflicts but also contributed to the emergence of private caste armies as violent non-state actors to mediate ruthless political and social conflicts.

CHAPTER III

POLITICAL POWER STRUGGLES AND THE DECLINE OF STATE POWER IN BIHAR

This chapter argues that evidence from Bihar suggests that the emergence of senas has coincided with the increasing ineffectiveness of state power in Bihar. The support for this argument is based on an examination of the gradual disintegration of the upper caste monopoly of power and emergence of backward castes as the new power elite in the politics of Bihar since independence. The highly unstable caste-based factionalism centered around powerful personalities, decline of the dominance of the Congress party, highly fluid party alignments, increasing deprofessionalization of the bureaucracy, criminalization of politics, are analyzed to explain the dynamics of unmediated political power struggles that have resulted in the emergence of what many observers call "administrative atrophy" or " anarchy" in Bihar.[204] This process is not one that occurred as a sharp break at independence from colonial rule in 1947 but has been much more gradual, indeed almost continuous, and remarkably ruthless in post-independence Bihar. In other words, the emergence and proliferation of caste armies (senas) is embedded in the slow but steady erosion of the state power to mediate social and political conflicts in Bihar.

Dominance and Decline of the Congress Party

(i) Upper Caste Monopoly of Power and Factional Conflicts in the Congress Party

It has been noted in the earlier discussion that historically, politics in Bihar has been structured by the dynamics of caste and class exhibiting different levels of

politicization and cohesion. Evidence from Bihar demonstrates that castes not only operate as powerful bases for political mobilization, they routinely consolidate, fragment and re-unite along political, factional, and class lines.[205] Contrary to popular essentialist view that castes are uniquely immobile, fixed, and rooted in religion, politicization of caste points to the ability of caste to act as dynamic associational resource which political actors use to negotiate their power and status under conditions of competitive politics.[206] Described as the horizontal mobilization of castes by scholars, the political power struggles in Bihar have produced a paradox; democratic politics both consolidates and fragments caste solidarity.[207]

At the time of independence in 1947, the Congress Party and the upper castes enjoyed near monopoly of power in Bihar.[208] This dominance continued largely unchallenged until the mid-1960s when the Congress Party and the dominant upper castes received body blows by the rising backward castes in the historic elections of 1967. The dominant position of the upper castes notwithstanding, factionalism centered on powerful caste leaders has always been a hallmark of politics in Bihar. Although the political elite came from a narrow social base, they were deeply fragmented leading to vicious intraelite power conflicts. The effect of caste domination on governmental policy has also been pervasive. In the words of one senior official "state in Bihar may become class neutral on occasion but never caste neutral. No policies have ever been made without keeping in mind caste calculus."[209]

As a unit of Indian National Congress Party, the Congress Party in Bihar was established in 1908 and functioned until 1947 as both a nationalist mass organization and a political party in running the actual business of government under the

government of India Act 1935.[210] Performing these dual roles required the Congress to dominate the political space and accommodate the bewildering variety of the local, caste and class interests. This led to the emergence of what Rajni Kothari has called "the Congress system" in India.[211] In this system, the Congress Party as party of consensus captured the dominant, central position in the political spectrum, with minor opposition parties acting from the margin as "parties of pressure" without providing an alternate center of power. Based on the notion of unequal political competition, the opposition parties found themselves unable to pose an effective challenge to the dominant party's hold on public power.[212] The elaborate network of factions and patronage enabled the dominant party to function as a grand coalition of major social and political forces. Interestingly, this whole system faced a paradox; in order to maintain its dominant position; the Congress Party brought into its fold a variety of interests, which were neither compatible nor homogenous. In the words of Morris-Jones, "to dominate, the Congress must accommodate, yet accommodation encourages incoherence which destroys the capacity to dominate."[213] Therefore, the gradual erosion of the Congress hegemony in Bihar pointed to the potentially conflictual structural reality of one party dominant party system in Bihar.

Not surprisingly, considering the strong influence of" "twice-born castes" in the society, caste became the prime mover of politics in Bihar. By the time the first Congress ministry was formed in Bihar as a result of provincial elections in 1937, the Congress leadership in the state had split vertically into two factions; each composed of several caste groups. Shri Krishna Sinha, a Bhumihar peasant leader from Munger district, headed the leading faction. Shri Krishna Sinha, a supporter of Jawaharlal Lal Nehru, (the first Prime Minister of India) secular and anti-Zamindar had much

broader social base than his opponent did. His faction included prominent Rajput leaders such as Sardar Harihar Singh, Nand Kumar Singh, Ram Binod Singh and Kayasthas like Harbans Sahay and Ramdahri Prasad "visharad". The other group was led by Anugrah Narayan Sinha; a Rajput Zamindar from Deo estate of Gaya district who represented conservative and communal forces.[214]

Within Congress, Rajputs and Bhumihars emerged as dominant castes by challenging the Kayastha leadership of Congress. Sachidanand Sinha, the founder of modern Bihar, and Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India were the leading lights of Kayastha leadership in Bihar. Bhumihars challenged Kayastha supremacy first when the latter bagged 35 percent of seats in Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee in 1935.[215] Threatened by the rising power of Bhumihars, Kayasthas entered into an alliance with the Rajputs and attempted to checkmate the Bhumihars. This was the beginning of a series of alliances and counter-alliances leading to intense intra-party conflicts at all levels of politics in Bihar. Interestingly, this also led to the emergence of caste based patronage politics for which Bihar has become notoriously famous in India in recent years. Lamenting the growth of patronage system in the Congress Party in the early years, Rajendra Prasad said that many Congress workers "...started assessing their services in terms of rewards in the form of membership of a Legislative Assembly, municipal or district board or at lest a place of honor and power in a Congress Committee."[216] Attempts to secure public goods exacerbated the conditions of intra-elite conflicts in the government led by Shri Krishna Sinha (S.K.Sinha).

In the assembly elections in 1946, S.K.Sinha faction succeeded in getting a large number of their supporters elected. This helped S.K.Sinha to become head of the government in Bihar on 2nd April 1946. His cabinet demonstrated the almost absolute dominance of upper caste in politics, as there was no representation from the numerically preponderant backward castes. Although two Muslims and one Harijan were members of the cabinet, power firmly belonged to the upper castes. The major fault line was between the faction led by the Bhumihar leader S.K. Sinha and the faction led by Rajput leader Anugrah Narayan Sinha (A.N. Sinha). The origins of fierce factional competition affecting the effectiveness of the governmental power are traced to the highly contentious issue of anti-Zamindari legislation backed by S.K. Sinha in the early years of independence in Bihar. Articulating the interests of majority of substantial tenants such as Bhumihars against the Zamindari system" (landlordism), S.K. Sinha attempted to consolidate his power in the organization and the government. The pro-Zamindari lobby led by Raja of Ramgarh encouraged by the faction led by A.N. Sinha and supported by Rajendra Prasad launched a scathing attack on S.K. Sinha government for its zeal in abolishing Zamindari.

Despite the stiff resistance, the government of S.K. Sinha succeeded in implementing the anti-Zamindari legislation. Aside from the defeat in the struggle over Zamindari abolition, the gradual withdrawal of Rajendra Prasad, soon after becoming the President of India in 1950 further weakened the position of A.N. Sinha faction in the Bihar Congress Party. Although S.K. Sinha and A.N. Sinha led rival factions, they were not guided by the concerns of personal power and did not encourage opportunistic alliances to defeat each other. They were mutually deferent

and discreet, and tried not to opt for public showdown on organizational and police issues.[217]

(ii) Dominance and Dissent in the Congress Party (1947-67)

In 1952 when the first general elections to the Indian Parliament and Bihar Legislative Assembly took place, the Congress Party was in an unassailable position. The opposition parties functioned from the margin and had informal ties with the factions in the Congress Party. For instance, the charismatic leader of the Socialist party in Bihar, Jaiprakash Narayan (JP) set up candidates in 1952 elections in consultation with A.N. Sinha.[218] Inside Bihar Congress, the S.K. Sinha faction had assumed dominant position. The Congress won an overwhelming majority in the assembly. S. K. Sinha again became the Chief Minister. In the new cabinet, there were three Bhumihars, two Rajputs, two Kayasthas, one Brahman, two Muslims, one Harijan, and one backward caste (Yadav). The composition of the Cabinet was unrepresentative of the social composition of the state and continued to symbolize the monopoly of upper castes on political power.

During the entire period of five years (1952-57), the Congress Government functioned under the shadow of intra-factional fights in the S.K. Sinha faction. The entry of Mahesh Prasad Sinha, a wealthy Bhumihar Zamindar of Muzaffarpur district, with the backing of S.K. Sinha, in the cabinet started the process of disintegration of the S.K. Sinha faction. Mahesh Prasad Sinha's (M.P. Sinha) rise to power made K.B. Sahay, the Kayastha leader, who was widely perceived to be successor of S.K. Sinha, apprehensive of the intentions of the Chief Minster.[219] The rivalry between K.B. Sahay and M.P. Sinha intensified caste rivalry and brought a division in the S.K. Sinha faction. The new Bhumihar stars of S.K. Sinha faction were Laliteswar Prasad

Sahi, Dhanraj Singh, Krishan Kant Singh, etc. The bi-factional structure of competition came to an end by 1953 when all the important non-Bhumihar supporters of the S.K. Sinha faction deserted his camp and formed a "Centrist group."[220]

This was the beginning of the end of Bhumihar hegemony over politics in Bihar. The new group took the battle on to the street creating a public opinion against the dominant faction. The killing of a Bhumihar college student Dinanath Pandey in August 1955 in the police firing brought all the opposition forces against S.K. Sinha. In this sense, the new group provided a forum for dissidents inside the party and the opposition parties as well.[221] The intra-party conflicts and the Dinanath Pandey incident took heavy toll on the top leaders of the Congress Party in the 1957 elections. Though the Congress Party maintained its predominance in the assembly, prominent faction leaders such as M.P. Sinha and K.B. Sahay were defeated. For the first time, in the history of the Bihar Congress, a contest for leadership between the old-rivals S. K. Sinha and A.N. Sinha took place. A.N. Sinha, the Rajput leader, lost the bid as many supporters of K.B. Sahay deserted him. S.K. Sinha was once again retained as the Chief Minster.[222] S.K. Sinha by then had become old and ineffective leaving the real power in the hands of M.P. Sinha, L.P. Sahi, and Krishan Kant Singh. Lacking the farsightedness of S.K. Sinha, the trio's resort to Bhumiharization (euphemism for the Bhumihar Raj) of all pubic goods and services led to alienation of non-Bhumihars from the faction of S.K. Sinha. The dissidents were not very fortunate either as A. N. Sinha passed away on 5 July 1957. In the absence of any recognized leader, the A. N. Sinha faction under the leadership of Satyendra Narayan Sinha, the son of A. N. Sinha got reduced to a caste group. As a result, most non-Bhumihar elements veered round a Maithil Brahman leader Binodanand Jha.

The death of A.N.Sinha brought Jaiprakash Narayan, the charismatic Kayastha socialist leader, in the factional fights of the Congress Party. Espousing the cause of K.B. Sahay, he attacked the S.K. Sinha Ministry and attributed the increasing corruption and casteism in the government to the "internal bickering, self-interest of leaders, and their personal ambition."[223] In a controversial letter to S.K. Sinha on 27 July 1957, Jaiprakash Narayan provides a scathing criticism of the factionalism in the politics of Bihar. Charging S.K. Sinha with ill-treating K.B. Sahay, Jaiprakash Narayan writes:

> As long as K.B. Babu agreed with you, his rise was liked by some people. Now that he does not enjoy your support it is held that he should not be allowed to go ahead. Such standards have degraded Bihar State and Bihar Congress to their present condition So long as a person belongs to one's camp he is good whatever his demerits, but the moment the very same person goes into opposition he becomes thoroughly degraded in spite of all his good qualities. We can never build up India with this mentality. This is prompted by pure self-interest and is not based on any ideology or principle... It is of no importance whether a person is a true worker of the Congress and a true servant of the country and honest and able. Only one thing counts, namely, who is the person to whom one owes allegiance. May God save the state![224]

The rivalry between S.K. Sinha and Jaiprakash Narayan fully exposed the extent to which caste factionalism had gripped the entire state including Rebel Congress, Socialists, and Communist etc. With the untimely death of S.K. Sinha on 31st January 1961, the non-Bhumihars united behind Binodanand Jha who was elected leader of the Congress legislative party defeating M.P. Sinha. M.P. Sinha lost to new coalition of caste interests comprising Brahmans, Rajputs, Kayasthas and a majority of backward and lower castes. This started a new phase in the politics of Bihar; rise of Brahmans and backward castes. The intense factionalism among the upper castes had necessitated the co-option of members from the backward castes. Between 1957 and 1962, about 22 percent of the legislators in the Bihar Legislative

Assembly belonged to the backward castes. [225] The slow but steady rise of backwards caste in the Congress Party and the assembly began to show new trends whose implications were of far reaching consequences.

In the 1962 elections of the Bihar assembly, the Congress Party once again maintained its majority but saw a trend of decline; its share of the seats in the assembly came down from 210 to 185 (from 66 percent to 58.2 percent). Swatantra Party, a new incarnation of Raja of Ramgarh's Janata Party, won 50 seats, the socialist parties, (the Praja Socialist Party and Lohia Socialist Party), also secured 36 seats. Jha could not continue for long as a fall out of 'Kamraj Plan" which envisaged drafting senior Congress leaders for organizational work.

After the exit of Jha, for the first time in the history of Bihar a direct contest took place between reigning power holding upper castes and the rising backward castes. K.B. Sahay defeated Birchand Patel, a backward caste Kurmi leader and protégé of Binodanand Jha. Sahay fulfilled his long cherished ambition of becoming the Chief Minister in October 1963. However, his new cabinet was historic as for the first time the upper castes did not have majority in it. In order to build a viable support base in the party, K.B. Sahay attempted to woo numerically stronger backward castes by elevating them to leadership positions.[226] Three were three members from most power backward castes, one each from three numerically important castes, namely Yadav (Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav), Kurmi (Birchand Patel), and Koiri (Sumitra Devi, first woman minister in Bihar). However, Sahay's strategy of wooing the backward castes did not work well as his position was dependent on the support of Satyendra Narayan Sinha, the leader of the Rajput faction and M. P. Sinha, the leader of the

Bhumihar faction. His attempts to rally the support of the backward castes generated discontent in the government and the party. He even attended and addressed the All-India Yadav conference at Patna in March 1965 and made an effort to revive Triveni Sangh, the confederation of three most powerful backward castes. The efforts of the ruling upper caste elite to use backward castes in the factional conflicts started showing the increasing importance of the backward castes as an autonomous political force in the politics of Bihar. However, one of the debilitating consequences of this development was the added fluidity to the whole system of factional politics leading to rapid proliferation of smaller factions and growing organizational vacuum in the Congress Party.

Soon the political power struggles transgressed the organizational boundaries and broke out in public limelight. In June 1966 Bhumihar leader M.P. Sinha turned against K.B. Sahay in the fight over formation of the Pradesh Congress Committee (Provincial Congress Committee). However, managing to split the Bhumihar faction, Sahay emerged victorious by capturing six seats out of ten in the Congress committee. [227] The increased vulnerability of the K.B. Sahay government came to be reflected in rapidly developing climate of social and political unrest. The slow pace of land reforms and reneging on the promises of tenancy reforms eroded the progressive leadership image of K.B. Sahay. More importantly, the drought crippled the economy, the prices of food grains ominously rose, corruption became endemic, discontent among government employees, doctors, engineers, school teachers and students mounted. The ineffectiveness of the government to handle growing discontent was reflected in the police firing on school students demonstrating against the increase in tuition fees in August 1965.[228] This coincided with police firing upon the

demonstration of Communist party of India and Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) agitating against food shortage and rising prices. For some time, the entire state came under a massive wave of protest against the government. Providing an eyewitness account on the nature of the political turmoil, T.J.S George wrote:

> ...the upsurge against the government spread to all nooks and corners of the State. This was outwardly incredible. Schools and colleges were closed; curfew was clamped on all important towns; police reinforcements were called in from neighboring states; publications of all news concerning the disturbances was effectively controlled; opposition benches were empty in the legislatures; and yet the movement spread. For a week a defiant and angry people kept the State rocking. Firing was ordered in at least 23 places. Jails overflowed....It was as though Bihar was back in the thick of the great upsurge of 1942. The police resorted to firing on angry demonstrators in as many as 23 places to restore order in Bihar.[229]

For many people in Bihar, the Congress Party increasingly became a symbol of corruption, casteism, inefficiency and oppression. The oppositional activism inspired by social unrest and increasing governmental ineffectiveness reached an unprecedented level just before the historic 1967 elections in the country.

(iii) Breakdown of the Congress Party dominance and Fragmented Governments (1967-1972)

The infighting in the Congress Party continued in the face of growing discontent. At the eve of elections of 1967, the factions in the Congress Party were busy opposing each other with vehemence and a sordid display of personal greed. On the issue of party nominations for their camp followers bitter factional fights ensued. Satyendra Narayan Sinha deserted the ruling camp to join the dissidents in the M.P. Sinha and Binodanand Jha faction. K.B. Sahay's ruling faction was reduced to minority in the Pradesh Election Commission of the Bihar Congress Party.[230] The intra-party warfare was so intense that rival factions submitted separate lists of candidates to the Central Election Committee of the Congress Party. The decision of

the High Command failed to satisfy the warring factions[231]. Some, including former Bihar Congress President Mahamaya Prasad Sinha (Kayastha) and Ramgarh Raja felt so disappointed that they left the party to form a separate a new political party "Jan Kranti Dal" to fight against their former colleagues.

Therefore, at the time of 1967 elections, Bihar stood at the peak of political turmoil; the Congress Party looked incoherent, mired in riots of personal ambitions. Coupled with the increasing inability of the state power to contain growing social unrest, Bihar looked set for a vicious power struggle. The passing away of first – generation nationalist leaders like S.K. Sinha and A.N.Sinha left behind a "highly factionalized and squabbling Congress elite."[232] This is best illustrated by the rapid proliferation of factions; from the two main factions led by S.K. Sinha and A.N. Sinha at the time of independence, the bi-polarity of factions turned into a complex net work of various smaller caste based factions continually engaged in forging alliances and counter alliances with the sole aim to capture state power. The increased political fragmentation was further compounded by the rising backward castes. From a catchall party, the Congress Party was fast moving into the direction of cleavage-based party system in which rising backward castes came to play major role. Although personal greed for power emerged as the leitmotif of politics, caste continued to be the conveyor belt on which politics rolled out in Bihar.

In a watershed event, the Congress Party lost its preeminent position in the 1967 elections. It was defeated not only in Bihar but also in many parts of India.[233] According to one observer of Indian politics, the elections of 1967 effectively replaced the Congress System in the states and created a complex system in which

"factions and individuals" all played important roles according to the logic inherent in particular situation.[234] Aside from the growing economic crisis in the society, a major reason in the defeat of the Congress Party was the failure of the Central leadership of the Congress Party to arbitrate factional conflicts in the states.[235] In Bihar, the defeat of Congress was severe and it could manage only 128 of 318 seats. Its percentage of votes fell to 33.1 percent from 41.4 percent. The Congress Party, though in minority, emerged as the single largest party in the assembly. Ram Manohar Lohia's Samyukta Socialist Party secured 68 seats, followed by Jana Sangh (26), Jana Kranti Dal (26), Communist party of India (24), Praja Socialist Party (18), Jharkhand (13) and others. Commenting on the increasing governmental instability in the wake of 1967 elections in Bihar, Francine Frankel writes:

> The crisis of instability that overtook Bihar after the 1967 elections left *the state with hardly any government. (emphasis mine)* During 1967-1971 Bihar experienced nine coalition ministries and three periods of President's Rule. Obscured by the political chaos of defections and counter-defections, numbering in the hundreds, was the new bargaining power of the Upper Backwards in getting a larger share of ministerial posts.[236]

K.B. Sahay, M.P. Sinha, S.N. Sinha, and Binodanand Jha, four leaders aspiring to become Chief Minster after the elections, maneuvered to get defeated as many as possible of the Congress candidates supporting their rivals.[237] In addition to the factionalism, the success of the opposition parties in forming anti-Congress coalition in the elections was another big reason for the defeat of Congress party in Bihar. Ram Manohar Lohia's articulation of "catch-all" opposition and solidarity of backward castes did wonders in forging united front against the Congress party leading to straight contest in many places. The Yadavs, the most populous caste in Bihar, for the first time emerged as the second largest caste group after the Rajputs in

the assembly.[238] The verdict of the people in 1967 elections began the coalition era in which politics of defection and precariously short-lived governments flourished in Bihar.

On 5th March 1967, Mahamaya Prasad from the Jana Kranti Dal headed the first non-Congress government, euphemistically called the United Front. Karpoori Thakur, the tallest backward caste leader in the state, became deputy chief minister. The anti-Congressism of Lohia produced strange party alignments throwing ideology to the winds. The Communist Party of India and Jana Sangh (a Hindu nationalist party) which fought elections against each other became partner in the same government. Claiming to respect the wishes of the people, a motley confederation of nine parties with some independent candidates inaugurated the beginning of the end of the hegemony of the Congress Party in Bihar. In the first United Front Government, out of 16 Cabinet members, nine belonged to the upper castes and four belonged to the backward castes. After the expansion of the cabinet, the strength of the backward castes went up to ten. However, the upper castes maintained their dominance in the ministry. Thus, the rise of the backward caste though evident was not enough to dislodge the upper castes from the top echelon of power in Bihar.

The fierce competition among smaller parties and political fragmentation added to the growing governmental ineffectiveness that would become a recurring theme in the politics of Bihar. This was soon reflected in the collapse of the first non-Congress government in Bihar. The Mahamaya Government could not remain in power for more than ten months and twenty days and was voted out of power on 25th January 1968 by a no-confidence sponsored by the Congress and Shoshit Dal

alliance.[239] This collapse heralded the phase of uncertainty and beginning of the politics of defection in Bihar. Besides policy differences over land reforms, the status of Urdu as the second official language, and role of the Congress Party, the United Front government fell under the burden of its own internal contradictions.[240]The factionalism and ruthless struggle for power led the constituents of the coalition government pull in different directions in order to use the resources of the state to advance their political base.[241] Slowly but surely the resurgent backwards also wanted to see their men installed as the Chief Minister.[242]

After the fall of the first United Front government, politics in Bihar witnessed the most bizarre experiment in government; installation of a stopgap government under Satish Prasad Singh for three days, the shortest tenure of the government in the history of India. A nominee of the Shoshit Dal and backed by the Congress, the main job of the Satish Singh Government to make B.P. Mandal a member of the legislative council in order to clear his way for becoming the Chief Minister. On 1st February 1968, the Satish Singh government resigned. Supported by the Congress, the new Shoshit Dal Ministry headed by B.P. Mandal, a powerful Yadav landlord, was sworn-in the same day. Bihar formally ushered in the reign of backward castes. The backward castes enjoyed preponderance in the cabinet; six Yadavs, three Koiris, and two Kurmis and one Teli. However, the Mandal government was easily the defector's paradise. Every one who defected to Shoshit Dal was rewarded with a ministership. The Mandal government survived in office only for 47 days and collapsed on 18th March 1968 owing to the defection of Binodanand Jha from the Congress. Thus, defection proved the nemesis of the first Yadav led government in Bihar. The Mandal

Ministry though did not last long but it represented the beginning of the backward castes' tryst with the state power in Bihar.

Soon after the fall of the Mandal Ministry, the second United Front government headed by Bhola Paswan Shastri was installed on 22 March 1968 that lasted just for 96 days. He became the fourth chief minister since the 1967 elections and the first ever ÿXHjani Chief Minister. Although the Chief Minister himself was a Harijan (scheduled caste), his ministry was dominated by the upper castes. The Yadavs, the most dominant backward caste had no representation at all. This indicated the emergence of a Forward-Harijan alignment against the backward castes, which would later become the pattern in the Congress rule in the 1970s and 1980s.[243] The second United Front government resigned on 22nd June 1968. In the absence of viable government, the President Rule under the federal constitution of India was imposed on 29th June 1968 leading to dissolution of the Bihar assembly. In the ensuing mid term elections in 1969, the Congress Party failed to get majority polling only 30.5 percent of votes and 118 seats. The most impressive gain was registered by the Jana Sangh, which won 34 seats and polled 15.7 percent of valid votes. The Socialists failed to get the majority of the backward caste support. The Shoshit Dal's slogan, 'ninety percent of the people are Shoshit (exploited) and the Government is for ten per cent', could not enthuse backward caste voters.[244] The hung assembly once again became a reality. The mid term elections in 1969 were so ruthless and bloody that many observers agree that it started the nefarious practice of booth capturing and criminalization of politics in Bihar. In the words of one observer:

The distinctiveness of the mid –term poll of 1969 was that ballot and bullet would now go together; to win the election the ballot must be backed by the bullet.

Fraudulent voting became a common device to win the poll; acquiesced in by the gun-shy polling officers, and openly resorted to by the local group having superiority in fire arms...It came to be called the device of booth –control: it consists in frightening, through the display and, when necessary, through the actual use of fire-arms, all unfavorable voters and thus succeed in preventing them from coming to the polling station at all forecasting their vote. Under the umbrella of superior arms the favorable voters are then encouraged to cast as many votes as they desire.[245]

As Atul Kohli has pointed out that the fragmentation and incoherence in the government slowly started showing its signs; growing deprofessionalization of bureaucracy, endemic corruption, and rampant casteism in the distribution of public goods in Bihar.[246] The Congress Party emerged as the single largest party in the hung assembly. The three big caste leaders in the Congress Party, M.P. Sinha, K.B. Sahay and Satyendra Narayan Sinha set aside their differences temporarily and selected Sardar Harihar Singh (Rajput leader) from Shahabad as the first-ever Congress led coalition government in Bihar on 26th February 1969. The Shoshit Dal and the Jharkhand were the junior partners. The composition of the Sardar Harihar Singh ministry was heavily tilted in favor of the upper castes. Angered at the composition of the ministry, the backward castes rallied around the leadership of Daroga Prasad Rai to challenge the upper caste leadership in the state. Shaky since the day of its formation, the 115-day old government of Sardar Harihar suffered a defeat in the assembly on the snap vote on the budget demands of the Animal Husbandry department on 20th June 1969. The same evening, Sardar resigned.

The fall of the Sardar Harihar Singh Ministry brought the United Front government to power for the third time. Bhola Paswan Shastri formed the government on 22nd June 1969. Of the 19 ministers of the Shastri government, six ministers each belonged to the upper castes and the backward castes. The Shastri government could

not last for less than two weeks because of the fierce competitiveness of the smaller parties and splinter groups over the question of their nominee in the ministry. The Jana Sangh played the spoiler role withdrawing the support to the Shastri government. In the circumstances, the second spell of President's rule was imposed on Bihar on July 4, 1969.

The uncertainty in Bihar politics was further aggravated by the historic national split in the Congress Party in November 1969. The impact of the national split on the Bihar Congress added to the growing turmoil in the party alignments, caste equations and factional rivalry. The three top upper caste factional leaders, namely, K.B. Sahay, (Kayastha) M. P. Sinha, (Bhumihar) and Satyendra Narayan Sinha (Rajput) joined the Congress (O), the faction opposed to then the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and supporting the so-called Syndicate led by Morarji Desai.[247] For some time, the emerging major cleavage between upper castes and backward castes took a back seat. Temporarily, backward castes under the leadership of Daroga Prasad Rai supported the Congress Party to take advantage from the political space created by the defection of the powerful Rajput, Bhumihar and Kayastha faction leaders to the Congress (O). One of the important Yadav leaders, Ram Lakhan Yadav joined the Congress (O)-helping troika of upper caste leaders to capture the historic Sadaqaut Ashram, the headquarters of the Congress in a street battle.

With her populist slogans such as "Garibi Hatao" (Remove Poverty), anti-rich image, and firm support to the minorities, Indira Gandhi built a new winning coalition comprising Brahmans, Harijans (Dalits or Scheduled castes) and Muslims. The Bihar

politics as elsewhere came to be polarized between pro-Indira and anti-Indira parties and factions. One of the major consequences of the national split was the shift of the affairs of the state politics to Delhi, the seat of national power in the Congress party. Indira Gandhi in order to check regional leaders came to rely on the wily Maithil Brahmin politician Lalit Narayan Mishra (L.N. Mishra). This also led to the beginning of Maithil Brahman's increasing monopoly of power in Bihar. According to one observer, "a time came in Bihar's politics in the late 1970s and early 1980s that Brahmans dominated the government and the bureaucracy so effectively that traditional distinctions between Kingly power and Priestly power did not make any sense. Jagannath Mishra, younger brother of L.N. Mishra, came to symbolize the merger of the Prince and the Priest during his tenures as Chief Minister."[248]

On 16th February 1970, the President Rule was lifted and a coalition ministry, headed by Daroga Prasad Rai (hereafter DP Rai) of the Congress (R) was sworn –in as the Indira faction had emerged as the single largest party in the state assembly. Daroga Prasad Rai became the second Yadav chief minister in the history of Bihar signaling the start of future trends. The Rai ministry was dominated by backward castes. There were twelve ministers belonging to the backward castes. By contrast, there were only eight upper caste ministers. The Rai ministry could not last long due to bitter dissension over the composition of the ministry. However, one of the most important decisions of his government was the appointment of a Backward Classes Commission to explore whether reservations for backward castes could be made in government service and educational institutions. Mungeri Lal, a former minister who belonged to the Dusadh community, headed it. The establishment of the commission

raised the expectations of the backward castes leading to what would later become emergence of politics of reservation in Bihar.

The Rai ministry was followed by two United Front governments in quick succession. The first led by Karpoori Thakur, a backward caste leader, formed the government on December 22, 1970. This was the eighth ministry to assume office since the general elections in 1967 and the fourth after the mid-term polls in 1969. The veteran socialist Karpoori Thakur's ministry had almost equal number of upper caste and backward caste members. Among the nineteen ministers coming from the backward castes, the Yadavs and Koiris had six ministers each in the government. The landed caste Kurmis had three men in the ministry. The backward castes were clearly on the upswing. Defections, factionalism, and dissidence in the Samyukta Socialist Party led to the quick fall of the Karpoori government. Once again smaller and regional parties became the maker and destroyer of the government.

In addition to this, the landslide victory of Indira Gandhi led Congress in the parliamentary elections of 1971 accelerated the process of the disintegration of the anti-Congress front in Bihar. Karpoori Thakur without offering any resistance in the assembly resigned on 1 June 1971 after staying only 161 days in the office. Immediately after the fall of the Karpoori Government, a progressive Vidhayak Dal (Legislature party) coalition headed by Bhola Paswan Shastri backed by the Congress (R) came to power in Bihar. Fort the third time, Shastri became the Chief Minster of the State. Interestingly, this time he was leading a Congress led coalition, while on earlier occasion he was the chief minister of the non-Congress ministries. Politics in Bihar really had become the bread and butter issue for most politicians. All this was

happening in the state capital of Patna, while in the countryside was brewing radical peasant unrest in the garb of Naxal rebellion in the state.

The presence of the Congress (R) was overwhelming in the Shastri ministry. Of the 35 ministers, fifteen ministers belonged to the upper castes and the eight ministers represented the backward castes. The conflict between upper castes and backward castes had not yet become full blown; however the hegemony of the upper castes on the political power was slowly cracking. This was rather the most important consequences of the making and unmaking of the coalition governments during 1967 –1972. In the prevailing atmosphere of distrust, personalized factional conflicts, and opportunistic defections, the fate of the Shastri government was not different from the previous coalition governments. The ruling Shastri government was in such disarray that it feared facing the legislature and wanted to run the government without calling the legislature.

Once again President Rule under article 356 of the Indian Constitution was imposed. As in the first phase since 1967, during the second phase of coalition governments, instability threw the state into limbo, administration suffered, criminalization of politics took deep roots, corruption became pervasive, and politics in reality became a market place for unprincipled buyers and sellers.[249]

(iv) Revival of Congress Dominance and the Crisis in the State Power (1972-77)

The general elections to the Bihar Assembly held in March 1972 led to the end of coalition politics, albeit temporarily. The proliferation of smaller parties gave way to the restoration of the sole dominance of the Congress party in its new avatar. The Congress (R) which eventually became Congress (I) won 167 out of 261 seats it

contested in the 318-member Assembly. The charismatic leadership of Indira Gandhi and India's emphatic victory in war with Pakistan in December 1971 reversed the fortunes of the Congress party in Bihar. There were 202 new faces in the assembly. An eight member Kedar Pandey government of the Congress (R) was sworn-in on March 19, 1972. Out of the 35 ministers of the Kedar Pandey ministry, ten members were backwards. The upper castes were fourteen. Thus, the dominance of upper castes continued. One of the notable developments was the induction of Jagannath Mishra, the younger brother of L.N. Mishra, the most powerful leader in the Congress in Bihar, in the ministry. The wily Maithil Brahman politician Jagannath Mishra would soon become a major power center in the Congress Party by virtue of his proximity to the Prime Minster Indira Gandhi.

Kedar Pandey started well. He quickly constituted his ministry and distributed portfolios which was no mean achievement considering the fictionalization of the Congress party. But this was surrealistic as the factional feuds soon overtook the function of the government. In an attempt to reduce the grip of L.N. Mishra over Bihar Politics, Kedar Pandey contemplated a major reshuffle of his ministry. The attempt to drop L.N. Mishra loyalists threw the minister into deep trouble. Facing challenge from the dissidents, Pandey himself resigned and secured the invitation of the Governor to form a new government.[250] The factional fights reach such level that 14 dissidents refused to take the oath of office. The crisis was finally blown over by the intervention of the Central High Command of the Congress Party, a trend that eroded the autonomy of the regional Congress Party. One of the unintended consequences of the interference of the Central High Command was that intra-elite conflicts at the center became entwined with politics in the state. The factional fights

between L.N. Mishra and his opponents especially Uma Shankar Dikshit, the then Union Home Minister was to a great extent responsible for the leadership crisis in Bihar.[251]

The factional war against Kedar Pandey continued. A majority of cabinet colleagues turned against him leading to his exit from the power in June 1973 after only 15 months of being in the office. The drama of Kedar Pandey's exit demonstrated the power of the faction led by L.N. Mishra. Headed by Abdul Ghaffoor, a new ministry came to power on July 2, 1973 in Bihar. As it was increasingly becoming a part of Congress's political culture, the appointment of Abdul Ghaffoor came from the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. In reality, the installation of Ghaffoor confirmed the continued dominance of L.N. Mishra faction in the politics of Bihar.[252] There were 21 upper caste members in the Ghaffoor ministry. There were nine backward castes in the ministry and six scheduled castes. The Ghaffoor ministry soon became mired in the "no-holds barred struggle between rival factions to capture office with the object of making money, enjoying official privileges and distributing jobs and patronage among relations, friends and hangers-on".[253]

The increasing governmental ineffectiveness culminated in the popular alienation in the face of the historic "Student Movement" led by ailing Jaiprakash Narayan against the high prices, rampant corruption, and mounting unemployment among the educated youth. The movement rocked the entire state particularly urban areas.[254] The J.P. movement as it came to be called "involved a temporary alliance between leading politicians of the Backward Classes and their rivals among

Bhumihar, Rajput, and Kayastha groups, all of whom had been excluded from power by Mrs. Gandhi's Brahman coalition".[255] The Bihar Chhatra Sanghrash Samiti, the nodal organization leading the movement, was "dominated by upper castes and middle class including teachers, writers, layers, and Sarvodaya workers. Shopkeepers, lawyers and doctors dominated its chapters in towns. In villages, they were controlled by rich peasants who, of course were from the upper castes".[256]

Soon political activism in Bihar turned into an open rebellion against the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. A highly faction ridden Congress Party, the increasing usurpation of the autonomy of the Bihar Congress Party by the Central High Command, perpetual governmental instability especially since 1967 and growing paralysis in the bureaucracy took a heavy toll on the capacity of the state to handle the political upheaval caused by J.P.'s movement. This was beginning of the trend toward decline of the state power to effectively intervene in power conflicts. No doubt, there was shortage of goods, prices were rising, there was widespread labor unrest, but as Atul Kohli rightly suggests that the political turmoil in the face of the J.P. movement resulted more from political crisis than societal struggles.[257]

Following the path of Kedar Pandey, Abdul Ghaffoor also tried to take on the dominant faction led by L.N. Mishra but he failed miserably. His failure to tackle the J.P. movement added to loss of his legitimacy in the party. Further, his inability to protect the life of L.N. Mishra who was killed in a bomb blast in Samastipur on 2nd January 1975 sealed his fate as Chief Minster. Eventually, Ghaffoor was replaced by L.N. Mishra's younger brother Jagannath Mishra on 11th April 1975. Jagannath Mishra attempted to consolidate the Brahman, Harijan, and Muslim model of the

Congress rule in Bihar. This was reflected in the composition of the ministry. Commenting on the Mishra ministry, Frankel says:

> Mishra followed the strategy of his predecessors in strengthening the position of the Forwards (upper castes) in his ministry (to 40 percent), containing the Backwards (at 20 percent) and building up the representation of Muslims (13 percent) and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (27 percent).[258]

The passing of old bosses in the party, appeal to populism, and his image as Indira Gandhi's younger son and de-facto ruler of the country Sanjay Gandhi's man led to Mishra's meteoric rise to power in Bihar. The fact that during national emergency between 26th June 1975 and March 1977, Jagannath Mishra's authority went unchallenged to a large extent was not surprising. The fear of repression during national emergency led to decline of political activism in Bihar. Most of the opposition ministers were in the prison and open political activity barring state-sponsored was not allowed. Indira Gandhi's authoritarian style of functioning reduced the Bihar Congress to near insignificance. The appointment by the Central High Command in the name of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi rather than selection of by local legislators made most Chief Ministers powerless and Jagannath Mishra was no exception.

The Mishra rule and emergency era in Bihar hastened the process of political decay in Bihar. The Mishra government was not the first to have seen corruption and personalization of the bureaucracy. All previous governments especially during 1967 and 1972 had indulged in corrupt practices. The Daroga Rai government was accused of running a racket of transfers and posting of bureaucrats in the state, a trend for which Bihar would later become notorious.[259] Karpoori Thakur government made a large number of questionable and illegal decisions. A minister of the Karpoori Thakur

minister was dragged into the court in a bribery case.[260] The deterioration of law and order became so acute that Suraj Narayan Singh, Chairman of the Indian Socialist Party issued a statement on 26th June 1972 that "the whole administration had collapsed and it was suffering from cancer."[261]

That the politics of money and patronage was converted into a sophisticated art of governance goes to the credit of the wily and suave Maithil Brahman Jagannath Mishra, according to most observers.[262] Lacking mass support Jagannath Mishra came to build a personalized and loyalist bureaucracy to remain in power. It certainly enhanced the political control but also led to deprofessionalization of the bureaucracy. "During his rule, Bihar came to symbolize the zenith of patronage democracy; everything up for grabs and politicians came to become rentier par excellence", comments one former Director General of Police in Bihar.[263] Refusing to go on record, one senior police official known for professional integrity says:

> "...do not blame Laloo Yadav for the ills of the state, the disease is old, it just got exposed in the days of Laloo. It was during the regime of Jagannath Mishra, transfers and posting came to be sold in Patna, the state capital. Earlier, politicians used to do *pairavi* (Indian word for lobbying), now they have made transfers and posting a big industry. In addition to this, transfers have become a punitive tool to punish any officer who shows some resolve and integrity. This has created a culture of tolerance in the bureaucracy in which *sab kuch chalta hai* (every thing is fine). Loyalty matters more than merit.[264]

Paradoxically, politics pervaded all aspects of life but the state power gradually became so ineffective that it refused to get involved in bitter societal conflicts even in and around Patna, the state capital. Therefore, the emergence of private caste senas (armies) to cope with the increasing radicalism in rural areas led by Naxal came as no surprise to anyone in the 1970s. In fact, to overcome its growing ineffectiveness, the state government came close to privatizing one of its basic

functions; law and order. Considering this not a sign of weakness or ineffectiveness, but a policy response to growing peasant unrest, one senior police officer announced in 1975

> ...the Bihar government has decided to arm all able-bodied persons in Bhojpur and Patna districts for self-defense to face the extremist- menace, who have recently launched an armed struggle... District magistrates of both the districts have been asked to visit the affected villages and issue licenses for firearms on the spot to those who were able to possess them...The decision was taken following a spurt in the armed attacks on landowners by the extremists in these villages. The trouble was mostly of agrarian nature.[265]

During Jagannath Mishra's rule, many observers aver that crime and politics became inseparable. And politics became a source of personal gain and loss. Ram Naresh Ram, the legendary leader of the Naxal movement in Bhojpur blames casteist regimes of the Congress Party for the criminalization of politics in Bihar:

> I know what it means to be contesting without *goondas* (criminals). Earlier upper castes feudal lords used to rely on their armed retainers to win the elections, very soon their muscle men realized why not run ourselves and join the lucrative industry called politics in Bihar. Most of these criminals came from the dominant landed castes that are also known for repression in the countryside. Therefore, caste, crime and politics combined together made Bihar look sick, and very disorderly. Sadly, none paid attention to the glorious struggles of the Naxals who have stood between hope and despair.[266]

Though Mishra took some populist steps to bolster the credibility of his regime such as implementation of distribution of surplus land over ceiling laws to the scheduled castes, his rule came to be perceived as highly corrupt, and repressive. To add insult to injury, his regime refused to accept the Mungeri Lal Commission's Report on the reservations for backward castes in government jobs. Mishra dismissed the reservation issue as a "conflict between persons who are in government service, have landed property and are economically strong, and those who are equally economically strong."[267] Bihar definitely looked set for a fresh bout of a bitter power struggle. It

was quickly reflected in the historic elections of the parliament in March 1977 after then the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi decided to restore democracy and seek popular mandate. The Congress Party suffered unprecedented defeat losing monopoly of power in the parliament for the first time in post-independent India. A hastily formed motley group of opposition parties called Janata Party (People's Party) came to power in Delhi. The Congress Party was almost decimated in Bihar. The Janata Party, another incarnation of the United Front, comprising the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh, the Bhartiya Lok Dal and the Socialists won 52 of 54 seats in Bihar. Emboldened by the victory in the parliamentary elections, on April 30, 1977, the Janata Party led Union Government dismissed Jagannath Mishra ministry along with governments in eight other states.[268] The assembly elections once again demonstrated the popular anger against the authoritarian regime of the Indira Gandhi resulting in the end of pre-eminence of the Congress party in the politics of Bihar.

Power Struggles between the Upper Castes and the Backward Castes (1977-1989)

The end of the National Emergency heralded a new era in Bihar, the ruthless power struggles between upper castes and the backward castes. Interestingly, the struggle did not start immediately because landed upper castes and the rising backward castes had entered into a fragile and temporary alliance against the misrule of the Indira regime. In contrast, Brahmans, Harijans, and the Muslims stood solidly behind the Congress Party. The elections of 1977 were momentous for another reason- the phenomenon of booth capturing both silently and violently. Paradoxically, popular anger and the power of the muscle flowed together. Observing elections in Bihar, one analyst remarked:

> Voting irregularities occurred in about 80 constituencies, and in a number of these, criminals who had previously captured votes for other candidates discovered they could win office by the same tactics for themselves. Harijans and members of lower Backwards who wanted to vote for Mrs. Gandhi were often prevented from doing so by the "united lathis" of the Bhumihars, Rajputs, and Yadavs. The Janata won an unprecedented 68 percent of the popular vote. Congress strength dwindled to less than 23 percent.[269]

The power struggles inside the Janata Party were no less ruthless. The short-lived unity of upper castes and backward castes in "an all –out war" against Indira Gandhi evaporated in no time. The two contenders for Chief Ministership- Satyendra Narayan Sinha, (Rajput) and Karpoori Thakur (barber) demonstrated the quick polarization of caste and factional interests in the politics of Bihar. The installation of Karpoori Thakur as the Chief Minister in Bihar in 1977 symbolized "the simultaneous consolidation of an alternative to Congress and the political rise of the backward castes".[270] Observing Bihar elections in 1977, Harry Blair concluded

> transfer of power to the backward castes will continue at local level along political lines. And there will be a continuing struggle between Backward and Forward castes in the legislative assembly and even a series of alternating governments in the short terms.[271]

Blair's prognosis sounded prophetic as the social ascendancy of the backward castes almost matched their newly found political dominance. And Karpoori Thakur also interpreted his victory as a mandate of numerically preponderant backward castes. His ministry reflected the changing nature of power struggles. Out of 47 members in the ministry, 19 belonged to the backward castes, fifteen belonged to the upper castes, and five were Scheduled caste.

Although their dominance was realized, hegemony still eluded the backward castes. The presence of substantial number of upper castes was enough to block Karpoori Thakur's attempt to establish a "Backward Raj", which he soon tried to

create. Since his own caste was inconsequential in caste and class calculus, Thakur attempted to mobilize backward castes as a whole. In a master stroke promising to implement the election manifesto of the Dal, Karpoori Thakur announced to implement the recommendations of the Mungeri Lal Backward Classes Commission to reserve quotas in both government jobs and educational institutions.[272] This sudden policy shift resulted in violent reaction from the upper castes students culminating in caste riots especially in the cities. The upper caste members of the ministry opposed the reservation policy pressing for the appointment of new commission and inclusion of economic criteria. They opposed the extension of reservation to dominant backward castes like Yadav, Kurmi and Koiri.

The upper caste students and youths took to the large-scale rioting on the streets. None survived the scar of reservation riot including the venerated leader of the historic movement of 1974, Jaiprakash Narayan. Many backward caste leaders in the ministry inspired by Rammanohar Lohia's ideology mounted attack on their upper caste colleagues including Jaiprakash Narayan. Ram Avadesh Singh, a backward caste leader declared "the choice was now between Lohia's principled politics and JP's pro-upper caste politics."[273]More than anything else, the reservation issue politicized caste forever. Noting the true nature of the reservation politics, Harry Blair writes:

> The whole struggle is not really over the 2000 jobs; rather, the reservation policy is a symbolic issue and has griped the imagination of virtually everyone in Bihar who has even the slightest degree of political awareness. Through the reservation issue, Karpoori Thakur asserted that the Backwards had displaced the Forwards as the dominant force in Bihar politics, that the old days of dominance in public affairs from village to Vidhan Sabha by the twice-born were gone forever, and that his government would be one based on the support of the Backwards. The forwards interpreted things this way as well, fearing that their days of dominance

might indeed have departed, and responded with a volatile mixture of fear and rage.[274]

Karpoori Thakur succeeded in his goal partially, ending effectively any nonpartisan compromise on reservation issue. The conflict on the reservation issue once again demonstrated the salience of politics in the increasing no-holds-barred power struggles in Bihar. Years later commenting on the reservation stir, Karpoori Thakur himself pointed out, "the agitation were definitely politically organized. Newspapers helped them (the agitation leaders) with publicity. There was a whispering campaign...including lies. The crowds were mainly students. Political trouble was mainly urban.... Rural masses were not involved."[275] Most observers noted the role of political parties and leaders opposed to Karpoori Thakur in fomenting the potentially explosive divide between upper castes and backward castes.[276] That the caste polarization was going to be bloody was soon demonstrated in the elections to the Panchayat Samitis (local self-government bodies) in 1978. More than hundred persons were dead in the violent clash between upper castes and backward castes to capture local bodies considered vital for dominance at the local level.[277]

As the Janata party was a loose collection of regional parties and powerful individuals, it failed to emerge as a cohesive political unit. This highly fragmented nature of the ruling party made consensus almost impossible leaving the government in self-inflicted limbo. The struggle in the Janata Dal replicated the days of United Front governments of the 1960s; smaller parties jockeying for power permanently.[278] Karpoori's position in the Janata party took a nosedive with the gradual weakening of his mentor Charan Singh at the national level. The upper caste members in the Janata Party combined together to dislodge Karpoori Thakur from power by Ram Sundar

Das, a Harijan leader on 19 the April 1979. The Das ministry restored the power back to the upper castes. In the 32-member ministry, 13 belonged to the upper castes and only 7 represented the backward castes. No sooner than the Das ministry was formed, the Janata Party at the national level split. This triggered a fresh wave of governmental instability in Delhi and in Janata Party ruled states. The Bihar Janata Party also split. The Das ministry survived with the help of Jana Sangh, Congress (O) and Jagjivan Ram faction. However, busy in the intrigues, factional feuds, defections, the top leaders hardly had time to rescue the Ram Sundar Das ministry from the growing administrative atrophy. The fragmentation of the government of was reflected in the Pipra Carnage of Harijans (dalits) by one of the dominant backward castes Kurmi on 25th February 1980. Not just political rioting was becoming a norm; the politicization of massacres was increasingly coming to the center stage of political activism in Bihar. Almost all political parties started viewing massacres as an effective tool to seek political revenge and reward.[279]

The fall of the perennially squabbling Janata Party Government in Delhi led to the holding of mid term parliamentary elections in March 1980. Riding on the "stability slogan", Indira Gandhi led Congress formed the national government. In Bihar, the Congress party won 30 out of 54 Lok Sabha (Lower House of the parliament). Soon after, the Das ministry was dismissed by the Union government and President's Rule imposed. In the ensuing assembly elections in Bihar, the backward caste parties could not pose any serious challenge to the comeback bid of the Congress Party. The backward castes were deeply divided among various smaller parties such as Karpoori Thakur led Lok Dal; Raj Narayan led splinter group of Lok Dal etc. As a result of fragmentation among the political parties, the polarization

between upper castes and backward castes was nowhere in the election outcomes. Benefiting from the disarray among the backward castes, the Congress Party won 169 seats with about 34 percentage of the vote. The victory of the Congress Party brought Jagannath Mishra back to power in Bihar.

The formation of the Congress government on 1st June 1980 failed to take note of the diminishing political base of Congress Party among backward castes. It could not see that Yadavs emerged as the single largest caste group with 40 members in the assembly and Lok Dal of Karpoori Thakur represented about 50 percent of them. The 39-member Mishra ministry had 18 upper caste members and 11 backward castes and three Harijans. The dominance of the upper castes was almost intact in Congress. The Mishra government could not arrest the continuing decline of the political and governmental institutions in Bihar. On the return of the Mishra government, Atul Kohli comments "...government ineffectiveness and agrarian violence were continuing to grow in Bihar. There was no major policy initiative undertaken by Mishra during his three- year rule."[280] The factional squabbling came back with a vengeance. Infighting became the order of the day. After slightly more than three years, Mishra was replaced by Chandra Shekhar Singh, a Rajput landlord of the Munger district, on 14 the August 1983.

This change was effected as a part of broader strategy of the Central High Command of the Congress Party to bring Rajputs closer to Congress. The Chandra Shekhar ministry turned out to be a stopgap arrangement before assembly elections in early 1985. Dominated by the upper castes, the new cabinet failed to satisfy the aspiration of the backward castes. The Congress Party continued to rely on a coalition

of upper castes scheduled castes and Muslims. The Chandra Shekhar government like its predecessor failed to stem the rot in administration. Many observers have found causal link between increasing violence; electoral and agrarian and the decline in the capacity of the government to tackle rising cases of agrarian struggles.[281] By the end of 1985-86, agrarian struggles between landless laborers and landowning castes had caused so much unrest in the countryside that almost a quarter of the available land in Bihar was not cultivated in Bihar.[282] Nearly 100 people were killed in the 1985 election compared with 34 in 1977. Violent incidents dramatically increased from some 260 in 1977 to 617 in 1984. Crime and politics thrived on each other.[283]

The assassination of then Prime Minster Indira Gandhi in October 1984 generated unprecedented wave of sympathy for the Congress Party across the country including Bihar. In the ensuing parliamentary elections in the winter of 1984, the Congress Party won spectacular victory both in terms of seats and votes. It got 48 (as against 45 secured under Nehru's leadership in 1952) and 51.8 percent while the highest percentage of votes polled earlier was only 45.8 percent.[284] The sympathy wave continued through assembly elections of March 1985. The Congress got 196 of 324 seats and 39.4 percent of votes. Enjoying the clean image and youthfulness of the new Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, the Congress Party won, but could not repeat its performance of the parliamentary elections. In the feel-good scenario of double-victory, the Congress Party failed to notice that the Karpoori Thakur led Dalit Mazdoor Kisan Party (DMKP) maintained its hold over the backward castes by winning about 15 percent of votes and 45 seats in the assembly elections.[285] The assembly elections of 1985 also illustrated the increasing dominance of criminals in the electoral politics. Commenting on the increasing criminalization of politics in

Bihar, Frankel notes that "leaders of all parties including the Congress (I), freely admitted that they sought the help of criminals and that (except in the tribal areas) booth- capturing occurred on large scale".[286]

The installation of Bindeshwari Dubey, a veteran trade union leader, by the Congress High Command, on 12th March 1985 brought neither political stability nor could it counter fresh wave of extremism in the countryside. Caste based factional politics refused to die. Factional war soon broke out between Bindeshwari Dubey and Jagannath Mishra who gradually fell out with Central leadership of the Congress party. This time inner squabbling came out to the street sapping the organization of the Congress party. Jagannath Mishra started his so-called Janjagran Abhiyaan (People's Awakening Campaign) to focus attention of the people on to the growing backwardness of the State and the Center's discriminatory policies. However, in reality the movement turned out to be mobilization tool in the hands of Jagannath Mishra to dislodge Dubey government

The technique of mass mobilization in the intra-elite conflicts, which would become a recurring theme in the politics of Bihar, was both a cause and effect of decay of political parties. Parties had become personal fiefdoms of powerful leaders. Using governmental machinery in the factional fights reached new heights resulting in frequent transfer and postings of civil and police officials in the state. Dubey government surpassed all records when it transferred about 300 top civil servants belonging to elite Indian Civil Service cadre within just first fifteen months of his government.[287] The trend of mass transfer of senior police and civil bureaucrats would become a permanent feature of state power in Bihar. The ineffectiveness of state

power vacillating from powerlessness to extreme form of state repression was manifested in the DalelChak-Baghura massacres of landed castes by Naxals and the brutal police killings of the lower caste supporters of Communist party of India (ML) at Arwal in Gaya district in 1986. A national newsmagazine comments:

> Everybody in Bihar is ranged against each other and the state is now a land of weapon-wielding senas always on the prowl, looking out for the next target. The landlords and the landless, the Rajputs, the Yadavs, and the Kurmis and at the other end of the spectrum, the splintered groups of communist extremists have converted Bihar into a raging battlefield as the helpless Bindeshwari Dubey governments keeps talking of its resolve to counter extremism.[288]

The continuing uncertainly about the survival of his government added a fresh inertia to already highly demoralized and partisan bureaucracy. The Central High Command of the Congress Party in Delhi replaced him with Bhagwat Jha Azad, a lightweight Maithil Brahman politician in February 1988. Neither recognized as a caste overlord nor did he have any following in the local Congress Party, the ministry of Jha depended on the Central High Command of the party for its survival. Further, he had to face the continuing dissidence of Jagannath Mishra who had virtually monopolized the oppositional space in the Congress with the help of his Bihar Jan Vikas Manch.[289] Like the ministry of Dubey, Bhagwat Jha's ministry was heavily packed with the upper castes. Without any worthwhile political capital, inspired by his crusading zeal, Jha attacked vested interests everywhere; from coal Mafia to the plunder of development fund by corrupt bureaucrats to landed classes. In the process, he alienated one and all including the Naxalite and the communist parties who could have benefited from his implementation of land reforms.[290] The result was quick, in less than thirteen months he exited from the power.

As power in the Congress Party had gradually become a function of personal loyalty to the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and flowed from top down, the old warlord Satyendra Narayan Sinha was selected by the party High Command in Delhi. One of the major reasons behind selection of a Rajput landlord was to checkmate the rise of Vishwanath Singh, a Rajput dissident Congress leader and crusader against corruption. Except his caste following, Satyendra Narayan Sinha had neither charisma nor administrative ability to run the government. His ministry was dominated by his caste men in particular and upper castes in general. Crippled by the infighting, increasing administrative inefficiency and loss of the legitimacy of the Rajiv Gandhi led Union government; the Satyendra Narayan Sinha government got washed away by the unprecedented Bhagalpur communal riot in October 1989. Although projected as a salvage operation, in a classic sign of weakness the Congress High Command eventually meekly surrendered to factional war unleashed by Jagannath Mishra and brought him back to power on 6th December 1989. This showed the growing dependence of the Congress Party on the powerful and populist regional leaders. But times had changed. And politics in Bihar headed for fundamental transformation. Jagannath Mishra came to play the role of night watchman in the historic transfer of power from the traditionally dominant upper castes to resurgent backward castes in the impending parliamentary and assembly elections. By the end of 1989, the ruling Congress was fast losing its dominant position in the politics in Bihar as it failed politically and organizationally to respond to radical agrarian struggles and new social actors. Jagannath Mishra, in an interview with one analyst candidly admitted "the poor are being neglected by all parties. My own party, Congress, is losing support among the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes. The old left has lost the

initiative. Politics, however, does not like vacuum. Someone will move in. That is why the New Left parties are being successful. This is all quite new".[291]

In the parliamentary elections in December 1989, the ruling Congress Government lost power at the center. At the center, National Front comprising Janata Dal, Bhartiya Janata party, left parties, and some major regional parties formed the government under the leadership of V.P. Singh. The Congress Party faced rout in Bihar winning just four seats out of 54 seats in the state. In the assembly elections, the Congress Party fared badly and won only 71 seats as against 196 in 1985. Rather than a catchall party, the Congress Party came to symbolize upper caste. 39 members out of 71 belonged to the upper castes. By contrast, the Janata Dal overwhelmingly represented the most numerous backward castes in the state. Out of 121 members, 55 members of the Janata Dal belonged to the backward castes. Most importantly, 36 Yadavs were elected from the Janata Dal making it predominantly a Yadav political part. [292] The caste composition of the 1990 assembly was truly historic. For the first time, majority of the members belonged to the backward castes. Of 324 members of assembly, 117 members belonged to the backward castes bloc. Among the backward castes, most of the members came from the four major backward castes such as Yadavs (63), Kurmi (18), Koiri (12) and Bania (16). The power in Bihar now clearly belonged to the backward castes.[293]

The Hegemony of the Backward Castes and the Collapse of State power (1990 onward)

Interestingly, a triangular leadership contest took place in the Janata Dal in Bihar. Laloo Prasad Yadav (hereafter Laloo Yadav), a protégé of Karpoori Thakur and one of the top leaders of Student Movement of 1974, Ram Sunder Das, socialist

and former chief minister, and Raghunath Jha, an associate of Janata Dal leader and former prime minister Chandrashekar Singh fought a closely contested election. With a margin of just four votes, Laloo Yadav defeated his rival RamSundar Das.[294] His victory, however, opened a new phase in Bihar's history. He not only became the Chief Minster but also transformed the substance and style of politics in Bihar. Having established the near hegemony of numerically most powerful Yadav caste by ridiculing the so-called Brahmanical culture and urban classes, Laloo Yadav has almost re-invented a new Bihar. Though ruled out by many as "country bumpkin" and an ephemeral phenomenon, he has come to symbolize the rise of backward castes to power in Bihar.[295]

Leading a minority government with the help of left parties and other smaller parties, he became the second chief minister since independence to complete one full term of five years. This is considered a political wonder by many observers in a state where the turnover rate of the chief minister is amazingly high as a result of a tradition of political fragmentation and factionalism.[296] His luck finally ran out when court cases in a corruption scandal known as "fodder scam" forced him to resign on 25th July 1997[297]. His resignation and subsequent police arrest, however, did not lead to his losing power. In a shrewd move symbolizing his personal hold over the party and the government, he made his stay-at-home wife Rabri Devi leader of the ruling Janata Dal and the Chief Minister of the state. The installation of his wife as the Chief Minster enabled him to rule by proxy as de-facto ruler of the state leading him to run every day administration from the prison. Sure enough, the bureaucrats and ruling party politicians surrendered their autonomy meekly by seeking orders and instructions from Laloo Yadav in prison. Using his populist image as the savior of

poor and backward castes, Laloo Yadav not unwittingly laid the foundation of family rule or what many observers call "Raja-Rani" (King and Queen) syndrome in Bihar. This also illustrated the extent to which Bihar descended into personalized rule at the expense of established state and political institutions.[298]

This emergence of the enigma or the phenomenon called Laloo Yadav is not an accident; it is culmination of the power struggles between the upper castes and the backward castes in the state of Bihar. In this, he was aided by the powerful anti-congress and anti-upper caste waves that swept across North India in the late 1980 and early 1990s. The fall of Rajiv Gandhi government at the center in 1989 was perceived by many as the march of the backward castes to the power. The increasing political significance of the middle peasants or "bullock capitalists", enjoying the market-oriented policies of the state, radicalized the backward castes in North India.[299] Emerging as the most vocal face of the backward castes against the dominance of the upper castes and classes over state institutions. Laloo Yadav became the champion of social justice for the downtrodden. He stood more for what he called giving voice to the oppressed rather than radical transformation of the economy. The emphasis on restoring prestige (izzat) and voice (swar) to the masses made him instant hero with millions of oppressed in Bihar.[300] He quickly marginalized established leaders of backward castes and cultivated young leaders. Nitish Kumar, a Kurmi leader became second-in command of Laloo Yadav consolidating the hold of the Janata Dal over backward castes. His first ministry in 1990 reflected the new power configuration. Of the 23 cabinet rank ministers, 12 members belong to backward castes and only three members belonged to the upper castes.[301] The social ascendancy of the backward castes combined with an innovative

rustic style of political communication made Laloo Yadav vastly popular among the predominantly rural population. His making fun of urban ways of life and urbanites touched the hearts of many of his followers who felt slighted and equated urban life with Brahmanical world view. Some observers believe that Laloo Yadav's rise to power accelerated the process of the beginning of the end of the Brahmanical order in Bihar.[302]

In his attempts to consolidate the power of the backward castes, he was greatly helped by *Ram Rath Yatra* of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Mandal controversy (job quota stir) in the 1990. The implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations for reservation for the backward castes in government jobs and educational institutions at the Union level brought a political turmoil in the country in August 1990. This was almost a replay of anti-reservation riots during the days of Karpoori Thakur in Bihar. The difference was in the intensity of rage and scale of the stir against the Mandal report.[303]

The implementation of the Mandal report was rooted in power struggles in the Janata Dal between then Prime Minister V.P. Singh and his powerful rival Devi Lal, the then Deputy Prime Minister.[304] Enraged at the implementation of the caste-based job-quota, upper caste students and urban middle class youths in Delhi and elsewhere took to the rioting on the street. In the emotionally charged atmosphere, many youths committed self-immolation to protest the policy of job quota. The violent protests over the Mandal report eroded the credibility of the V.P. Singh government. Not able to withstand the combined political challenges of Ram Temple stir of the BJP, and Mandal controversy, the V.P. Singh government fell later in the year.[305]

Although the implementation of the Mandal recommendations created violent discontent in North India, in Bihar the trouble assumed serious proportion because of the history of caste riots over reservation for the backward castes and recent loss of political power by the upper castes. The anti-Mandal agitation by the upper caste was most intense and ruthless in the Central Bihar region where Bhumihars dominate the ranks of the upper castes. The conflict also took a violent turn in North Bihar when two known criminal-politicians, Pappu Yadav and Anand Mohan Singh, joined the warring sides. The dithering by the Congress Party in Bihar was perceived as anti-reservation stance, though some influential Congress leaders did play important role in the anti-reservation stir in Bihar.[306] The result was that Bihar Congress failed to convince numerically powerful backward castes. Considering the anti-Mandal stir a unique chance to establish his personal and political hegemony over the politics of Bihar, Laloo Yadav quickly blamed the dominance of the upper castes in politics for all the ills of the society. To begin with, he exposed the dominance of the upper castes in the political and state institutions. He shunted upper caste bureaucrats, civil and police, from all-important positions controlling the transfers and posting as a means to consolidate his control over the government. In the aftermath of the Mandal stir, state power joined the ongoing power struggles directly and openly.[307] By supporting job quota for the numerically powerful backward castes, especially Yadavs, Laloo Yadav unlike Karpoori Thakur aggressively and radically polarized the caste society to broaden his power base and saved his minority government from disintegration.

Laloo Yadav's hold over politics was further consolidated when he halted the controversial *Rath Yatra* (Chariot Journey) of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Lal Krishan Advani in Bihar en route Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh to demolish the Babri

mosque and rebuild the Ram temple in October 1990. He arrested Advani and also maintained communal peace in the state. This won him the trust and crucial political support of the Muslims in the state. Branding the BJP a high caste Hindu party, Laloo Yadav succeeded in convincing his low caste supporters about the need for political alliance with the Muslims in order to keep upper castes out of political power. Therefore, an astute mix of lower caste politics and minority politics helped Laloo Yadav greatly to establish his hold over the politics in Bihar.[308] The new political alignments gave the Janata Dal led by Laloo Yadav impressive gains in Bihar wining 32 out of 54 seats in the parliamentary elections of 1991. The Congress Party was almost decimated in Bihar with only one seat. Replacing the Congress Party as main opposition party, the BJP won six seats. Not surprisingly, most upper castes supported the BJP.

Despite the near invincible political position, Laloo Yadav soon encountered the intraelite conflict in the party, a recurring theme of party politics in Bihar. For instance, in the event of the killing of Harijans in Tishkohra village on 19th February 1991 dissident leaders such as RamSundar Das, Hukumdeo Narayan Yadav and others launched attack on Laloo Yadav's leadership. Laloo Yadav quickly overcame the threat to his leadership by expanding the ministry, and splitting the smaller parties on caste basis. He even threatened to split the Congress in order to ward off any potential threat to his leadership.[309]

The most serious challenge came from Kurmis' perceived neglect by the Laloo Yadav government. His long time ally Nitish Kumar rebelled against him and demanded adequate share in political power for Kurmis. In a massive Kurmi Chetna

Maha Rally (Kurmi Consciousness Great Rally) on 12 February 1994 in Patna, Kurmis exposed the growing chinks in the solidarity of the backward castes.[310] This eventually culminated in the split in the ruling Janata Dal and formation of the Samata Dal by Nitish Kumar who sought to reverse the hegemony of Yadavs. Essentially conceived as another backward-minority coalition minus Yadavs, the Samata Dal attempted to rope in Kurmi, Koiri and other smaller backward castes.[311] According to many observers, the Samata Dal started the process of dealignment among the backward castes. This is reflected in economically and socially powerful Kurmis and Koiris forming alliance with the upper caste dominated BJP in order to challenge the increasing monopoly of power by the Yadavs.[312]

Despite mounting anti-incumbency wave and split in the backward castes, Laloo Yadav won majority in the assembly elections of 1995. Contesting elections with Communists and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), the Janata Dal returned to power with an absolute majority winning 166 of the total 324 seats with 27.9 percent votes. The Samata Dal failed to make any impact and Laloo Yadav's party emerged as the favorite choice of the backward castes, the Muslims, the landless, and the poor in general. The Samata Party was perceived by many as fighting a proxy war at the behest of the upper castes.[313] Although still popular among the upper castes, the Congress Party suffered humiliating defeat winning just 28 seats. The end of the Congress control over Bihar politics was now complete. In one of the big surprises of the assembly elections, the Bhartiya Janata Party, (BJP) became the second largest party in the state, attracting motley of upper castes Kayasthas, Bhumihars and Tribals.[314] The result of the 1995 assembly elections turned out to be historic for backward caste politics in Bihar. The 1995 Assembly of Bihar had 161 members from

the backward castes. By contrast, there were only 56 members from the upper castes. This symbolized the virtual monopoly of political power by the backward castes. However, this monopoly reflected the increasing dominance of the upper backward castes in the politics of Bihar. Of the 161 backward caste members in the Bihar Assembly, 144 belonged to the upper backward castes; 86 Yadavs, 27 Kurmis, 13 Koiris and 18 Banias.[315]

The growing bitter power struggle among the upper Shudras or upper backward castes accelerated the process of dealignment. This was quickly reflected in the results of the 1996 parliamentary elections in Bihar. Mired into the infamous fodder scam and unable to stem the deteriorating law and order, the Janata Dal and its allies led by Laloo Yadav suffered major setbacks. The organizational weakness of the ruling party and its total dependence on the person and career of Laloo Yadav exposed the limits of ascendancy of backward castes. The unity between the Samata Dal and the Bhartiya Janata Dal (BJP) forged a powerful coalition of Kurmis, Koiris and upper castes against the Yadav dominated coalition of Laloo Yadav. The Janata Dal won only 22 seats as compared to 33 seats in the 1991 parliamentary elections. On the contrary, the BJP won 18 seats with 20.5 percent votes as compared to five seats won during the 1991 elections. The Samata Dal won five seats and registered presence in the national politics. Although the Congress Party won two seats, its vote share among the electorate reflected the continued marginalization of the party.[316]

Before the Janata Party could recover from the electoral set backs of 1996 parliamentary elections, the fall of the ruling Janata Dal coalition at the center in Delhi led to the dissolution of the parliament and holding of fresh parliamentary

elections in 1998. In the meantime, the political fault lines in Bihar had changed. Laloo Yadav's charisma suffered due to his arrest in connection with the fodder corruption scandal but he continued to outshine his political rivals when it came to ruling Bihar. The factional crisis in the Janata Dal Government at the center deepened when the intra-party feud triggered by the troika of Deve Gowda, then Prime Minister, Sharad Yadav and Ramvilas Paswan forced Laloo Yadav to relinquish the post of the national party president of the Janata Dal. Sensing his growing marginalization in the national politics of the Janata Dal, Laloo Yadav quit the Janata Dal and floated a new regional party named Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). The majority of the parent Janata Dal in Bihar remained with Laloo Yadav. Desperate to seek new alliance partner, he forged alliance with the Congress Party for the 1998 parliamentary elections. On the other hand, the BJP- Samata Dal combine turned the elections into a direct contest between pro and anti-Laloo Yadav forces. The Rashtriya Janata Dal suffered serious reverses winning just 17 seats. By contrast, the BJP- Samata Dal romped home with 29 seats (BJP19 and Samata Dal 10 seats respectively). The declining fortunes of the Rashtriya Janata Dal came into sharp relief in another snap parliamentary poll in 1999. In a straight contest, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and its ally captured 41 of the 51 Lok Sabha (Lower house of the parliament) and polled 43.3 percent of the votes, while the Rashtriya Janata Dal-Congress alliance won only 11 seats and polled 37.1 percent of the votes. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) suffered a major loss but by securing 28.3 percent of the popular vote continued to remain the single largest party in Bihar.[317] In a shocking reversal of electoral fortunes in just few months, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) comprising Bhartiya Janata Party, the Samata Dal, and the Janata Dal

(Secular), failed to translate their massive parliamentary victory into the subsequent assembly elections of February 2000.

One of the major reasons for the failure of the National Democratic Alliance was the result of bitter infighting on the leadership issue and nomination of candidates to the elections. Although experiencing significant decline of legislative strength, the RJD won 124 seats and emerged as the single largest party in the assembly. The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) finished way behind securing only 66 seats. The Bhartiya Janata Party led alliance could manage only 125 seats of the 324 seats in the assembly. The Congress Party with 23 seats emerged as the decider in the rapidly unfolding drama of coalition politics in Bihar.[318]

The post-assembly elections scene once again resembled the familiar scenario in the politics of Bihar, the drama of unusually short-lived government and machinations of coalition politics. According to many observers, in a sheer case of partisanship, the Governor of the state invited Nitish Kumar as the leader of the National Democratic Alliance to form the government on March 3, 2000. The game plan to split the Congress Party and buy independent members of the assembly failed miserably and the Samata Dal leader Nitish Kumar resigned as the Chief Minister of the state in less than 10 days paving the way for the RJD to form the government. On March 11, 2000, with the crucial support of the Congress Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Rabri Devi came back to power. This was the third time she assumed power in the state, an unprecedented record by any non-Congress leader.[319]

Although as the president of the Rashtriya Dal, Laloo Yadav has increasingly been reduced to the status of a powerful Yadav leader rather than a messiah, the ease

with which he has once again strengthened his hold over political power in Bihar continues to baffle analysts and masses alike.[320] Describing the apparently enigmatic nature of Laloo Yadav, historian Arvind Das writes:

> Indeed, Laloo Prasad is himself a figure who has caused immense confusion among the chattering classes. At first, they made fun of him as a country bumpkin, almost the village idiot of Indian politics. When those who knew him better pointed out his craftiness and cunning, they were described as having been taken in by the ideology of Mandalization. Later, Laloo Prasad Yadav was portrayed as an intrepid anti-communalist and the master of the *art of Realpolitik*. Again, when those who knew him better pointed out that he had no clue about the nitty-gritty of steering the ship of state, they were dismissed as carping critics who did not acknowledge the mastery of the great communicator..."[321]

One of the apparently inevitable outcomes of the "proxy rule" by Laloo Yadav is the so-called yadavization of the state power in Bihar. Commenting on rampant nepotism and favoritism, Walter Hauser writes that "the chief minister, openly cynical of the idea of serious administration, has nevertheless involved himself in widespread transfers and postings to the narrow interests of his caste fellows and political supporters. Any one remotely familiar with Bihar can identify the number and proportion of police officers or other officials of what caste have ascended or descended in their postings at the whim of the Chief Minister."[322] Though not new, nepotism and personalism have come to choke all pores of the state administration in Bihar. Partisan political interference has become the order of the day. Patronage rules the market place of politics. The strategy to enhance the presence of the backwards and dalits in the administration by exercising direct political control has effectively challenged the upper caste monopoly of the bureaucratic power in the state. However, this also has produced unintended consequence aggravating the continuing decline of the autonomy of the state and political institutions.

On the decline of the state power, Jason Burke comments, "estimates vary as to how many die in caste related violence in Bihar each other. The police say 2,000 but local reporters say the number is closer to 6,000. Meanwhile the administration of the State has all but collapsed. Development funds made available by central government can not be spent because the bureaucracy in the State has decayed to the point at which it is impossible to disburse the money."[323] Tottering on the brink of financial collapse, the state power has become not only so ineffective but so apathetic that it fails to pay regular salary to its own employees including teachers of collages and universities. According to a rough estimate, around 1.5 lakh (150,000) employees of various government boards and corporations have not received their salary for a period ranging from four to 94 months.[324] "We are surviving on monthly loans to afford essentials some how," says Patna University Teachers' Association General Secretary Amarnath Singh.[325] The practice of unpaid salaries has increasingly led people to starvation deaths and suicide. If press reports are to be believed, about 650 employees have died because of starvation in the last eight years in Bihar.[326] Commenting on the recent incidents of suicide on the issue of unpaid salary, a veteran Bihar analyst Shaibal Gupta remarks, "the state has collapsed. The government has become blind towards the woes of the employees who have no option but to choose desperate measures to highlight their plight."[327]

One of the clearest signs of the weakening of the political institutions in Bihar has been the increased legitimacy of crime and criminals in the mainstream political process. Commenting on the increased criminalization of politics in Bihar, William Dalrymple notes that "the mafia, the police and the politicians of the state are virtually interchangeable: Dular Chand Yadav who has 100 cases of dacoity and 50 murder

cases pending against him, can be addressed as Honorable Member from Barh... Great Swathes of countryside are controlled by the private armies of landlords and their rival Maoist militias. The state has withered; Bihar is now nearing a state of pure anarchy."[328]According to a press analysis, about 40 MLAs (members of legislative assembly) had links with organized crime in Bihar.[329] Interestingly, even crime has not escaped the caste fault lines. In the past too, criminals emerged and won elections but they failed to get respectability. Before the rise of Laloo Yadav to power, upper caste criminals dominated the scene. The trend towards dominance of criminals especially backwards castes and Muslims in state politics coincided with the onset of the Laloo Yadav's regime. Chanting the mantra of Mandalized politics, the MLA-dons turned into modern Robin Hoods unleashing war against upper caste leaders. Many Dons have started controlling important sources of political and economic resources hitherto controlled by upper castes at the grass roots. Some of the big names from the backward castes include Dualarchand Yadav, Bijendra Gope, Ranvir Yadav, Surendra Yadav;[330] The RJD Member of Parliament Mohammed Shahabuddin who faces numerous cases of murder and other crimes has become the most visible face of criminalization of politics in Bihar.[331] Though the Rashtriya Janata Dal is routinely accused of sheltering of criminals, the opposition parties are not far behind in supporting criminals. The opposition parties as a matter of fact derive strength from the upper caste dons such as Suraj Bhan, Ranjan Tiwari, Anand Mohan Singh, Aditya Singh, Sardar Krishna Singh, and Sunil Pandey. Incidentally, many of them are also involved in private caste armies.[332]

The crime-politics nexus transformed the contours of the underworld. The traditional crimes like dacoity have declined and money spinners like kidnapping-for

ransom and Rangdari tax or extracting protection money has become big industry. The bloodless crime of kidnapping generates about Rs 8-10 crore a year (about $ 2 million). Abduction for ransom has become so common that it no longer makes any news in Bihar. According to observers, the police recorded 350 cases of abductions in one single year in 2002. Most of the abductors enjoy patronage from the Dons turned members of assembly.[333] The Dons use caste for political power for themselves. The fight for social justice against upper caste has legitimized crime in Bihar for both the so-called protesting backward castes as well as the upper castes trying to protect their traditional dominance. Justifying the capture of power by means of crime, says Surendra Yadav, a member of state assembly, "those feet we used to touch are now touching our feet. We captured booths for them, now we are in power."[334] Reflecting on the perverse political environment in Bihar, one analyst comments, "Bihar's politics is now firmly in the grip of three C's-corruption, casteism, and crime."[335]

In sum, the slow but steady decline of state power in Bihar especially 1967 has been accompanied by the ruthless no-holds barred political power struggles between the traditionally dominant upper castes and emergent backward castes. Despite the long tradition of elite factionalism, the emerging power struggle was kept within manageable limits in the Congress Party until the historic elections of 1967. As the process of polarization of castes took a sharp turn in the late 1960s, a virulent power struggle ensued between the Congress Party and a fragile coalition of opposition forces in the 1970s and 1980s. This resulted in a series of short-lived governments and frequent turnover in the leadership. The come back of the Congress Party to power in the 1980s failed to stem the impending crisis of ineffectiveness of the government. The trend of increasing reliance on personal rule, deprofessionalization

of the bureaucracy, criminalization of politics and widespread corruption reached their zenith in the 1990s. This incidentally coincided with the capture of political power by the numerically preponderant backward castes led by Laloo Yadav in Bihar. Although it is hard to visualize a scenario in which backward castes would not play a decisive role, the process of vicious alignments and realignments within the backward castes point to the recurring pattern of consolidation and fragmentation of castes coupled with fierce elite factionalism in the politics of Bihar. In this climate of what Atul Kohli describes "the undisciplined power struggles among the competing political elite", exacerbated by the continuing agrarian conflict in the civil society, the emergence of private caste armies is no surprise in Bihar.[336]

CHAPTER IV

EMERGENCE AND PROLIFERATION OF CASTE ARMIES IN BIHAR

The emergence and proliferation of various caste senas (armies) can be best understood within the context of two interrelated struggles: unmediated political struggle for the control of state power and an escalating agrarian conflict in Bihar. This chapter offers an interpretative narrative of the emergence and proliferation of caste armies as "politics by violent means" in Bihar. As we have noted earlier, Bihar has a long history of peasant unrest coupled with ruthless political power struggles in post-independence Bihar especially since 1967. This chapter presents evidence that private caste senas have been brought about by the contemporary experience of democratic politics in Bihar. The sphinx-like rise, decline and re-emergence of senas are causally connected to the agrarian radicalism of lower castes and growing powerlessness of the state. Instead of maintaining monopoly over means of coercion, the state chooses to recognize private caste senas as surrogate arm of the state. Furthermore, the emergence of caste senas also points out that the conventions and ideological norms of the caste society in real life are continually reconstituted and contested. In other words, the private caste senas are deeply implicated in the dynamics of caste, class and state power in Bihar. This explains how and why caste senas emerge not only as surrogate arm of the state and violent political entrepreneurs but also community warriors.

What are Senas?

It is interesting to consider the various ways in which the term sena is understood in Bihar. The most widely prevalent meaning of Sena is army in the sense of having arms, ammunition and the expert knowledge of warfare. Most often, sena is understood as a paramilitary syndicate consisting of criminal gangs and petty feudal elements. This has led to portrayal of Senas as "class warriors" defending the propertied classes with unusual ruthlessness. According to historian Arvind Das, "the process of the development of these senas was gradual. They began ostensibly as mass organizations and slowly converted themselves under locally charismatic leaders into hit-and run squads at first and then into almost regular standing armies."[337] In this view, the emergence of senas is merely a continuation of the tradition of armed retainers (*lathials*) hired by landlords in Bihar. This is however one-dimensional and also reductionist interpretation of the senas because of its failure to recognize the enmeshing of senas in the struggles for state power in post-independent India. The distinctiveness of senas, as they have emerged in post-independence Bihar lies in their participation in quasi-political functions rather than protecting property of one or two landlords. Therefore, senas need a political interpretation as well.

Sena as a political entity is not new to political landscape. The tradition of using senas as a vehicle of political awakening and mobilization of untouchables (dalits) goes back to Ambedkar, the father of dalit awakening in India. As a mobilizational entity, a caste sena can be non-violent and legal. Following Ambedkar, many dalit politicians run Dalit Senas as cadre based political machines that organize political rallies, mobilize public opinion against caste atrocities, and build a popular constituency. For instance, Ramvilas Paswan, a former Union Minister from Bihar

runs a Dalit Sena mainly as a youth brigade of his political party. In the same vein, Ramai Ram of the Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar operates a Dalit Sena mainly as his personal storm troopers. Though the Red armies or Lal Senas are strongly identified with dalits, they are not described as the Harijans private army because they are run along Maoist principles of class revolution.

One peculiar feature of the violent, private caste senas is that their life span is very short, not more than five –six years. They go through the process of disintegration, split, dormancy and death in many cases. The world of private caste senas is "short, brutish, and nasty" said one ideologue of Ranvir Sena.[338] The relatively short life of senas is generally attributed to annihilatory tactics of Maoist groups and fluctuating fortunes in the political life in Bihar. It is true that caste senas face a tough challenge from highly motivated cadres of Naxals. However, this view neglects the interconnections between caste and politics. As caste is structurally segmented across regions, senas fail to mobilize horizontally. Further, senas are not immune to acute factional fights among political parties over issues of political patronage, money, and leadership. These battles are not fought in the darkness of massacre politics, but in the well-lit drawing rooms of their not so covert patron-politicians, bureaucrats, and criminal-turned government contractors. Cadres wait in suspense as to the outcomes of struggles over spoils in the villages.[339]Senas become active as politico-military formations during elections striking deals in electoral markets from mainstream political parties. So in this sense, senas symbolize the increasing irrelevance of political parties in the electoral market in Bihar.

The Naxals dominated areas are considered "badlands for politics" in Bihar. Therefore political parties often justify the services of senas to intimidate voters, capture booths and win elections. This explains why caste senas die but not their leaders and cadres. They re-emerge under different garbs and at various times. Emerging as quasi-spontaneous assembly of caste *sabhas* (caste association), most senas increasingly assume the character of violent political entrepreneurs closely aligned with powerful politicians belonging to mainstream political parties. In many instances, former commanders of caste senas transition to becoming provider of violent merchandise, a necessary ingredient of elections in contemporary Bihar. Therefore, it gradually becomes difficult to distinguish violent political entrepreneurs from defenders of propertied castes and classes in the rural Bihar. Many of their leaders swiftly cross the thin line between illegal political movements and officially organized politics. They often penetrate established political parties, trade unions and caste associations. Interestingly, sena commanders seldom become powerful politicians. They mostly operate as retailers of violent merchandise providing much needed resources and personnel to candidates belonging to different political parties. Furthermore, they also help organize routine politics in the wake of weakening of political parties. It is no secret in Bihar that many politicians take help from caste senas for organizing constituency services.[340] In this sense, the portrayal of atrocities on lower castes by caste senas as "undeclared civil war" whose leading characteristics is "spontaneous, leaderless violence against property and persons" is erroneous.[341] On the other hand, the decline of state power and increasing criminalization of politics in Bihar has contributed to the depiction of senas as "paramilitary syndicate" of landowning classes having links with rural criminal gangs and the urban criminal

underworld. According to the People's Union of Democratic Rights, organized around caste ideology, senas regularly hire criminal gangs and toughs who often not only massacre lower caste Naxals but also involve in killing and kidnapping of ordinary citizens in villages and cities as mercenaries. Faced with the challenge of preventing violent attacks on landlords in the wake of Naxal movement, the police and the state administration actively helped in the organization of ad-hoc gangs of criminals to repress the movement of rural poor.[342]

Another popular meaning of caste sena is "voluntary self-defense armed bands" against real or imagined insurgents but not against the state. In this sense, sena fights the so-called extremists who attempt to undermine the established order. This meaning sheds light on why in the popular imagination senas (armies) are often viewed as "surrogate state apparatus". The evidence from Bihar demonstrates that the state responds favorably in most cases to the senas' fight against the "enemy of the state" on moral and political grounds. Most state functionaries consider senas not deriving any personal gains but engaged indirectly in protecting the prestige of the state that is increasingly under attack from murderous Naxals. Facing the humiliating prospect of Naxals running so-called parallel government in many parts of the state, the state functionaries feel powerless, threatened, and outraged.[343] This often leads them to recognize unofficially senas as "citizens' army" articulating republican spirit against the so-called enemy of the state. For many sena activists, state may be partisan, corrupt but not unjust or immoral as one Ranvir Sena ideologue said.[344] True, they detest the policies of land reforms and procurement prices of agrarian commodities and they oppose the state's so-called anti-farmer actions, but do not challenge state's moral and political authority as a guarantor of social order. And

senas have justified the faith reposed in them by the state power. Senas never attack police stations, government buildings, or any other symbols of state power. In contrast, Naxal attacks on police and the government are endemic and violent bringing opprobrium from the authorities. This makes labeling of Naxals as potential destroyer of state power.[345] Therefore, most Naxal senas (armies) known as Lal senas (Red armies) are dealt with ruthlessly by the police. No government, whether it is headed by the upper castes or backward castes, shows any qualms in ensuring repressive measures to crush the so-called Naxals.

Based on shared bonds of community and caste, senas also represent themselves as community warriors. It is interesting to note that the term sena evokes a strong sense of "righteousness". It appears to have been embedded in devotional tradition of Hinduism, "evoking the ideal of the Hindu warrior who fights for his lord in a spirit of selfless piety"[346]. Ask sena activists, whether from Ranvir Sena or Red army (Lal Sena), they immediately point to the ideal of a warrior who fights in a spirit of selflessness, sacrifice, justice, honor, and virtue.[347] This elevates the status of violence; from being nasty, dark, and anarchic, violence acquires a worthy, righteous and modernist character. Therefore, though origins of sena are strongly influenced by the patterns of control of land, senas acquire the character of community warriors in many instances of caste wars. Admittedly, caste senas coerce, intimidate and massacre lower castes. They, however, righteously represent themselves as defenders of community norms. Claims to personal gains are discounted. The spirit of sacrifice pervades the rhetoric and construction of identity of senas. Land no longer remains a material artifact. It quickly acquires cultural, symbolic and a divinely ordained character. The attackers on land are considered polluters of a way of life deserving

violent death. This perhaps explains the rage and hatred with which senas massacre lower caste men, women and children. In the mental universe of the senas, the massacres of the lower castes, unclean and impure, are just, legitimate and righteous.[348]

The Dynamics of Private Caste Senas in Bihar

The earlier discussion of the dynamics of the peasant unrest and the ineffectiveness of the state power has demonstrated that caste senas are neither spontaneous nor sporadic development in the politics of Bihar. Emerging from the vestiges of the traditional lathials (musclemen) who formed the coercive arm of big Zamindars, senas came into existence as a private response to the upsurge of radical peasant movements led by various Maoist groups popularly called Naxals and pejoratively described as "extremists" by the government in Bihar. The caste senas are different from armed gangs of Individual landlords. The tradition of maintaining private arm retainers by the feudal lords for the purpose of extraction of land revenue and for maintaining feudal hegemony is age old. On the other hand, caste senas are mobilized around specific caste in the form of collective action. They are also distinct from criminal gangs and social bandit. The phenomenon of dacoits along caste lines is not new to Bihar. What is new is the blurring of the distinction between caste Senas and private dacoit gangs. Though many criminal elements find easy way into caste Senas, they operate more as military formation of caste Senas. For instance, Bengali Singh of Kansara village in Karpi block of Jehanabad was not only a powerful Brahmarsi Sena commander but also a "noted dacoit" in the region.[349] Killing, massacres, and rape of dalits are some of the means by which caste senas attempt to restore the declining social dominance of the landed castes.

The development of sena has followed a gradual process in the social history of Bihar. Senas proliferated in certain Central Bihar areas where Maoist groups had established strong presence in terms of mobilization of landless labor especially lower castes and some sections of backward castes. Senas have arisen in areas where modest agricultural development has taken place as compared to many other parts of stagnant rural economy of North Bihar. In terms of agrarian class structure, the senas have emerged in areas dominated by small landlords and rich middle caste peasants. It is worth noting here that most senas are concentrated in areas where the Kisan Sabha of Swami Sahajanand and Triveni Sangh of backward castes were organized in the 1930s. Earlier rural oppression was maintained by social and ideological domination of upper castes in the local caste hierarchy. The need for physical domination over the lower castes was met by maintaining armed retainers and functionaries by individual Zamindars. Additionally, operation of the patronage and *jajmani* (reciprocity) system of caste had, to some extent, put brakes on the absolute repression of poor and lower castes in the rural power structures. This also allowed playing out of everyday resistance in a variety of forms somewhat blunting the harsh realities of iniquitous power relations in the countryside in Bihar. This does not mean that there were no occasions for collective violence in the countryside. According to colonial records, violent agrarian disputes were endemic but the scale was limited without involving much killing. This led to agrarian riots momentary and sporadic in Bihar.[350] In most of the agrarian disturbances, the "well-off" participated, from the landholder down to the ranks of the powerful and privileged in the village society, the petty *maliks*, and the substantial *raiyats*. The predominance of the village level controllers and the community bonds mitigated the sustained conflict between the landholders and

peasants. Secondly, Zamindari was an internally differentiated system. There were few large estate-holders like Darbhanga Raja, one of the largest landlords in pre-independence India.

The Zamindari system that developed in the event of permanent settlement of 1793 was notorious for proliferation of smaller landlords, petty Zamindars and tenant farmers.[351] Zamindari was complicated by the creation of a new class of absentee landowners who, however, were as ruthless as Zamindars but were never in the position to dominate fully. The rule by force is not new to Bihar. In many parts of Bihar such as Purnea in North Bihar, Zamindars ruled with the help of a large army of musclemen organized along the lines of feudal army. These muscle men were responsible for the extraction of surplus, and revenue from the share-croppers. The lathials (clubmen or musclemen) were also familiar faces in the disputes between two powerful local Zamindars as regards settlement of proprietary interests. Notwithstanding active role of lathials, the expression of routine outbursts of recalcitrance or intense episodes of peasant unrest activated the subterranean undercurrents to fully manifest into an organized struggle against locally dominant classes in the post-independence period.

In post-independence Bihar the slow but steady rise of the neo-rich peasants replacing the dominance of the Zamindars set the stage for the emergence of Naxal rebellion and its counterpart private caste Senas in Bihar.[352] Commenting on the social origins of private caste Senas, historian Arvind Das writes:

> ...the new Senas which have come up in various parts of Bihar in recent years however are not hired gangs but are more in the nature of "voluntary" and "participatory" organizations of the rural rich themselves. Their support base is the section which can be broadly classed the emergent rich peasantry composed of

the Junker-type landlords-turned-capitalist farmers, the kulak-type substantial erstwhile tenants and the upwardly mobile economic and social groups among the Rajputs, Bhumihars, Yadav, Kurmis and other upper caste and backward agriculturists. And the prime target of such Senas is not rent paying tenants and sharecroppers but agricultural laborers.[353]

The new dominant classes in the countryside, created largely by the abolition of Zamindari Act and various provisions of land reforms, acquired dominance without legitimacy. Unlike traditional Zamindars, the new class of rich peasants did not enjoy the absolute support of the state. The abolition of Zamindari had some unintended consequences; it created benefits to Bhumihar, Yadav, Kurmi and Koiri tenants. These castes gradually became prime movers in the emerging capitalist agriculture especially in Central Bihar. The introduction of Green Revolution hastened the process creating a paradoxical condition; capitalist enclave of agricultural production within over all semi-feudal relation of production in Bihar. The issues of minimum wages for the labor and the issue of social dignity came to the fore complicating the social ecology. Confirming these trends a brilliant survey of Patna district in the 1980s observes:

In the western part of the Patna district i.e. in Naubatpur, Bikram, Pali, Bihata, Khagual, and Maner block the landlords and rich peasants belonging to upper castes dominated, while in the eastern part i.e. Phulwari-Sahriff, Poonpun, Masaurhi, Dhanaura, and Fatwa blocks, the backward castes, especially Kurmi landlords and rich peasants, dominate. Brahmins, Bhumihars, Rajputs, and Kayasthas form the upper castes. They command strong influence in various political organizations and in the administration. They provide the core of Congress (I) and BJP vote banks in Patna district... among the main backward castes of this district re Kurmis, Yadavas and Koiris as well as kanu, kahars, beldars, etc. A section of the backward castes are rich peasants who were raiyats before 1952. After the Zamindari Abolition Act, they became owners of big holdings. Through cultivation, employment and other sources their incomes have gone up. They purchased land from ex-landlords at very cheap rate and though various means, they continued to enlarge their holdings. Soon they emerged as a new class of landlords. With their developing economic and social position, their political ambition too has grown. These new –style landowners are fiercely aggressive and despotic. They ruthlessly exploit the landless poor and middle

peasants in numerous ways and many of these belong to the backward castes...The peasants of Patna districts organized themselves not only against the social injustice but also against the improper implementation of the Minimum Wages Act. From 1967 onwards the landless and poor peasantry, mainly dalits, started manifesting militancy...The landlords on their part organized themselves under the banner of Bhoomi Sena to resist the organized strength of the poor of this area. This private army of the landlord is getting patronage of the government.[354]

In this sense, the senas have been organized as the violent defender of class and caste domination of certain landholding castes attempting to cling to age-old patterns of domination. However, one must also recognize the way senas have been implicated in the ruthless political struggles for state power in Bihar. Nearly all-political parties have either actively engaged or patronized caste based Senas primarily for electoral and political dividends in the region. The interplay between electoral politics and Senas is illustrated by the partisan stance different political parties take on the caste massacres in Bihar. Pointing out the perverse influence of vote bank politics, a report of the People's Union of Democratic Rights says

Where Bhumihar landowners are killed, the BJP visits the village, and meets and supports the survivors. On the other hand, where dalits are killed by the Ranvir Sena, the RJD and Congress leaders, with an eye to the vote bank, visits promptly. So the Chief Minister did not visit Senari where 35 Bhumihars had been killed by the MCC. On the other hand, three cabinet and one Union Ministers belonging to BJP-Samata visited the site. Even before they were in power, BJP leaders of the importance of Murli Monohar Joshi visited Raghopur, where the CPI-ML (Party – Unity) had killed 7 Bhumihars in April 1997. The dalits likewise appear to be fairly convinced of the cynical calculations behind the visit of RJD leaders to the sites of massacres by the Sena. In fact, in Shankarbigha, the families of the victims faced the Chief Minister, Rabri Devi and Laloo Prasad Yadav with anger and resentment.[355]

Therefore, the "armies of the night" as caste senas are sometimes called, emerged crisscrossing the complex patterns of state and society engagements in Bihar. The fierce and unrestrained power struggles for state power led many politicians to forge special relationship with caste armies because winning elections became more important than anything else. The numbers mattered more in making and breaking

and remaking of new alliances, factions and groups in politics. As a result, crime acquired political respect if not social respect. One of the unintended consequences of Naxal rebellion in most parts of Central Bihar was the rising cost of fighting elections. Most of my respondents in the village and district towns told me that the cost of hiring muscle men, buying guns and bombs became high. This also put high pressure on them to divert "developmental fund" for winning elections. The pork barrel politics gave way to violent political entrepreneurs. The distinctions between underworld, social bandits, and routine politics blurred. The growing alliance between village, and district level politicians and the criminal world became a convenient alliance for appropriating not only rural surplus but also state property i.e. development fund. And bureaucrats were not left behind. One senior bureaucrat remarks

> facing rising costs of living, it became highly difficult to maintain a decent life-style. We took to corruption initially in good faith. So corruption was meant as liberal interpretation of rules rather than plunder of the property of the state. Sadly, soon many of my colleagues started not breaking rules but also writing new rules of the game, unofficial rules. This affected the politico-administrative culture also. What used to be formal rule bound system became a system based on informal personal relations. In other words, personalism replaced professionalism.[356]

Naxalites, Senas and the State Power: From Surrogate arm of the state to violent political entrepreneur

Following the arrival of "spring thunder" in the state of West Bengal, the Naxals rebellion started from Mushari block in Muzaffarpur, a district in North Bihar in 1967.[357] Alarmed at the beginning of a West Bengal like scenario in Bihar, the state attempted to crush the Naxals. As has been discussed earlier, Naxals initially acquired the image of "local Robin Hoods" or native form of Nakshatra Malakar.[358] In the first phase, the Naxal movement suffered a setback as a result of police actions and lack of strong organizational basis. The first phase of Naxal rebellion was characterized as

"infantile adventurism" due to mindless application of class war strategy by the Naxals. Interestingly, the first phase of Naxal movement did not witness any caste senas as the Naxal movement failed to strike deep roots in the soil of North Bihar. The second phase, however, witnessed a qualitative and dramatic change in scene. The venue of Naxal movement shifted from Mushari in North Bihar to Ekwari in Central Bihar. Bhojpur became the epicenter of peasant radicalism. The police department of the Bihar government quickly recognized the changing contours of peasant unrest. B.N. Sinha, a senior police officer in charge of Naxal operations noted in 1975 that "the cult of violence in Bihar, as also in the belt from Sahar to Mokameh, has its two phases; the first between 1967 – 1971, was very much marked in North Bihar and southernmost Bihar and the second phase, since 1972 to the present time, is writ large in Bhojpur, Patna, Nalanda, Giridih, Hazaribagh, and Dhanbad."[359]

Instead of direct action, the government opted for a diffused and private response providing arms to the landlords for their self-defense against peasant uprising. Exploring the origins of private caste armies, Atul Kohli points out that "As challenges by the poor have mounted in the countryside, many in the state apparatus have chosen simply to let a decentralized pattern of private responses deal with the problem."[360] Describing Naxalites as extremists, the government decided to align with the locally dominant landlords as partner in order to quell agrarian disturbances. When Naxal movement started picking up in the Central Bihar region, the commissioner of Bhagalpur Mr. Ram Chandra Prasad assured landowners that he would give license for arms to persons to counter Naxalism.[361] Through generous grant of licensed firearms, the state encouraged the proliferation of senas as village

defense groups. Commenting on the nexus between police and the senas, a report of the People's Union of Democratic Rights in 1986 wrote

> One of the striking aspects of Central Bihar is the brazenness with which the police and the demonstration give support to the illegal and violent activities of these senas. During the Task force Operations in Gaya district last year 200 gun licenses were issued by the demonstration which in form of the other has reached these senas. In fact, this is continuation of the policy adopted during the seventies in the counter insurgency operations against the Naxalites in Bhojpur and other areas, when a large number of firearms were issued to landlords and even centers for training them were setup.[362]

In this, senas were also helped greatly by illegal production of arms in various parts of Bihar. Bihar is considered a "gun-runner's paradise". Places such as Munger, Nalanda and Bhojpur became synonymous with "cottage arms industry."[363] In 1975, giving the first clear indication of the evolving state policy towards Naxals, a senior police officer stated that:

> ...the Bihar government has decided to arm all able –bodied persons in Bhojpur and Patna districts for self-defense to face the extremist menace, who have recently launched an armed struggle... District magistrates of both the districts have been asked to visit the affected villages and issue licenses for fire arms on the spot to those who were able to posses them.... The decision was taken following a spurt in the armed attacks on landowners by the extremists in these villages. The trouble was mostly of agrarian nature.[364]

That the private caste Senas maintained a cozy relationship with the bureaucracy became axiomatic.[365] A Union Government team from Delhi sent to investigate causes of violence in Bihar noted that "considerable action taken by the state government to enhance police strength in the affected areas does not seem to provide much assurance that it helps bolster up the position of the weak to resist their exploitation and oppression."[366]

During the National Emergency of 1975, the Congress government attempted to combine direct repression with a modicum of developmental initiative to resolve

power struggles at the grassroots. Operation Siddhartha was launched as a socio-economic program in Jehanabad area to foster development as a way to win over Naxalites. The stakes in the agrarian conflict were very high. The dominant castes not only controlled local economic resources but also all political largess meant for the development of local areas. The "development fund" meant for building local roads, hospitals, creation of new jobs, seeds, pesticides, and economic empowerment of lower castes was considered a natural privilege of locally dominant castes having access to governmental power in Patna. According to local observers, the state's strategy to countering Naxal rebellion was enmeshed in the local reality of power relations. One local analyst says that" The deployment of police also followed a pattern without any exception; seldom new police post was created. In most cases, the police force was accommodated in deodhis (village outposts of Zamindars) giving the impression that the state was arrayed against week (Naxals) and protected the rich and the powerful."[367] This increasingly eroded the legitimacy of the state as an autonomous actor in the emerging social conflicts in the late 1970s.

The third phase began in the early 1980s when new Naxalites emerged. The main organization representing new phase in Naxal movement was Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation group. In this phase, the Naxals especially Liberation group renounced the theory of "excitative violence" and also issued disclaimer on "individual assassination". They attributed the increasing level of violence in the rural area to the violence perpetrated by heavily armed landlords. The "New Naxals" as they came to be called, asserted the rights of the poor peasants to organize their own resistance. This was considered necessary to counter the attacks of growing private caste armies.

The new Naxals' fundamental policy turn took place on the issue of participation in electoral democracy. They appreciated the contribution of democracy to deepening of social democracy in Bihar. This found expression in their participation in the 1985 assembly elections in Bihar. New Naxals were led by Indian People's Front (the mass organization) as the liberation group was underground and banned by the government.[368] Though, they did not win a single seat in 1985, they fought against the practice of booth capturing in almost all places that they contested. For many lower castes, this was a new beginning.[369] This new beginning in democracy was matched by a ruthless response from caste senas who increasingly assumed the mantle of violent political entrepreneurs. Earlier, most caste senas such as Bhoomi Sena and Brahmarsi Sena were more interested in direct violent confrontation with the Naxalites. One of the favorite slogans of Bhoomi Sena *was "Naxaliyon ki kya dawai? Che Che inch do bhai"* (What is the remedy for getting rid of Naxalites? Shorten them by six inches) With Naxals participating in elections, the caste senas also increasingly directed their attention to electoral politics in Bihar.

The evolving relationship between the state power and the caste senas acquired a new dimension in the wake of increasing ineffectiveness of the government in the mid 1980s. Mired in factional feuds and power struggles between rising rich sections of backward castes and upper castes, the government in Bihar partly by design and partly by default perfected a new mechanism of control and conflict, privatization of law and order, especially in those parts where new Naxals were waging a powerful peasant movement. The journey from the limited Raj to limited state was complete. Following the colonial practice, the state removed itself from the grassroots and confined itself to power struggles in the state institutions. What had

started out as an ad hoc response to Naxals became a full –fledged policy of the state. Facing increased instances of massacres by private caste armies and Maoist groups, the Bindeshwari Dubey Government of Congress announced arming of the landlords against the Naxalites in 1986.[370] This led to what is popularly described emergence of caste senas as surrogate arm of the state power.

The evolution of caste senas was, however, problematic and fraught with contradictions. Most often political compulsions lead the government to declare senas illegal and ban them. While banning, theoretically the state does not discriminate between caste senas and Lal senas (red armies) of Maoist groups. For instance, the Bindeshwari Dubey government banned the Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (MKSS) on August 14, 1986 immediately after the infamous Arwal massacre of MKSS supporters by Jehanabad police. In the same year of August 1986, the Dubey government also banned the Lal senas of the Party Unity and the CPI (ML) liberation groups. The same day on 14th August the Dubey government banned the Kuer Sena, Lorik Sena, and Brahmarsi Sena.[371] The Maoist Communist Center (MCC) was banned in the wake of Dalelchak-Baghora massacre. A policy document of the Bihar police titled "Extremists and Sena activists in Bihar" submitted to the Dubey government in 1986, described caste senas as "self-defense groups" which indulge only in "retaliatory violence". Unwittingly admitting the role of the police bureaucracy in promoting surrogate caste militia of the state, the document stated

> the emergence of the Senas as a self-defense group is an indication of abdication of effective role performance by the police. In fact, there was a tendency among police functionaries to encourage the defense groups to organize themselves in order to fight it out with the Naxalites... this was the very negation of police performance which actually resulted in the rise of different caste Senas in Bihar.[372]

It is noteworthy that Maoist groups have been opposed by all mainstream political parities. Accusing them of creating anarchy, most political parties in Bihar take an unrelenting anti- Naxalite position. Occasionally, a few backward caste leaders have recognized the Naxals as potential ally in their war on upper caste domination. For instance, Karpoori Thakur criticized the then Congress chief minister Daroga Prasad Rai for crushing Naxalites. Karpoori Thakur took a soft line on so-called Naxalites. Instead of describing them as hooligans he described their outbursts as indication of "social and political malaise."[373] Of late, Laloo Yadav, the de-facto chief-minister of Bihar, has been accused of patronizing MCC, (Maoist Communist Center) one of the dreaded Maoist groups, in order to marginalize his political opponents. Since MCC comprises many Yadavas, the allegations stick in the public imagination.[374]

The police and civil administration view Naxals and senas purely as "law and order issue." Speaking to a team of People's Union for Democratic Rights, a senior civil bureaucrat of the Palamau district explained the ongoing violent conflict between Sunlight Sena and the Naxalites as a "gang war."[375] Consistent with this law and order perspective, the state administration views the elimination of Naxals or so-called extremists necessary for making caste senas irrelevant in the countryside. The perception of senas as vigilante groups has become a standard policy response of the state power in Bihar. Governments come and go but the policy towards Senas does not change. For instance, on 3rd April 1999, the Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi in a statement on massacres in Bihar described the private armies as "organized in defense against the extremist activities."[376] The state highlighted the killings as part of war of

dominance (*varchasva ki ladai*) between the private caste armies and radical peasant organizations demonstrating the continuation of the official policy toward Senas.

The violent conflict between caste senas and Naxals also influence the dynamics of the relationship between the Central Government in Delhi and the State government in Patna. Furthermore, caste senas also exercise significant influence on the policy choice, and electoral competition. In spite of bitter political differences, the Central Government of India and the State Government of Bihar quickly announced a policy to curb increasing incidents of massacres in Bihar in April 1999. The new policy is similar to the carrot-and stick policy of Operation Siddhartha (Jehanabad and Aurangabad) and Operation Rakshak. (Patna, Nalanda, Bhojpur, Rohtas, Gaya, Aurangabad, And Jehanabad) launched simultaneously in the 1980s. The former dealt with issues of land reforms and the building of roads. The latter formed the repressive part of the policy of state. It dealt with modernization of police force, and deploying paramilitary forces. The new policy announced by the Rabri Devi government focused on building of roads, modernization of police forces, settlement of land disputes, employment generation etc. One of the highlights of the new policy is that the Union Government has agreed to bear fifty percent of security related expenses. The Union government also agreed to release more paramilitary forces to deal with "extremists".[377] As part of the new policy, the state government deployed paramilitary forces to deal with both Naxals and caste senas particularly the Ranvir Sena. Between January 1997-and April 1999, according to state government reports, the police conducted about 22, 276 raids in the four districts of Jehanabad, Gaya, Patna, and Bhojpur. The police also arrested about 2542 persons.[378] Thus, the arm of the state is limp but long and powerful enough to remind the presence of the state in the civil

society. It also shows that the there is not total breakdown of the state or vacuum at the grassroots in Bihar. In contrast, the state perpetuates itself by intervening selectively in most cases of power struggles. On occasion, the state does not intervene at all leaving the caste senas and Naxals to sort out power struggles violently. This is best illustrated by a discussion of the rise and fall of the various senas in Bihar.

Rise and Decline of the Private Caste Senas

Empirical evidence suggests that caste senas have operated sporadically in a limited region following a pattern of rise and decline. As has been indicated earlier that the life of senas is relatively short. Most of the senas that arose in the late 1970s comprised upper castes and rich backward castes. Except for the Ranvir Sena, none of the senas articulated a clear cut ideology and established organization. There are mainly two types of senas in Bihar, major senas and smaller senas. Smaller senas such as Amar Sena, Ganga Sena, Parsuram Sena, Ajad Sena,(founded by one Mohan Dubey in Bhojpur), and Sri Krishna Sena (founded by a retired soldier from Indian Army, Ambika Singh) were extremely limited. The smaller senas were mainly run as local village level defense unit against the uprising of Naxals. These senas died quickly for want of organization, ideology and clear-cut political aims. Most smaller senas also merged into major senas. In this sense, smaller senas operated mainly as recruiting personnel for major senas. Most smaller senas were run by middle and marginal peasants rather than big landlords. None of the smaller senas enjoyed any serious political patronage barring a few individual politicians. Therefore, smaller senas ended up becoming the cannon fodder for the politicians looking for booth capturing and winning elections.[379] In the dissertation, the focus is on major senas.

Table 9: Major Private Caste Armies in Bihar[380]

Name	Caste Background	Year of Birth	Districts of Influence	Nature of Government
Bhoomi Sena	Kurmi	1979-1982	Patna, Nalanda, Nawada, Jehanabad.	Janata Party Government Karpoori Thakur, 6/22/1977-4/21/1979. Ram Sundar Das 4/22/1979-2/17/1980.
Kuer Sena	Rajputs	Originally in 1969, reemerged in 1980	Bhojpur and Patna	Congress (I) Jagannath Mishra 6/8/1980-4/14/1983
Lorik Sena	Yadav	1980	Patna, Nalanda, Jehanabad	Same as above
Brahmarsi Sena	Bhumihar	1980	Bhojpur, Jehanabad, Aurangabad.	Same as above
Savarna Liberation Front (SLF)	Bhumihar	1980	Jehanabad, Patna, Gaya	Same as above
Sunlight Sena	Rajputs	1986	Palamau, Garhwa, Gaya, Aurangabad	Congress (I) Bindeshwari Dubey 3/12/1985-2/13/1988
Ranvir Sena	Bhumihar	1994	Patna, Bhojpur, Jehanabad,	Janata Dal (RJD), Laloo/Rabri 3/10/1990-till today.

Before the emergence of Ranvir Sena, earlier caste Senas had either disintegrated or merged into mainstream political parties due to rapidly fluctuating political fortunes in the state, more importantly, the emerging "radical peasant politics"[381] led by the radical Maoist groups. Interestingly, the genesis of senas is often traced to the vicious cycle of massacres of dalits beginning in Belchi in 1977.[382] The massacres of dalits in most cases and upper castes in some cases, progressively became the order of the day as the various Maoist groups knows as Naxalites and private caste armies of landowners belonging to upper caste and rich sections of backward castes became engaged in a no-holds-barred war of supremacy.

Yashwant Kumar Choudhary, leader of the Swatantra Party in the assembly of Bihar was one of earliest advocates of forming a private army to deal with Naxal uprising in the state. On February 24, 1970 he announced that his party was going to organize a Kisan Sena (Farmer's Army) to crush the extremists of the state. He also said that that the strength of the Sena would be one lakh (One hundred thousand). He alleged that the "Bihar government failed to protect the life and property of the Kisan of Bihar and anti-national elements and criminals were operating with impunity."[383] He later accused Bihar government led by Daroga Rai of siding with communist elements. This was evident according to him the way police failed to protect the crops of farmers who were being targeted by "forcible grab of land" by Communist Party of India and other Socialist parties as part of their land reforms movement in the 1970. However, the Kisan Sena could not become a reality but it indicated the extent to which politicians were prepared to go to counter the so-called Naxals. As discussed earlier, with the spread of Naxals in the late 1970s, the battle lines increasingly became drawn in terms of both caste and class. Organized around Maoist principles, Naxals used the language of class to define and fight their opponents. In contrast, the senas mixed the language of caste with class as well. An interpretative reading of some of the major and best known caste senas reveal dynamics of caste, class and state in contemporary Bihar.

Bhoomi Sena (Kurmi Caste Sena)

The term Bhoomi means "land". As has been analyzed earlier, Kurmis are one of those emergent backward castes that have taken advantage of Zamindari abolition and land reforms in the early years of independence in Bihar. The ownership over land has always been a crucial issue in the representation of the

identity of Kurmi. In the pre-independence era, Kurmi caste council had extolled repeatedly the virtues of the Kurmis as the *Bhoomi putra* (son of the soil).[384] Therefore, any encroachment on their land was to be resisted, more so if it came from dalits considered unclean and impure in the hierarchy of the caste. The resistance required appeal to caste bonds and landed interests as well The ruthlessness with which Kurmis defended their superior rights in the land and attempted to reimpose traditional jajmani relations was demonstrated in the massacres of dalits in Belchi in 1977. This is the first instance of massacre of lower castes by rising backward castes asserting their social and political ascendancy in Bihar. Since the Belchi massacre would soon become forerunner to the increasing cases of massacres perpetrated by various caste senas in Bihar, this massacre requires a brief explanation.

In Belchi, Kurmi landlords massacred eleven lower caste persons on May 27, 1977. Belchi is located at the border of Patna and Nalanda districts. The area, according to locals, is popularly called "the land of Kurmis" due to dominant position of Kurmis in local power structures. According to available evidence, the Belchi massacre was perpetrated by Kurmi landlords Inderdeo Choudhary, Mahavir Mahato and their supporters. Observing the power of Kurmi in the region one analyst writes "the new rich Kurmis of this area are in a very strong position not only economically but politically too. At the elections any candidate enjoying the support of the trigger-happy gangsters of Inderdeo Choudhary can just not lose". Contrary to local perception and reality, the then Union Home Minister Charan Singh, the formidable backward caste Jat leader from Uttar Pradesh, sided with the rising power of the Kurmi in Bihar. In a reply to the debate on Belchi massacre in Indian Parliament, he described the massacre as "a clash between two criminal gangs"[385]. Many non-

partisan observers and civil liberty organizations hotly contested this. The probe committee of Bihar Assembly chaired by Vijay Kumar Choudhary of Janata Party considered the massacre as a clash between oppressor and oppressed. [386] The Belchi massacre clearly put the so-called non-elite peasant caste Kurmis on top of the new caste and class alignments. Therefore, the formation of the Bhoomi Sena is best understood in the assertion of new patterns of domination by newly emerging power elite in Bihar.

The Bhoomi Sena of Kurmi grew out of "Kisan Suraksha Samiti" (Peasant Protection Council) of Kurmis in 1973-74. In the late 1980s, the CPI (ML) started a wave of land seizure movement and also strikes for wage earners. Some successful mass movements aimed at occupying some small plots of waste land, repairing *nahars* (water reservoirs), tanks as well securing fishing rights in the river and curbing criminal acts such as rape committed by the landed gentry threatened the newly acquired fragile prosperity and status of Kurmis. To counter this, Kurmis formed a village level informal caste council to unite Kurmi peasants under one banner. As is well known in Bihar that Kurmis dominate the areas adjacent to Patna, capital of Bihar. The Poonpun block of Patna district is famous for Kurmis' dominance in agriculture of the area, giving them money and muscle power. In this part of Patna, Yadavas and Bhumihars are not in large numbers. In the years of 1973-74, The CPI (ML) liberation extended its base among lower caste agricultural laborers. This made Kurmis vulnerable to the attacks of CPI (ML). The region of Masaurhi block particularly became a hot spot due to increasing tension between Kurmi landholders and the cadres of the CPI (ML) known as Naxals.

Most Kurmi believe that Naxals are predators as they attack the agricultural interests of the community by instigating the farm workers. Kurmis of Patna were also notorious for practicing semi-feudal practices such as usury, bonded laborers, and sexual exploitation of women of the lower caste in the district.[387] The first landlord-peasant confrontation took place in Sikandarpur village. The locally notorious landlord Jeolan Singh illegally had large areas of land surrendered before the people and expressed his readiness to hand over the plot in question to the agricultural laborers. Soon landlords of the area retaliated and set fire to the Mushar tola (hamlet) of Sikandarpur in April 1980. This was followed by a strike of agricultural laborers, which continued for 20 days. According to locals, the formation is also traced to the Kishori Singh incident in Lahsuna village. This story is well documented in CPI (ML) records. According to available evidence, Kishori Singh, a Kurmi landowner, raped a village woman. The village decided to punish him publicly. Meanwhile the police intervened and arrested Kishori Sigh and the victim in order to save him from the wrath of the public. Around 500 people gheraoed (surrounded) the police party and snatched Kishori Singh. The next day, around 150-armed police came to the village, beat up the villagers, ransacked their houses and arrested 21 villagers. Soon a big crowd gathered at the local railway station. By that time the police party had already left the place. The furious mob ransacked the railway station and also attacked the police station. After this incident, landlords of the area fled to Patna. The poor peasantry seized the crops of Kurmi landlords and proclaimed a "People's Raj" which according to sources continued for five months. It is widely believed that after this incident, Kurmis decided to convert their informal council into a paramilitary body called Bhoomi Sena.[388]

The formation of Bhoomi Sena is often traced to agrarian crisis made worse by severe drought of 1979 in Patna District. The activists of CPI (ML) mobilized people to tackle shortage food grains by asking well-to-do farmers to contribute food grains to poor. It worked well in some way but many Kurmi peasants resented the interference of the Naxals. This led to war of attrition between the Naxals and the Kurmi landlords. One notorious landlord of Deokhli village, Dwarika Singh was subsequently murdered. The CPI Ml justified the killing of Dwarika Singh because he "actively collaborated with the police in killing and looting, in getting many peasants activists arrested and in compelling the Harijans and other laboring masses of Deokhli to leave the village".[389] According to the CPI (ML) party documents, the assertion of rural poor led the formation of Kisan Suraksha Samiti (Association for the Protection of the Peasants). Ramsharan Singh, Bhola Singh, then president of Bihar Lok Dal, Bipin Bihari Singh, Godhan Singh and Laddu Singh (one of the convicts in Pipra carnage), Girish Singh, a landlord of Kamlpura village was founders of this outfit. Bhoomi Sena, according to press reports also received support from former Congress MLA, Mrs. Poonam Devi.[390]

The Kisan Suraksha Samiti was complicit in the infamous Belchi massacre of 1977.[391] This Samiti soon took the shape of a full-fledged politico-military formation of Kurmis. Many criminal elements operating in Patna also penetrated Bhoomi Sena. In the early part of 1980s, Bhoomi Sena accumulated a huge quantity of arms and launched recruitment drive among Kurmi youths. To mobilize support, the Bhoomi Sena appealed to a wide range of issues. To a rich Kurmi peasant, they would say, "the life, liberty and property are at stake. What remains if there is no dignity and no prestige"? Further, they would say, "you see input costs are rising and you are the

worst sufferers. And these Naxalites are instigating the laborers to demand higher wages but you will be ruined". Hyping up the fear, they would add, "These Naxalites won't spare anyone. Moreover, they are demanding higher wages and tomorrow they will take your land also".[392] Interestingly, Bhoomi Sena attempted to use the traditional notion of reciprocal relationship between labor and maliks (owner). To this effect, they took recourse to using slogans like "Mazdoor Kisan bhai-bhai, Naxali beech mein kahan se aai". (Labor and farmers are brothers, where have Naxals come from?)[393] In this sense, Kurmis responded to the traditional notion of caste hierarchy and corporate moral essence.

The activists of Bhoomi Sena struck another massacre of dalits (lower castes) in Pipra in Patna district in February 1980 during the regime of Ram Sundar Das, then chief minister of Bihar. The massacre in Pipra also showed the growing paralysis in the state power. Even though it was just 15 kilometers away from Patna, the state capital of Bihar, the government could not prevent the massacre. The massacre symbolized the collapse of state authority in no uncertain terms. The Pipra massacre not only demonstrated the hatred of Kurmi against Naxal mobilization of lower castes but also showed the changing dynamics of state power in Bihar. Describing Pipra massacre as a clash between rising neo-landlordism of Kurmis and laborers, one observer writes "in fact the suspected connection of the Harijans (scheduled caste) with the Naxalites active in the area is believed to be the basic reason behind the massacre".[394] Laddu Singh, one of the main accused in Pipra Carnage attempted to mobilize the entire Kurmi community and emerge as the savior of the community.[395] He wrote letters from the Central Jail of Patna to his caste men to organize along caste lines to combat the resistance of Harijans (dalits).[396] The need for Kurmi Sena was

justified in the name of protecting the entire caste regardless of inner economic differentiation. Leaders of the Sena blamed the government for creating a situation of helplessness by failing to stop "Naxal predators". One of the commanders of the Bhoomi Sena, Girish Singh attributed the formation of Sena to the gradual ineffectiveness of the state to protect the interests of the Kurmi community. In an interview with the press, he said, "the administration is ineffective and does nothing to protect the kisans. If we did not defend ourselves, we would all be killed one by one."[397] Laddu Singh fought unsuccessfully assembly elections from the jail. He was awarded life imprisonment in the infamous Pipra massacre.[398] According to then chief of police of Patna district, Kishore Kunal, Bhoomi Sena activists committed crimes in the city of Patna in addition to fighting Naxals. He also claimed that Bhoomi Sena imposed levy on farmers of the area for buying guns and running the underground organization.[399]

Initially Bhoomi Sena conducted its activities in the blocks of Poonpun, Masaurhi, Naubatpur, and partly Dhanaura in Patna district. During the hey-day of their activities they extended their operations to the Patna-Gaya border area in Jehanabad sub-division too. According to CPI (ML) party documents, during 1982-85, they killed at least 65 persons, mostly rural poor (38 in Poonpun alone), including 4 of CPI (ML) members. In the process, the Bhoomi Sena generated resentment within its community. They resorted to extorting a massive amount of levy from Kurmi peasants as protection money and also force them to provide shelters, chicken, and liquor and at times even women.[400] In this phase, Bhoomi Sena eliminated any sign of dissension in the community. They particularly targeted those Kurmis who sided with the peasant movement. Prominent dissidents like Lalbabu Singh

(Mukhiya), Sharda Singh and Prem Chand Sinha (student leader, ex general Secretary of Patna University Student's Union). were simply done away with. Later, Bhoomi Sena activists also killed the elder brother of Sinha.[401] The peak period for Bhoomi Sena is considered between 1982 and 1985. According to one assessment, the Sena killed about 65 persons (38 in Poonpun Block itself) Set 213 houses ablaze and drove out 325 families from 13 villages.[402] Approximately 200 incidents of armed clashes between the Bhoomi Sena and major Maoist groups took place until 1984.

At one point of time, observers say, Bhoomi Sena became so strong in the area that it started to collect protection money from the farmers, a practice, which will become a hallmark of all succeeding Senas. It demanded money from the community for buying arms and fighting court cases.[403] In part, the strength of Bhoomi Sena emanated from the cozy relationship with the district police and civil officials. In Nalanda district, considered to be strongholds of Kurmis, the district police administration distributed arms among Kurmi youths in order to form a village defense army. The Chief of the local police administration declared openly that the army of Kurmi youth would be trained by the district administration to fight red armies of Naxalites.[404] The Bhoomi Sena remained quite active in Patna and Jehanabad districts. Corroborating the extent to which Bhoomi Sena had influenced the mind of the Kurmi men, one senior police official in Patna commented that though educationally very progressive, the cult of violence penetrated the minds of Kurmi youths in order to protect the dignity, status and social power of the community."[405]

The disintegration of Bhoomi Sena started slowly. The armed squads of the CPI (ML) gave Bhoomi Sena a heavy blow. Many of their leaders were executed by

the Naxal armed squads. Their efforts to expand their activities to other parts of Patna and Gaya did not succeed either. In Jehanabad, they were given a serious blow by the armed bands of Party Unity, a Maoist group. By the end of the decade of the 1980s, for all practical purposes they were confined to few villages of Poonpun and Masaurhi blocks of Patna district. Their disintegration also hastened by their internal bickering. Their social base among the Kurmis gradually became considerably weak. The hold of the Sena was also weakened by the change in the tactics of the CPI (ML). The adoption of mass movement helped the Naxals to expand their social base and increasingly neutralize the appeal of the Bhoomi Sena. In an open letter to Kurmi Peasants, CPI (ML) said:

> ...the Kurmi caste is well known as an honest, hard-working and brave caste. It has produced quite a considerable number of progressive individuals and revolutionaries. Many whole time party cadres of our Party hail from your caste...your caste is held in high esteem in the whole society... about our party. We admit that we had made some mistakes in the past, but we have already rectified them. Now, some arch-reactionaries and their goons, who also happen to come mainly from the Kurmi caste, have formed a gang like Bhoomi Sena that is out to perpetuate your deprivation and backwardness and to make life hell for you. And some persons are associating your entire caste with this notorious gang to tarnish your great image. You must be knowing it very well what a tremendous hatred the people have for this Bhoomi Sena. Do you not want to preserve the respect the people have always shown towards your caste? Do you not want to prosper economically, socially, politically and culturally? Do you not want to break out of this bondage of backwardness? Surely, you do, and we, there fore, appeal to you to isolate and smash this notorious gang and to march forward to a better tomorrow. However, in the interest of the masses, and particularly of Kurmi caste, we are prepared to work out a compromise with these elements and valid blood shade if possible. We will not take any action any against them till 31 March and wait for their responses. But if we don't get any response by them by 30 March, we will assume that they do not want any compromise, they do not have any sympathy for the Kurmi peasants and sympathy for their lives. After that we will be free to mobilize the masses in any action against this gang of five.[406]

By 1986, changing political fortunes in state politics also affected the vitality of Bhoomi Sena. One section of Kurmis preferred to align with the Congress Party

and Bhumihars while the other section decided to side with the Lok Dal, a political party dominated by backward castes. At the end of 1990, the Kurmis were fully entrenched in the growing Mandalization of state politics. The capture of state power by backward castes mitigated the necessity of running caste-based armies. Armed with state power, most Kurmis abandoned Bhoomi Sena and returned to using state power directly to protect community and material interests.[407] However, soon Kurmis encountered the reality of democratic politics, fragmentation of backward caste solidarity around issue of sharing political power. The intensification of power struggle between Yadavas and Kurmis led to organizing "Kurmi Chetna rally" (Kurmi Consciousness Rally) on February 12, 1994 that culminated in the formation of anti-Laloo Yadav political outfit Samata Dal. This has started the process of dealignment in the backward caste politics in the state. The Samata Dal has come to represent the rising political aspiration of Kurmis and other smaller backward castes.

In sum, Bhoomi Sena evoked the sense of community and extolled the virtue of the community as son of the soil. The Sena received active support from the local police in order to fight dalits mobilized by Naxals. Local Kurmi politicians including members of state assembly also assisted the Sena to fight the Naxals and continue the political dominance of the ruling party in the area. Emergent Kurmi landlords, professional criminals, and Kurmi businessmen especially government contractors comprised the bulk of the Bhoomi Sena. Lacking strong ideological commitment, and organizational capacity, the Sena quickly disintegrated in the face of annihilatory armed attacks by the various Maoist groups in the area. Further, the emerging backward caste politics directed the attention of the Kurmis to focus on the capture of state power rather than fighting an armed warfare against Naxals. As discussed

earlier, this is reflected in the significant role Kurmis led by the Samata Dal have come to play in influencing political outcomes in the state especially since the 1990s.[408] Members of Bhoomi Sena are not only enmeshed in the politics of backward castes but also in the factional warfare among various Naxal groups. Interestingly, a recent CPI (ML) Party document entitled "Tathyon Ki Jubaani People's War Ki Kahani" (Facts speak the story of People's War), claims that many former members of the Bhoomi Sena have come to occupy senior positions in the rival Naxalite outfit People's War.[409]

Lorik Sena (Yadav Caste Sena)

Lorik Sena was formed in 1980 but it came to prominence in 1985. Lorik Sena emerged as a private caste Sena of Yadavas, the most numerous and influential caste among backward castes in the state. Tracing the origin of the Lorik Sena, one-analyst points out that "Lorik was the legendary hero of Yadav community. He launched glorious struggle against atrocities of the then Kings and landlords, and upheld the banner of dignity for Yadav raiyats (tenants). Thus, the Sena was named 'Lorik Sena', in order to utilize the popular sentiment of the Yadav community, cutting across the class line, against the Naxalite movement."[410] Lorik is still venerated by many Yadavas as savior of their community. In fact, the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the ruling political party dominated by Yadavs, often uses the name of Lorik to evoke the caste solidarity of Yadavs.

The Lorik Sena became established in Hilsa-Ekangarsarai blocks of Nalanda district. It also became quite influential in bordering villages of Ghosi block in Jehanabad and Dhanaura bloc of Patna district.[411]Jaitipur, a village in Nalanda district was considered to be the headquarters of the Lorik Sena. Baiju Yadav, the scion of

most influential Yadav family in Jaitipur was believed to be founder of the Lorik Sena.[412] Lorik Sena hit the headlines after 1985 assembly elections in which Indian People's Front (hereafter IPF) succeeded in mobilizing lower and some backward castes.

The locally dominant castes, Bhumihars and Yadavs, felt threatened by the growing popularity of IPF. The Communist Party of India (CPI) Member of Parliament Ramashray Singh, a Yadav leader form Jehanabad, is considered the most influential political patron of Lorik Sena. Perceiving a threat to his electoral success in the region, he set about organizing Yadavs. It was difficult to forge unity between Bhumihars and Yadavs considering their traditional caste hostilities towards each other. But against Naxalites as a common class enemy, these two dominant castes decided to sink their caste differences and help each other. This made it possible for Jagdish Sharma, Bhumihar Congress member of state assembly and Ramashray Singh of CPI to address a joint meeting in the region.[413] Therefore, right from the beginning, Lorik Sena was embedded in the caste, class and electoral incentives.

The first major act of violence by Lorik Sena was reported on 14th November 1985 in which the Sena killed landless poor in Hilsa and Ekangarsarai blocks of Nalanda district.[414]According to CPI (ML) documents, one of the main reasons in the formation of Lorik Sena was Naxals' campaign against theft of cattle and dacoity in the area. This directly and indirectly affected some rich and criminal minded Yadavs. They took the opportunity to portray the Naxal movement as anti-Yadav movement. Therefore, community leaders, feudal elements and criminals in the community all got together and formed Lorik Sena under the active patronage of CPI leader

Ramashray Singh. It is worth noting that the Lok Dal, the most influential backward caste party in the state, lent its full weight to Lorik Sena in order to protect the caste and class interests of Yadavs.[415]

Baiju Yadav, the so-called commander-in –chief became target of the armed squads of IPF. After narrowly surviving attempt to his life in his village Jaitipur, Baiju Yadav retaliated ferociously. With help from the local police, Lorik Sena roamed freely in the area looking for so-called Naxal predators. The wrath of Yadavs against lower castes could be gauged from the way Lorik Sena took revenge of Naxals' attack on Sena commander Baiju Yadav. Farzand Ahmad reporting on the activities of Lorik Sena writes

> Soon enough the Lorik Sena struck back, with the police lending more than active help. The Yadavs led by Baiju and reinforced by a posse of policemen from Ekangarsarai raided Barai village hunting for the red extremists. The two who fell victims to their wrath, however, were not extremists but merely innocent villagers, Ramswaroop Ram, a Harijan, and Kailash, a landless carpenter. The Lorik Sena may have been looking for some particular elements but the fact that they went about hunting for then shows that they were on killing spree. Says Ram Swaroop's wife "my husband was a farm laborer and did not belong to any group. They came shouting, dragged him out and just shot him; one reason why he was killed could be that he was once fishing in a pond to which the Yadavs objected.[416]

Lorik Sena roamed freely and hunted lower caste with impunity. In 1985, the Lorik Sena activists went on a killing spree in the region.[417] Interestingly, Lorik Sena did not commit any big massacre. It concentrated rather on low-level violence in which not more than 4-5 persons were killed. One of the favorite ways of asserting its power of was looting the property of lower caste laborers. They also attempted to grab common village properties such as pasture grounds, water reservoirs etc. According to CPI (ML) documents, on October 27, 1985, the activists of Lorik Sena attempted to grab one common water reservoir (Chhilka) in Masarh and Sikandarpur Villages of

Nalanda district. The water reservoir was used by all in these villages for fishing. Their actions had support from the local police and civil administration.[418]

The CPI (ML) attempted to tackle Lorik Sena by using a combination of armed and political struggle against landed Yadav gentry. An open letter to Yadavs was circulated in the region encouraging Yadavs to join radial peasant movement and not to support Lorik Sena. The letter blamed the Congress government and local landlords for hatching a conspiracy of pitting Yadavs against the Harijans and CPI (ML). It also accused CPI leader Ramashray Singh and Congress leader Mahendra Prasad Singh (Member of Parliament) for using Lorik Sena for electoral purposes. The letter said

> (Has) this Lorik Sena been formed for the good of the Yadavs or does it have some evil intentions? What has been the record of its activities so far? Looting the rural poor in league with the police and certain Bhumihar goons, setting their houses on fire and killing them, molesting and raping their women, abusing and terrorizing the people of all castes and extorting levy from them....And Lorik Sena is the name of those thugs and lumpens who rob and murder poor peasants at the instigation of the government and the landlords who bring disgrace to the great name of Lorik and to the entire community. To be sure, the Lorik Sena will ultimately prove to be a Frankenstein for the Yadavs. Just as the Kurmis had to suffer the most on account of the Bhoomi Sena, the Lorik Sena too will bring the greatest of losses to none but the Yadavas" under no circumstances are we going to loot (plunder) any villages for looting is against our principle. But tell them that if they dare enter any village to plunder the people, not a single one of them shall return alive"... we appeal to the wisdom and conscience of all wise and conscientious Yadavs to try their level best to stop this suicidal frenzy and to wage a militant people's movement on all their burning issues together with the peasants of all other castes. Our Party certainly fights against the cruel landlords, goondas, and dacoits (robbers) of all castes, but never does we and never will fight against the broad masses of any caste, not even if they are instigated to fight against us". [419]

Lorik Sena disintegrated fast in the early 1990s following the path of Bhoomi Sena. By 1985, Lorik Sena started losing ground in the face of dual strategy of armed actions and political propaganda of the various Naxal groups in the region. One of the

reasons for the quick decline of Lorik Sena was attributed to the increasing dominance of the criminal elements led by dreaded criminal Ramanand Yadav in the Sena. He was reportedly patronized by Yadav leaders belonging to all most all-political parties including CPI. His criminal actions alienated majority of Yadav peasants in the area. In accordance with their policy of eliminating hard-core activists of Lorik Sena, Naxal groups, particularly Party Unity killed Ramanand Yadav in August 1990.[420] The killing of Ramanand Yadav, one of the powerful commanders of Lorik Sena by the Naxal armed squad created leadership crisis in the Sena. This was further aggravated by the gradual shift of Baiju Yadav, another powerful commander of the Sena, to the emerging backward caste politics in the state. Taking advantage of the increasing blurring of line between crime and politics, Baiju Yadav became a votary of Rashtriya Janata Dal and became elected to the state assembly in 1995. This led to transition of Lorik Sena activists to formal electoral politics.

In sum, Lorik Sena like Bhoomi Sena suffered from lack of strong ideological commitment, lack of organization, strong presence of criminal elements, and a combined strategy of political and armed struggle of Naxals. More importantly, as many local observers point out, the emergence of Laloo Yadav as the chief minister of Bihar in the 1990s made Lorik Sena redundant. This is reflected in the accommodation of former Lorik Sena commander Baiju Yadav in the formal electoral politics. As discussed earlier, the virtual monopoly of political power under the leadership of Laloo Yadav shifted the focus of Yadavs at using the state power to maintain their social and political ascendancy. A party worker of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) says "we don't any longer need paramilitary Sena when we command entire resources of the state. The feeling of security under the RJD led by Laloo Yadav and

growing Mandalization of administration lent us adequate protection against any injustice whether it comes from upper caste landlords or Naxals."[421]

Kisan Sangh (Yadav Caste Sena)

The Kisan Sangh was formed with the help of veteran Yadav leader Mr. Ramlakhan Yadav during 1989 parliamentary elections in Bihar. He urged all existing caste Senas to merge into one umbrella organization in order to counter Naxal challenge and safeguard peasant interests. The first meeting of Kisan Sangh was held at Pali in Patna district under the chairmanship of Ramlakhan Yadav in Nov 1990.[422] It is commonly believed that Kisan Sangh was formed after Naxalites killed Parade Yadav, Mukhiya of Paliganj, and a relative of Ramlakhan Yadav. Origins of the formation of Kisan Sangh are also traced to holding a rally of Yadavs in Patna in 1990 demanding an end to Naxal activities in the state. The Kisan Sangh also took up the issue of economic issues such as raising farm prices and lowering prices of farm input. However, the Kisan Sangh was more interested in furthering political interests of Ramlakhan Yadav.[423] Political support to landlords and Caste army was not unknown to Ramlakhan Singh. According to press reports, he won 1991 parliamentary elections with the help of Jawala Singh, the terror of Bhojpur who was finally eliminated by CPI (ML) as part of their strategy of liquidation of class enemies.[424]

The Sangh attempted to establish its presence by committing massacre of dalits, the most usual route to gain status as violent entrepreneurs in the market place of politics. According to sources in Patna, Ramlakhan Singh Yadav supported formation of Kisan Sangh more for securing votes in elections. At the time of the formation of Kisan Sangh, Ramlakhan Yadav was in Congress (I) and he was on

verge of losing grip over his community due to growing disintegration of Congress in Bihar's politics. The Sangh was implicated in the Tishkohra massacre in 1991 Tishkohra is about 30 km Patna. The Tishkohra massacre took place on 19th Feb 1991 in which 14 persons were killed. The massacre was carried out by the "Kisan Security Tigers" (Peasant Security Tigers), the armed wing of the Kisan Sangh led by Satyendra Yadav. [425].In the aftermath of the massacre, Ramlakhan Singh Yadav denied his links with Bihar Kisan Sangh that was responsible for Tishkohra massacre. However, According to news reports and People's Union for Civil Liberties' survey of killings, his links cannot be ruled out. The People's Union for Civil Liberties attributed the Tishkohra massacres to the struggle for political supremacy between Yadavs and IPF (Indian People's Front, a mass organization of the Communist Party of India, ML).[426] Kisan Sangh leaders were fast losing grip over local politics to the mobilization of IPF. This emboldened the IPF to secure surplus land over ceiling laws from local Yadav landlords. In this process, the IPF confronted Ram Iqbal Singh and threatened him to surrender surplus land over land ceiling laws. Ram Iqbal Singh, owner of about 123 acres land, refused to oblige them leading to a violent confrontation. [427] Narrating the massacre, a national daily wrote

> The killings showed a method in madness with a trigger –happy private army of farmers picking up IPF youths and gunning them down at point blank range. An agency reporter saw that most of the bodies had bullet injuries in the head, chest, and arms, "First they shot at the arms, then the chest and finally at the head to be sure' an eyewitness said...most of the attackers were nearby villages of Mirapur, Keonta, Dumri, Sikaria and Charma, besides Dariapur.[428]

The Kisan Sangh faced dual opposition; the emergence of Laloo Yadav eclipsed Ram Lakhan Yadav's position as the undisputed leader of the caste and Naxal attacks on Kisan Sangh. The exodus of Yadavs en masse to the Janata Dal led

by Laloo Yadav drained the mass base of Kisan Sangh. Additionally, the government of Laloo Yadav refused to patronize leaders of Kisan Sangh and arrested them. As discussed earlier, the success of the MY (Muslim-Yadav) combine in 1995 assembly elections made Laloo Yadav undisputed leader of Yadavs. This led to marginalization of older leaders like Ramlakhan Yadav. Following the path of Lorik Sena, most leaders and cadres of Kisan Sangh opted for state power to protect the personal and community interests.

Brahmarsi Sena (Bhumihar Caste Sena)

This Sena was one of the earliest senas of Bhumihars in Bihar. The sena was named after the legendary Warrior-Brahmin Lord Parsuram who is venerated by many Bhumihars as the progenitor of the community. The name Brahmarsi symbolizes the assertion of Brahmanical status by Bhumihars in Bihar. Chronologically Brahmarsi Sena followed Bhoomi Sena. According to police information, this Sena was active in Bhumihar dominated areas such as Gaya, Jehanabad, Nalanda and Patna.[429] Although Bhumihars enjoy the status of upper caste in the local caste hierarchy, they frequently portray themselves son of the soil. Known as militant Brahman, Bhumihars unlike other upper caste are involved in agricultural practices. Like Kurmis, Bhumihars have very strong sense of attachment to the land. This explains the ruthlessness with which they fight so-called encroachment by assertive lower castes to their traditional rights in the land.

One of the main founders of Brahmarsi Sena was an independent MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) Sardar Krishna Singh.[430] Sardar as he was popularly known among his supporters was backed by the so-called Jehanabad lobby in Congress (I).[431] The Brahmarsi Sena became a prominent caste sena 1985-86.

Congress MLAs such Jagdish Sharma and Ramjatan Sinha were reportedly actively associated with the Sena.[432] Sardar Krishna Singh and Ramjatan Sinha fought with each other resulting in violent clashes between their supporters. Though both claimed to represent Bhumihars' interest, they were frequently involved in intra- factional warfare, sometimes violent too.[433]This shows Brahmarsi Sena was not well-organized and lacked formal leadership structure. It came to operate mainly as factional groups of two warring Bhumihar politicians Ramjatan Sinha and Sardar Krishna Singh, know for using violent means to secure political goals. Therefore, the presence of large-scale criminal elements in this Sena came as no surprise to anyone[434] The Sena used to be active only when it wanted to retaliate against Naxals.

The Brahmarsi Sena, however, brought the links between politicians and Sena activists into sharp relief. Using caste connection, the Sena, according to observers in Patna, maintained close relations with many Bhumihar politicians in Congress (I). During the Chief Ministership of Bindeshwari Dubey between 1985 and February 1988, this Sena attained the status of the surrogate arm of the state. Says one analyst of caste senas

> The Brahmarsi Sena was at its peak during the Chief Ministership of Bindeshwari Dubey. The Sena took to marauder actions without least fear of the state armed forces and government machinery. The Sean men were not only allowed to take shelter at the C.M (Chief Minster) bungalow, but eventually became a non-formal part of the state administration. Even I.G., D.I.G., Commissioners and D.M could have been transferred on the advice of Sena's top bosses.[435]

One of the reasons for the powerful hold of this Sena on the state administration was its utility in combating the growth of Naxal movement in Central Bihar. Led by Jehanabad lobby of Bhumihar politicians in the Congress Party, the Sena aggressively pursed its strategy of eliminating of Naxals in Jehanabad and Gaya

districts in 1985-86. In one single year, Brahmarsi Sena killed 15 Naxals in Karpi block of Jehanabad district.[436] According to one press analysis, the state adopted a dual strategy; encouraging Brahmarsi Sena to act as forward policing to neutralize Naxals and at the same time launch Special Task Force in selected areas to eliminate so-called Naxal extremism. Brahmarsi Sena was, according to press and police information, involved in some of the big massacres in Bihar such as Parasbihga and Pipra massacres. In Parasbihga massacre, several ministers, legislators, senior civil servants were indicted by the Patna High Court.[437]

This Sena remained in existence briefly despite strong political patronage. Following the fate of Bhoomi Sena and Lorik Sena, the Brahmarsi Sena also met strong-armed resistance from Naxals. In armed actions, the Naxal groups eliminated many commanders and activists of Brahmarsi Sena. The absence of organization, and continuing factional feuds among its patron-politicians also contributed to growing marginalization of this Sena. Within a short time, Swarna Liberation Front, another caste Sena of Bhumihars came to replace Brahmarsi Sena in the districts of Central Bihar.

Swarna Liberation Front or Diamond Sena (Bhumihar Caste Sena)

The founder of Swarna Liberation Front (SLF) was Ramadhar Singh, a former employee of a college in Gaya district. Ramadhar Singh was popularly known as " Diamond". At one point of time, the local Bhumihars considered him a savior of the community and was no less significant than Swami Sahajanand, the famous monk peasant leader, to quote one officer.[438] He displayed a hatred for landless castes that in his perception had challenged age-old status of Bhumihars. He once declared that "mera ithihas mazdooron ki chita par likha jayega (in history my name will be written

on the funeral pyres of laborers)[439] The growth of SLF was attributed to the growing frustration of the Bhumihar landlords following their failure to tackle the growing ultra-left clout in the area and also growing socioeconomic conflict between the landlords and labor over such issues as land ceiling, and minimum wages. Ramadhar Singh was patronized by the embattled landed gentry, government contractors, politicians and businessmen from the Bhumihar community. The SLF traced its origins to the break up of erstwhile private caste senas especially Brahmarsi Sena banned after a series of massacres between 1986- 1987 by the Bindeshwari Dubey Government. The SLF enjoyed the backing of many leaders of Congers (I). A prominent Congress MLA from Jehanabad Ramjatan Sinha, according to press reports, patronized this outfit.[440] He was no stranger to the world of private caste armies, as he had been a continuing presence in the emergence of all most all Bhumihar private caste senas.

The SLF signaled its arrival in the world of senas by killing lower castes in Swanbigha village of Jehanabad district on 21 September 1991. In a killing spree, the sena killed ten lower castes in Mein-Barasima villages in Gaya district on 23 December 1991. The then Chief Minister Laloo Yadav blamed SLF and its Congress backers for bloodbath in the region. In the increasing politicization of massacres in Bihar, the Chief Minister accused Congress MP Mahendra Singh alias King Mahendra for patronizing Ramadhar Singh, the founder of SLF.[441] The allegations stuck as it was well known that the Bhumihars of the area were at loggerheads with Naxals groups such as MCC and Party Unity on issues of wages of labor, and *gairmazura* land (village common land). To counter growing Naxal influence in the

area, it was believed that local Bhumihars donated money to Ramadhar Singh to raise a military formation and buy weapons.

The formation of SLF immediately resulted in a vicious caste war between landowning Bhumihars and landless dalits in the region. Faced with a ruthlessly hostile Bhumihar caste army, the dominant Maoist group MCC abandoned class war thesis and targeted all Bhumihars in the region regardless of class distinctions. This culminated in the infamous Bara massacre on 13 February 1992 in Gaya district. In Bara village of Tekari block in Gaya, MCC massacred 39Bhumihars, allegedly supporters or sympathizers of SLF.[442] The Bara massacre found Laloo Yadav at the receiving end and he lost the sympathy of Bhumihars. One of the reasons for Laloo Yadav's loss of face among Bhumihars was his alleged complicity with the dreaded MCC. The Chief Minister blamed the SLF for the increased massacres in Bihar as part of conspiracy against his rule by the upper castes.[443] He also blamed MCC for destabilizing the Janata Dal government and warmed MCC that it would be dealt severely.[444] Few, however, believed him, because it was an open secret in Bihar that the ruling Janata Dal enjoyed not very covert support of the MCC in the Southern Bihar during the parliamentary elections of 1991.[445]

According to press reports and local informants, the Bara massacre of Bhumihars was a fall out of killing of 10 lower castes by the trigger-happy Chief of SLF in Main and Barasimha villages under Belaganj and Tekari blocks on 23 December 1991. [446] The SLF had been opposing the MCC at every instance. On 5 February 1992, SLF had attacked a MCC rally at Konch Bazaar in Gaya. The SLF had issued warning to MCC that it would not allow it to stage any rally in the

district.[447] According to district officials, after this incident the MCC's armed cadres were looking for SLF leader Ramadhar Singh.[448] The search for the SLF leader led to Bara massacre of Bhumihars. The Bara massacre came to symbolize the deep roots the politics of massacres had taken in Bihar. The demand by opposition parties for the dismissal of the Laloo government due to its failure to prevent massacres would become a recurring theme in the politics of the state. The leaders of the Central government in Delhi also lost no time in joining the increasing politicization of massacres in Bihar. The then Union Home Minster M.M. Jacob quickly blamed the state government for not tackling the activities of "extremists."[449] The private senas also gradually became embedded in the factional feuds of the political parties. For instance, the Bara massacre was blamed on Sitaram Kesari, the backward caste leader of Congress by Jagannath Mishra, and the so-called strong man of Congress in Bihar. Mishra alleged that Kesari, a recent convert to Mandal politics (quota for backward castes in government jobs) had visited Main-Barasimha last month and publicly instigated the local backward castes to retaliate against the forward castes.[450]

That Bara massacre of Bhumihars was the result of a tug of war between SLF and MCC was no surprise. The Pioneer, a national daily in India wrote:

> with a formidable mercenary force, Swarna Liberation Front, his commander Ramadhar Singh alias diamond took it upon himself to chasten Dalit landless peasants who had the temerity to demand minimum wages .In the process; he declared war on left organizations protecting the interests of the Dalits.[451]

According to news reports, the MCC had definite information that Ramadhar Singh was hiding in Bara. So they planned an attack on Bara. When they did not find him there, the enraged cadre of MCC massacred Bhumihars to send a message to anyone who attempted to provide shelter to Ramadhar Singh alias Diamond.

However, some analysts cited the rape of two lower caste women by two SLF members of Bara as the immediate provocation for the massacre by MCC.[452] It is important to recognize that SLF also became notorious for the rape of lower caste women. Rape of lower caste women constituted one of the ways through which SLF tried to break the morale of lower caste resistance.[453] This demonstrated the significance of social oppression in the agrarian struggles in Central Bihar. The SLF was accused of being backed by the Congress. The Chief Minister Laloo Yadav blamed SLF and the Congress as hand in glove, which led to a spate of killings in Gaya district. He routinely blamed Congress leaders from Gaya and Jehanabad for patronizing SLF. He even accused the college in Lari village of Gaya district where SLF chief had worked of running a gang of criminals. [454]

Following the path of earlier caste senas, gradually SLF influence waned due to the absence of any organization and resistance by armed bands of Maoist outfits. It finally disintegrated after the so-called arrest of Ramadhar Singh on 17 December 1992 by the Gaya police. Many people believe that SLF chief Ramadhar Singh stage-managed his surrender to the Gaya police to save his life from the Naxals and police cases.[455] The SLF shows the dynamics of fluctuating fortunes of caste senas. The SLF Chief quickly fell from the status of community savior, although he succeeded in mobilizing Bhumihars for a brief period of time. According to press reports and version of locals in Gaya and Jehanabad, Ramadhar Singh used caste as an instrument to mobilize Bhumihars. Many poor Bhumihars considered him a trigger-happy and self-seeking person.[456]In the absence of organization and excessive dependence on one- man leadership, his arrest led his group in total disarray leading to its disintegration. The SLF was more of a violent entrepreneur than community warrior.

Its main goal as one journalist commented was that "the might of the upper caste landlords must not be challenged."[457]

Kuer Sena (Rajput Caste Sena)

Kuer Sena was the oldest private caste Sena in Bihar. Its emergence coincided with the beginning of Naxalite uprising in Bihar. It was born out of Kuer Sabha (association), a caste organization in Bhojpur district. Kuer Singh, the impoverished Rajput Zamindar of Shahabad district, was the legendary hero of the 1857 rebellion against British rule in India. Most Rajputs in the region regard him as their community savior and one who tried to give them back their prestige and dignity. The Kuer Sabha as a caste association was meant to further social and political interests of Rajputs. However, quickly, the caste Sabha assumed the form of violent defender of existing caste and class order. It was formed on 21st October 1969.[458]

The founder of Kuer Sena was a Rajput landlord Rajnath Singh. He also ran successful business in coal. He was president of the youth wing of the Congress Party in Shahabad District (erstwhile district Bhojpur). On the charge of running illegal violent organization, he was arrested by the local administration in the 1970s. Later, he met with violent death on 5th June 1985 in intra group fighting. He also helped set up a college for his Rajput community. [459] Aside from Rajnath Singh, one of the main actors behind the running of Kuer Sena was Bir Bahadur Singh, a former member of Bihar Assembly. He was also killed in intra group rivalry on 2nd May 1997 in Bhojpur district. According to press reports, he was involved in about 20 cases of murder and had to spend a great deal of time in jail. He projected himself as the defender of the interests of the Rajput community against Naxals. As he belonged to

Jagdishpur, home of Kuer Singh, the legendary Rajput hero during the mutiny of 1857 against British rule in Bihar, it strengthened his credentials as "savior of Rajputs."[460]

Though he was considered by many as a "trigger-happy" feudal lord surrounded by heavily armed supporters from his community, he harbored political interests and got elected from Jagdishpur constituency as an independent candidate in 1980's assembly elections. His tenure as MLA was mired in controversy due to his criminal activities and atrocities on lower castes leading him to long incarceration in the jail. He lost his reelection bid in 1985 elections. Another big patron of Kuer Sena in the decade of 1980s was Jawala Singh, the terror of Bhojpur and the sarpanch of Tarari block in Bhojpur. During the 1989 elections, the emerging hero of backward caste politics, Laloo Yadav shared public meetings with Jawala Singh who had been responsible for gunning down of 22 CPI (ML) supporters at Danwar-Bihta in Bhojpur during 1989 elections. Jawala Singh was also responsible for the twin carnage at Deo and Sahiara Village which clamed 15 lives.[461] As it was heavily dependent on few Rajput landlords, the Kuer Sena disappeared fast in the region after the killing of its big patrons such as Jawala Singh by armed squads of Naxals. Its place was soon taken over by another Rajput Sena, Sunlight Sena.

Sunlight Sena (Rajput Caste Sena)

The Sunlight Sena was the second attempt of Rajputs to try their hands at the formation of caste senas. It was the only private caste sena in the recent history of Bihar, which transcended religious lines bringing together Rajput and Muslim landlords in South Bihar districts of Palamau and Hazaribagh. The Sunlight Sena has a more pronounced association with big landholders than other private caste senas in Bihar. The name "Sunlight" recalls the mythical origin of Rajputs from the Sun God.

It emerged as a violent "class defender" of Rajput Landlords and Ruhella Pathans (Muslims) in the southern and border areas of central Bihar. Like Rajputs, Ruhella Pathans owned large tracts of land in the region. Interestingly, like Rajputs, Pathans also are considered a "martial race" in the region by the locals. According to oral accounts and legends, they served in the army of legendary mediaeval King Sher Shah who had ruled Delhi briefly. Thus, aside from class and religion, the warrior (martial) character of both Rajputs and Pathans worked as cementing factor.

The formation of Sunlight Sena is rooted in the growing agrarian unrest in the region. In the yearly years of 1980s, Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (hereafter MKSS) tried to set up its base in forest region that created panic among landowners and forest contractors. It was formed to protect the landlords and people having interests in trading of forest products. It was formed primarily to counter the growing influence of the most dreaded Maoist outfit MCC also known as "Lalkhandis"- a synonym for the Naxal movements in forest regions of Bihar.

The Sena and the MCC fought several bloody battles in which several people from both sides were killed. Malbaria Village was considered a stronghold of Sunlight Sena. Rajput landlords such as Lallan Singh, Dharam Das Pratap Deo and others are credited with mobilizing upper caste Rajputs against Naxals.[462] The precursor to Sunlight Sena of Rajputs was Kisan Sangh (Farmer's Association) that came into existence in 1984. According to press reports, the Kisan Sangh was patronized by one of the top Congress leaders of Bihar, Bhisam Narayan Singh, former Union Minister and governor of Assam. The Sangh's area was confined to Hussainabad. The Rajputs activists of the Sangh clashed with Maoist outfit over issues of land, wages, and

ownership rights to forest produce.[463] The Kisan Sangh did not take any organized shape and died towards the end of 1984. Another short-lived Sena called Krishak Sevak Samaj (Farmer Servant Society) took its place. It was patronized by the same set of Rajput landholders and politicians. Very soon, this outfit also disintegrated as a result of retaliatory violence of Naxals and intra group rivalry. Its place was soon taken over by the emergence of Sunlight Sena in 1989.

Observing the emergence of sunlight Sena, People's Union for Democratic Rights says:

> In many respects, the Sunlight Sena is different from earlier groups. Its influence is spread far and wide in the north Koel valley (Palamau). One of the reasons for this was its conscious mobilization on caste lines-principally Rajput, though landlords of other communities, like the Brahmins, also lending support to it. In Garhwa, where it originated, in the early days, the Sena took out an armed procession through the town and villages with a telling slogan: sona becho, loha kharido" (sell gold, buy iron, meaning guns), and appealed to Rajputs to join its campaign with arms. The organized caste mobilization also enabled it to acquire the support of middle and poor farmers of the caste.[464]

The Sena was organized on military lines unlike roaming bands of Lorik or Bhoomi Sena. However, like all private caste Senas, this Sena was actively assisted by all the major political parities in the state. In this sense, Sunlight Sena attained the status of a non-party violent political formation.[465] The Sena also had strong presence in Central Bihar district of Aurangabad. Aurangabad district occupies a place of pride for Rajputs as it is refereed to by local Rajputs as "Chittorgarh"- the legendary fort of medieval Rajput King Maha Rana Pratap Singh of Rajasthan who is venerated by most Rajput landlords and Zamindars for his bravery and sacrifice. The macho image of Rajputs is a part of local folklore. Therefore, the formation of sunlight Sena was rooted in a complex matrix of mythical martial cultural history, the practice of bonded labor (Kamiyauti) and material control over land.[466]

According to human rights activists, many landlords owned around 3000-4000 acres in violation of official laws of land ceiling in the region.[467]The Sunlight Sena was officially announced in a rally organized in 1989 in Garhwa. The main actors behind the formation of this Sena were men like Lallan Singh, Mahendra Singh, Dhrmendra Baccha, Batohi Singh and Ashok Singh.[468] Big landlords, Zamindars and descendants of big estate owners particularly in Palamau actively patronized the Sena. One of the infamous landlords of Palamau, Jagdishwar Jeet Singh Mauwar of Manatu, better known as the "Man-eater of Manatu, was a patron of Sunlight Sena.[469] The Sena received support from mainly Congress and BJP in the region. Dhrmendra Pratap Singh, son of former cabinet Minster, Manik Baccha of Nagar estate played active role in Sena. Similarly Congress leader Vijay Kumar Singh of Ladigarh estate, Congress MLA Rajendra Pratap from Nagar Untari, former Union Minister and Governor, Bhisam Narayan Singh of Chhatarpur, Janata Dal leader Avadesh Kumar Singh of Barwadih, and former Congress MLA Jagat Narayan Pathak of Ranka were considered patrons of Sunlight Sena.[470]

Soon some of the main leaders of Sunlight Sena were killed in intra group rivalry such as Mahendra Singh. Some joined mainstream political parties. For instance, Lallan Singh joined Janata Dal after he surrendered to the police.[471] The Sunlight Sena and Maoist group Party Unity clashed violently in the region. Led by Lallan Singh, the Sena massacred ten people in Malbaria village of Palamau district on 5 June 1991.[472] In the assembly elections of 1995 in Bihar, Sunlight Sena activists took to elections attempting to use their image as protector of caste interests. For instance, Mukka Yadav and Batohi Singh fought elections as independent candidates without any success. Dharmendra Bachha contested unsuccessfully from the

Bishrampur constituency as independent candidate backed by the Sena. The collusion between Sena and the local police was a well-known fact. According to People's Union of Democratic Rights, in the period from 1988 until February 1990, 250 Naxals were arrested as "extremists" but only 30 persons were arrested as the Sunlight Sena activists.[473] Most of the so-called extremist faced serious criminal charges ranging from arson, murder etc. leading them to languish in jail for longer period. On the contrary, Sena leaders were let off easily on bail. Commenting on the Sena and police, People's Union of Democratic Rights writes "the state and the Sena collusion thus are complete and absolute".[474]

The Sunlight Sena also engaged local dacoits (bandits) and criminal elements. Well known among them were Sita Ram Paswan and Mukka Mahato. They helped politicians to win elections from the area they dominated.[475] The Sunlight Sena conducted a series of raids in 1989 against lower caste men women and children. Like Swarna Liberation Front, Sunlight Sena also became notorious for its violent assault on lower caste and poor tribal women. According to press reports, whenever Sunlight raided a locality, it invariably subjected lower caste women to sexual assault.[476] Assertion of dominance thorough sexual assault of lower caste women is not new to Bihar considering its violent feudal past. Like many previous senas, Sunlight Sena could not stay for long in the field. The political marginalization of Congress and formation of Jharkhand as separate state in the 1990s left it without much political patronage, a necessary ingredient in the survival of private caste armies

FROM SURROGATE ARM OF THE STATE TO COMMUNITY WARRIOR

This discussion of major private caste senas reveals complex dynamics of class, caste and politics in Bihar. Clearly, senas are a violent response to increasing agrarian conflicts pitting landowning castes against the resurgent lower castes mobilized by Maoist groups. This explains why senas and Naxals are locked in violent confrontation. But senas are not solely linked to class. They often evoke the caste solidarity in order to erase the class distinctions in the caste society. Most senas address the caste as carrier of distinctive innate qualities and moral essence rooted in the hierarchical notion of purity and impurity. This helps them to mobilize both rich and poor and offer a united front against the violent mobilization of lower castes by Naxals. Although senas valorize caste identity and sentiments, they do not articulate a well-defined ideology. Senas are not exclusively an upper-caste phenomenon. Backward castes especially Yadav and Kurmis have formed their own Senas and massacred lower castes (dalits). Most senas have also been accompanied by criminal elements. Organizationally, senas have informal, loose and factional character. Their strength, however, varies. For instance, organizationally, Sunlight Sena is stronger than many other senas. Interestingly, Bhumihar Senas have demonstrated more factional and inner squabbling than other caste senas. Most senas revolve around powerful personalities. Kuer Sena and SLF are good examples of personalities based caste senas. Senas are also deeply embedded in the politics of the state. The career of each sena is closely linked with the changing fortunes of politics in Bihar. Lorik Sena and Bhoomi Sena are prime examples of co-option and accommodation of caste senas in the backward caste politics in the state. It is worth noting that all caste senas have strong links with the politics and politicians in the state. They help politicians win or

lose elections. They routinely receive covert and overt help from the state administration in order to fight so-called Naxals. As surrogate arm of the state, and violent political entrepreneurs, senas have come to symbolize the decline of state and political institutions in Bihar. A thick description and analysis of Ranvir Sena will help explain how and why caste senas also attempt assiduously to become community warriors.

CHAPTER V

CASE STUDY OF A PRIVATE CASTE ARMY: THE RANVIR SENA

Community Warriors vs. Subalterns

The Ranvir Sena, a private caste army of Bhumihars of Bihar, an upper caste community, is the "most notorious and most ruthless" private caste sena (army) in the history of Bihar, according to most observers.[477] This is the third sena of Bhumihars in the relatively long history of private caste armies in Bihar. Considered organizationally and ideologically most articulate, Ranvir Sena is the only sena that exists in Bihar today. Unlike earlier Senas, this Sena has attempted to emerge as community warrior besides performing the functions of violent class defender and political entrepreneur in Bihar. Though banned, it operates freely, if not openly, mostly in the Central Bihar.[478] The impunity with which Ranvir Sena inflicts massacres on lower castes is evident from the fact that the Sena's spokesman issues advance notice of massacres through media in the state capital.[479]

The Ranvir Sena, though "path dependent", in terms of being a continuing link in the violent history of private caste senas in Bihar, differs from the earlier senas in more than one way. Unlike the earlier senas, it has a well articulated ideological, organizational, political and leadership structure. It effectively mobilizes various resources of the caste system. Although there is evidence to suggest that Ranvir Sena is actively encouraged by the "embattled landowners", state administration, politicians, and also by the rural criminal gangs, this sena also claims to reestablish

the honor and pride of the Bhumihar caste." Therefore, Ranvir Sena has increasingly emerged as a community warrior. Unlike earlier Senas, Ranvir Sena is not confined to a localized region or a few villages but it has emerged as a violent parapolitical party to protect the interests of Bhumihar in particular and landholding castes in general in the entire Central Bihar. Most of the victims of Ranvir Sena are dalits or lower caste. The Ranvir Sena uses massacres not only to assert continued dominance over the so-called "unclean" subalterns (lower castes) but also valorizes its "community warrior image" exemplified by the mythical Sage-Warrior Parsuram, the primogenitor of the Bhumihars.[480]

Who are Bhumihars in Bihar?

Construction of the Identity

Before we proceed to discuss Ranvir Sena, it is important to have a brief discussion of Bhumihars. Bhumihars along with Brahmans, Rajputs and Kayasthas are the major "twice-born" upper castes in Bihar. The caste structure of the state has already been discussed in Chapter two. Here an attempt is made to situate the activists of the Ranvir Sena, namely Bhumihars, within caste and class structure and examine how and why the Ranvir Sena activists perceive themselves as community warriors.

Bhumihars are also called Babhan. Bhumihars, especially in the central Bihar, prefer to call themselves Babhan to assert their Brahman origins. Many, however, these days identify themselves as Bhumihars. The identity of Bhumihars is fluid. The term Bhumihar, deriving from Bhoomi meaning land clearly indicates that the caste did not perform priestly functions but was attached to land. They are largely concentrated in the state of Bihar and Eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh. Though ranked below Brahmins in terms of ritual status, Bhumihars consider themselves a Brahmin

community involved in agriculture. The term Bhumihar is of recent origin.[481] In the permanent settlement records of British Government, the Brahmin landlords (Zamindars) were not called Bhumihars.[482] For the first time, the word was used in United Provinces of Agra and Awadh in 1865.[483] Two characteristics of this community were noteworthy. First, they did not accept charity like Brahmins and second, most were landholders (Zamindars). The emergence of a new nomenclature for the community is attributed to a "movement of social mobility" in the late nineteenth- century that sought to elevate the so–called low ritual status of Bhumihar to the level of Brahmins.

According to colonial records, Bhumihars along with the Brahmans and Rajputs constituted the "actual stuff of the district life" in Bihar. The preeminence of Bhumihars in rural life of Bihar confirms Louis Dumont's perceptive observation that "territory, power, village dominance results from the possession of the land." [484] As for the origins of Bhumihars, there are numerous legends ranging from accounts that describe them as children of Brahman girls and Rajputs fathers to Brahman-Buddhists "who had lost their caste and position in Hindu society."[485] Colonial records write

...according to a local tradition, they are descended from a number of persons collected by the Diwan (minister) of Jarasandha, the king of Magadha, at the feast given by his master. Jarasandha had ordered his Diwan to secure the attendance of 100,000 Brahmans, but he could not find so many and was driven to bring in a number of men of other castes whom he invested with the sacred thread and palmed off as genuine Brahmans... It has been pointed out that Babhan is merely the Pali form of Brahman, and the word is often found in Asoka's edicts. It has, therefore, been conjectured that those now known as Babhans remained Buddhists after the Brahmans around them had reverted to Hinduism, so the Pali name continued to be applied to them; while the Synonym Bhumihar or Bhumiharka is explained as referring to their having seized the lands attached to the old Buddhists monasteries. This theory is born out of the fact that in this province they are practically confined to

the area covered by the ancient king of Magadha, which had long remained the center of Buddhism. [486]

Most Bhumihars are sensitive about the legends with regard to the origins of their caste and strongly contest the so-called "hybridity" or "fallen Brahman" theory being attributed to their origin. Though they acknowledge that they do not perform priestly functions and lack the knowledge of Sanskrit, they hold on to their claim of being Brahmin, albeit "*ayachak*" (non-begging Brahman).[487] Most Bhumihars in Bihar believe that they enjoy a higher status as compared to Brahman because they perform kingly functions. In fact, some Bhumihars believe that the performance of priesthood has not been regarded very prestigious in the ancient *shastras*. Like any other Brahmin, Bhumihars observe all the religious practices but the pursuit of secular affairs accords them a higher status in the social hierarchy.[488] In colonial records, Bhumihars are noted as "Zamindar Babhan" because of their dominant share in the land relations. Francis Buchanan calls them as "Zamindar Brahmins" i.e. the Brahmins who had become landlords.[489] Interestingly, colonial census reports attempted to construct a new meaning for Bhumihars. The census report of Bengal in 1881 describe them as "Military Brahmin" i.e. Brahmins who had taken to military professions and in reward got land rights etc.[490] This should not lead one to assume that all Bhumihars were Zamindars. As the Saran Census report, 1891 points out "not all Bhumihars were generally landlords and well -to-do. They are also occupancy *raiyats*, and serve as peons and constables."[491] Despite this, Bhumihars by virtue of their preponderance among landlords dominated the social and economic landscape of Bihar in the late nineteenth century.

Bhumihars, like many other upwardly mobile castes, actively sought to upgrade their social status by getting enumerated in the colonial census as "Bhumihar Brahman". Unlike most other castes, Bhumihars adopted Brahmanical model of Sanskritization.[492] The most popular name of this community up to the end of the 19th Century in Bihar was "Babhan" and in Western provinces "Bhumihars." Of course, a few families migrated from U.P. into Bihar, carried the name "Bhumihar" here also. But as they settled amidst Babhans of Bihar they became totally absorbed in the neighboring Babhans and rarely called themselves Bhumihar Brahmans. To further their social, cultural and political interests, prominent Bhumihar landlords (Zamindars) including Maharaja of Benares, organized "Pradhan Bhumihar Brahman Sabha" in 1896. This association's monthly journal, the "Bhumihar Brahman Patrika", published articles highlighting the high status of Bhumihars in social life. This Sabha functioned until 1929.[493] What is significant is the community's attempt to focus on the correlation between caste and social status. In a petition to the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy of India in 1917, the Pradhan Bhumihar Brahman Sabha eloquently argued:

> That the Pradhan Bhumihar Brahman Sabha is a registered and recognized association of the Bhumihar Brahmans, who are justly styled **the Aristocracy of Bihar**. The Bhumihar Brahmans **community** is one of the most respected and influential communities in Hindustan... whose chief occupation is **land holding.** They form the bulk of the Zamindars and agriculturists classes and have the **greatest stake in the country**, especially in the province of Bihar and U.P.[494](*emphasis mine*)

The Maharaja of Benares, Prabhu Narayan, a very influential member of Bhumihar Brahman Sabha, in his petition to S.H, Butler, census official, drew his attention to Bhumihars' claims to be included in the census as Brahmin. He argued that Bhumihars are actually Brahmins-those who do not pursue priestly functions and

rely on land for livelihood. He also blamed Europeans for creating confusion about the status of Bhumihars.[495] The persistence of the Bhumihar Brahman Sabha led to inclusion of the community in censuses of India, 1911, 1921, and 1931, as Babhan. The drive to get enumerated as Brahmin led to the decline in the population of Bhumihar as registered in the census. For instance, the population of Bhumihar declined from 106,098 in 1901 to 95, 422 in 1931. This clearly establishes the success of Bhumihar to position itself as an upwardly mobile caste in the social hierarchy of Bihar.[496]

The principal sub-castes are Eksaria, Donwar, Jaitharia, Domkatar, Mairia, Dighwait, Kinwar, Arait, Panchbhaia, Basmati, Karmali, and Sakarwar etc. The two main gotras are Bharadwaj and Shandilya. Bhumihars use a host of titles including Rajput surnames such as Rai, Singh and Bhahman surnames such as Pandey, Tiwari, Choudhary, Thakur, Mishra, Sharma, Shahi etc.[497] The marriage rule is endogamy at the community level and Bhumihars furiously observe "purity of marriage rules". Inter-caste marriage is very rare and brings disrepute to the family. However, inter-caste marriage is tolerated if the person is influential in the society.

The insistence upon the identification of the community as Bhumihar Brahman during the colonial rule led the intervention of modern state in the community affairs of Bhumihars. By enumerating Bhumihars in the census, the colonial governments seemed to have to permanently unsettled the identity of the community. The world view of Bhumihars is shaped by the two contradictory pulls to get recognized as Brahmin and to dominate the rural world as a Kshatriya (Military Brahman). The historical evolution of the caste reveals a complex interpenetration of

these apparently conflicting yet overlapping domains of identity. In contemporary Bihar, Bhumihars are most militant, ambitious and powerful landed caste. There is also a general feeling in rural Bihar that Bhumihars are the craftiest caste in Bihar. Table 10 reveals the position of Bhumihars in the agrarian structure.

Table10: Bhumihars in the Agrarian structure[498]

Class	Size of Land	Caste
Upper class of Landlords	Very large landholding (30acres or more)	Bhumihars, Rajputs, Brahmins, some Yadavas and Kurmis
Rich Farmers	Large Landholdings (8-30 acres)	Bhumihars. Rajputs, Some Kayasthas, but mostly Yadavs, Kurmis, and Koiris.
Middle Category Farmer (" Bullock capitalists")	Medium Landholdings (About 5-8 acres)	Mainly Yadavs, Kurmis and Koiris.
Poor Farmers	Small Landholdings (Less than 4 acres)	Mainly lower backward and Dalits.
Agricultural Laborers	Mainly Landless	Lower backward and Dalits.

Though Bhumihars have witnessed a progressive decline in their social and political power over the past twenty-five years, most Bhumihars envision themselves as a fixed, determinate and permanent entity unwilling to recognize "fuzzy" sense of the community identity.[499] This has also led most Bhumihars to imagine that they possess specific characteristics not available to other castes. And the most prominent quality of Bhumihar caste is its warrior character. Most scholars from the community recognize the centrality of the "warrior" image of the caste. This perhaps explains the ferocity with which Bhumihars protect the purity of their caste origin.

Exploring the issue of construction of identity, Pundit Paremeshwar Prasad Sharma, in his book entitled "Sanik Brahman" (Military Brahman) argues that even in the days of the *Mahabharata* (one of the classical epics of Hindus), there were two distinct groups of Brahmins; priestly and non-priestly and declares Chanakaya as a prototype Bhumihar. He also rejects the argument that Bhumihars are those Brahmins who lived in Magadha region and embraced Buddhism and after the decline of Buddhism, came back to the fold of Hinduism. According to him, Buddhist line of argument is vicious propaganda to malign the warrior character of the community. Interestingly, the rejection of Buddhist lineage helps us understand why Bhumihars are so fanatic about Brahmin past which has come to shape the contemporary construction of self-image of the community.[500]

Political Identity of Bhumihars

Bhumihars have long enjoyed considerable clout in Bihar's politics, often disproportionate to their numerical strength in the population. In the pre-independence days, important Bhumihars leaders were Sir Ganesh Dutta, Shri Krishan Sinha, Ram Dayalu Singh, and Langat Singh etc. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, the founder of Kisan Sabha (Peasant Association), is often recognized as the chief protagonist of self-respect movement among Bhumihars. A multifaceted Hindu monk, Sahajanand actively campaigned for elevation of Bhumihars status as Brahman. Later, Sahajanand gradually moved away from cultural politics to addressing the class issues of poor and marginal peasants in Bihar. Sir Ganesh Dutta, a rich landlord, lawyer and nationalist leader is also remembered by most Bhumihars as a pioneer in establishing the identity of the caste. Sri Krishna Sinha actively participated in peasant politics and became one of the front ranking leaders of the Congress Party in Bihar.

As discussed earlier, his political preeminence was so substantial that he remained Chief Minister of Bihar from 1937 to 1939 and again from 1947 to January 1961. During his chief ministership, many new leaders in the Bhumihar caste emerged. Prominent among them were Mahesh Prasad Sinha, Krishnan Kant Sinha, L.P. Shahi, Basawan Sinha (a socialist leader), Kailashpathi Mishra (Hindu nationalist leader) and others. In the eyes of many Bhumihars, Sri Krishna Sinha, popularly known as Sri Babu, symbolized glory and dominance of Bhumihars in local affairs. His influence on the construction of modern political identity of Bhumihars is so strong that many Bhumihars lionize him as a hero. Most Bhumihar politicians attempt to relate to the legacy of Sri Babu in order to get the support of the community. As it is well known that his long stint in power, however, generated the resentment of other castes, particularly Rajputs. After his death in 1961, Bhumihars failed to retain their hegemonic position on Bihar politics to the same extent. They, however, continued playing significant role in the politics of the Congress Party. L.P. Shahi, Ramashray Prasad Singh, Rajo Singh, Ramjatan Sinha, Shyam Sunder Singh Dhiraj, Maha Chandra Singh, and others emerged as important leaders in the community. Briefly, Anil Kumar Sharma, a former president of Patna University Students' Union also emerged as a charismatic student leader in the 1980s. After the electoral rout of the Congress Party at the hands of resurgent backward castes led by Laloo Yadav, the once power full caste could manage just three parliamentary seats in parliamentary elections in 1989.

The political decline of Bhumihars continued unabated. In the parliamentary elections of 1999, only C.P. Thakur from the BJP (he too was a Congressman till 1995), Nikhil Kumar Choudhary (BJP) and Rajo Singh (Congress) got elected from

the community. In the last Lok Sabha election, in the five constituencies of Central and North Bihar (Jehanabad, Nawada, Vaishali, Ballia and Muzaffarpur), where Bhumihar population is as high as 15 per cent, it was the non-Bhumihar candidates who won. From Begusarai, the other Bhumihar bastion, Rajo Singh of Congress, a Bhumihar won. His victory was made possible because of the non-Bhumihar votes as the Congress then had a poll alliance with the Rashtriya Janata Dal.[501]

Bhumihars' hold on state's politics has been reduced to insignificance causing insecurity and powerlessness in the community. In the changed political scenario, Kailash Pathi Mishra, and C.P. Thakur have emerged as important Bhumihar leaders in the BJP struggling to give Bhumihars a sense of power. For many of them, Ranvir Sena is the last hope to stage a political comeback. Realizing the importance of Bhumihars in the electoral arithmetic, the Rashtriya Janata Dal has also started wooing Bhumihar leaders. This has led to emergence of Akhilesh Singh, a minister in the ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal, as an important Bhumihar leader in the state.[502]

Origins of Ranvir Sena: Popular Renderings

The origins of Ranvir Sena are shrouded in mystery. Based on journalistic reports, police records, and personal observation, it is fair to assume that the Ranvir Sena was founded by Bhumihars in Belaur Village, Bhojpur District, in 1994. However, different versions of who founded Ranvir Sena are available. According to People Union's Democratic Rights, one of India's leading Human Rights Organizations, Ranvir Sena was formed in Belaur village which lies in Udwantnagar block in Bhojpur district in 1993.[503] The report cites the popular view that Ranvir Sena is named after a Bhumihar warrior Ranvir Choudhary who, in the late nineteenth

century, after his retirement from colonial military service fought against the local Rajput landlords and chased them out of the eight villages of Arah district. His heroic deed in protecting the interests of his fellow caste men earned him the epithet "Baba" (Saint).

Many Bhumihars I spoke with in the region had very faint idea of facts regarding Ranvir Baba. They, however, readily confirmed the popular construction of Ranvir Baba as a "Savior", one who saved the community in times of crisis. They believe Ranvir Baba fought against the tyranny of local Rajput landlords in the nineteenth century and established the supremacy and honor of Bhumihars in the region. Most Bhumihars from Bhojpur district faithfully adhere to this story.[504] Bhumihars are prompt to refer to this "glorious chapter" in their community's struggle against injustice and oppression. In fact, local Bhumihars have built a temple in the memory of Ranvir Baba. Therefore, Ranvir Baba emerges as the central ideological symbol around which Bhumihars have attempted to mobilize their caste men and construct rhetoric of sacrifice.

The most proximate cause of the formation of Bhumihar militias is rooted in the structure of land, caste, and power in the countryside of Bihar. The popular view is that polarization between landed upper castes and subalterns (dalits) began some twenty-five years ago in Ekwari Village (a predominantly Bhumihar village) in Sahar block of Bhojpur district. On February 23, 1971, Naxalites launched their first attack on landlords by murdering Sheopujan Singh, a muscle man of Ekwari's landlords.[505] According to reports of People Union's Democratic Rights

(PUDR), Bhumihars of Belaur village formed Ranvir Sena to check the rise of the CPI (ML) in the region.

The immediate provocation to form a Bhumihar militia is sometimes traced to a "trivial issue" as reported by the CPI (ML), and locals. According to the CPI (ML) party documents, the formation of Sena had been sparked by the newfound assertiveness of lower castes youths. According to Liberation, the party newspaper of CPI (ML), on 11 July 1994, a Bhumihar youth of Belaur went to the local village shop and asked for cigarettes. The shopkeeper told him that there were no cigarettes. In the evening another person from the same village got cigarettes from the same shop. When the Bhumihar youth came to know of it, he took it as an affront to his "prestige" (Izzat). In the night, he and his friends went to the shop and mercilessly beat the shopkeeper. The next morning, the local schoolteacher along with Birbal Yadav, a CPI (ML) supporter attempted to mediate in this incident. The result was quite bad for Birbal Yadav who got a brutal thrashing by the local Bhumihar youths for his "alleged proximity to the CPI (ML). According to the CPI (ML) sources, the incident did not go unchallenged. On 2 August 1994, the CPI (ML) and Pradesh Kisan Sabha (BPKS) jointly organized a protest meeting in Arah, the district headquarter. The meeting demanded immediate arrest of the people involved in the incident but the local administration kept quiet on the matter. The CPI (ML) raised the matter before the Chief Minister of the state.

Angered by the mobilization of the lower caste under the banner of the CPI (ML), local Bhumihars immediately formed on outfit called "Regional Peasant Front" (Kshetriya Kisan Sangha). The Maoist leaders claim that on 22 January 1995, this

body metamorphosed into Ranvir Sena in Belaur. Brahmeshwar Singh took the lead in establishing the sena and donned the mantle of founder and as well the supreme commander of the sena.[506] Confirming the formation of the Ranvir Sena as a result of petty row over cigarettes, Vakil Chaudhary, a sena activist from Belaur says "that day we decided that we will have to be armed to stop the barbarian Naxalites."[507]

However, according to Peoples Union of Democratic Rights (PUDR) reports, the origins can also be traced to the issue of "daily wages", the source of continuous tension between landholders and the landless labor (*majdoor*). The tension between upper caste peasants and their laborer in Bhojpur became acute in 1989 when the CPI (ML) forced landlords to double the daily wages from 1.5 kg rice for a day's work. The CPI (ML) used the weapon of economic boycott and blockade effectively resulting in the acceptance of their demand by the upper caste landholders. The story goes that in 1993, a Bhumihar landlord of Belaur punished a laborer for his attempt to ask for higher daily wage than the usual pittance by detaining him in captivity. After getting the news of his detention by the village landlord, the local unit of the CPI (ML) organized a *nakabandi* (blockade) of the village and stopped any movement between Arah and Sahar. Forced by massive power display of the CPI (ML), the landlord released the laborer. The Bhumihars of the region, particularly, Brahmeshwar Singh, the *Mukhiya* of Belaur, felt humiliated, and humbled by the growing power of the CPI (ML). This feeling of growing powerlessness and assault on their traditional notions of pride and honor led to the formation of Ranvir Sena. The merit of this story is that it fits in well with the usual portrayal of caste senas, particularly Ranvir Sena as a class based violent defender of caste hegemony.

This interpretation is strengthened by the statements of the Chief of the Sena, Brahmeshwar Singh, who spits fire against Naxalites saying, "the Naxalites have destroyed the farmers of the state. They harass us, extort money, instigate workers not to work on our field and declare economic blockade, which has left more than 40,000 acres of cultivable land barren in the Bhojpur district alone."[508] He contests that Ranvir Sena is created only for Bhumihar asserting that the sena was formed to protect kisans (peasants). Originally, it was named Ranvir Sena Samiti (Ranvir Sena committee) then the name was changed to Ranvir Sangram Samiti (Ranvir Revolutionary Council). The State government has popularized the name Ranvir Sena.[509]

Another interesting theory of the origins of Ranvir Sena states that the Ranvir Sena was actually formed in the 1950s by a Bhumihar landlord named Ranvir Singh. The sena went dormant and reemerged in 1994 when Dharikshan Chaudhary, a Bhumihar landlord of Belaur village took the leadership. This story, however, has few takers.[510] Another theory about the origins of Ranvir Sena revolves around the so-called failures and mistakes of CPI (ML). The Maoist Communist Center (MCC) known for its "annihilatory tactics" and trashing of parliamentary politics, blames the CPI (ML) for the emergence of Ranvir Sena. According to the MCC leadership, the origins of Ranvir Sena can be traced to the revisionist policies followed by the CPI (ML). It criticizes the CPI (ML)'s decision to join parliamentary politics that led to disbanding of armed struggle against landlords and exposed cadres to violent attacks from landlords. However, most Maoist groups agree that the Ranvir Sena is the most deadly sena and the biggest roadblock to their attempt to transform the feudal power structure in Bihar. The ruthlessness of the Ranvir Sena can be gauged from the table

11 that demonstrates the consistency with which the Sena has carried out massacres since its inception in Bihar.

Table 11: List of people killed by Ranvir Sena since its inception in 1994

S No	Village	Block	District	Date	No of people killed
1.	Khopira	Sandesh	Bhojpur	4/4/95	3
2.	Sarthua	Sandesh	Bhojpur	7/25/95	6
3	Nurpur	Barahara	Bhojpur	8/5/95	6
4.	Chandi	Charpokhari	Bhojpur	2/7/96	4
5.	Patalpura	Sahar	Bhojpur	3/9/96	3
6.	Naonaur	Sahar	Bhojpur	4/22/96	5
7.	Narhi	Sahar	Bhojpur	5/5/96	3
8.	Narhi	Sahar	Bhojpur	5/19/96	3
9.	Morath	Sahar	Bhojpur	5/25/96	3
10.	Bathani Tola	Sahar	Bhojpur	7/11/96	19
11.	Purahara	Sahar	Bhojpur	11/25/96	4
12.	Khaneth	Sahar	Bhojpur	12/12/96	5
13.	Ekwari	Sahar	Bhojpur	12/24/96	6
14.	Bagar	Tarai	Bhojpur	1/1/97	3
15.	Machil	Makhdumpur	Jehanabad	1/31/97	4
16.	Habispur	Vikram	Patna	3/23/97	10
17.	Akopur	Arwal	Jehanabad	3/28/97	3
18.	Ekwari	Sahar	Bhojpur	4/10/97	9
19.	Nagari	Cahrpokhari	Bhojpur	5/11/97	10
20.	Khadasain	Karpi	Jehanabad	9/2/97	8
21.	Kkatesar Nala	Karpi	Jehanabad	11/23/97	6
22.	Laxampur Bathe	Arwal	Jehanabad	12/31/97	61

23.	AyyaraRampur	Karpi	Jehanabad	7/25/98	3
24.	Shankarbigha	Arwal	Jehanabad	1/25/99	22`
25.	Narayanpur	Makhdumpur	Jehanabad	2/10/99	11
26	Sendani	Belaganj	Gaya	4/21/99	12
27.	Sonebarsa	Charpokhari	Bhojpur	3/282000	3
28.	Panchpokhari	Nokha	Rohtas	5/2000	5
29.	Mianpur	Goh	Aurangabad	6/16/2000	35
30.	Buddubigha	Karpi	Arwal	3/15/2002	3
31.	Sarta	Kinjer	Arwal	6/11/2002	2
32.	Diliyanka	Sahar	Bhojpur	5/6/2002	6
	Total				298

Source: The CPI (ML) party pamphlet "Ye Jung Hum Zaroor Jeetein" (This war we must win) Undated.
This document can be accessed at the party office in Patna. Killings in the year 2002 have been tabulated by the researcher. The police account of the massacre is generally flawed and partisan. So most observers rely on local journalists, human rights organizations and the CPI (ML) for accurate information on the killings. A casual trip to any police station is enough to know that data collection is hardly any priority of the police department in Bihar. More importantly, the police data are often misleading and partisan.

The ideology of the Ranvir Sena

Structure of the Ideology: Representation of the Identity

To understand the ruthlessness of Ranvir Sena activists one must appreciate their belief system and the group's ideology that is founded in a complex interplay of caste, class, and religious ideas. The sena's construction of the idea of community revolves around the bonds of caste helping it to obscure the distinctions of class, rank and status in the community. It is a common knowledge in Bihar that Bhumihars, like most upper castes in the state, take great pains in maintaining the gulf between clean and unclean castes. They strongly believe in hierarchy, entitlement, and moral superiority. Being a landed caste, Bhumihars cling strongly to their conception of

dominance, real or imaginary. Even a casual trip to the Bhumihar dominated villages in Central Bihar would lead one to appreciate their dominance in the rituals of village life. Though most Bhumihars would complain about their declining fortunes in the state politics and administration, especially under the rule of Rashtriya Janata Dal, they still go an extra mile in upholding the local caste ranking schemes confirming their superior status. Unlike past caste senas, Ranvir Sena articulates its ideology in unambiguous terms. In terms of typology, there are three categories into which most sena activists fall, the ideological, the utopian and the rationalist. These categories are distinct but also overlap, revealing a complex interaction between them. The common theme running across the three categories is that of the "community warrior".

The Ideologicals: Violent Political Entrepreneurs?

The ideological Sena activists have a coherent discourse of their goals and aims. They offer a set of ideas that justify violence suiting their political and social contexts. They often address a wider constituency that helps them to legitimize the scale and scope of violence; the terms "Naxals", "Land", "Farmer", "Communism," "Hindutva," and "Nation", frequently figure in the discourse of ideological sena activists.[511] They appeal not just to their caste members but also to members of political parties, members of legislatures, bureaucrats, non-governmental organizations and social activists. Compared to the old caste senas in Bihar, the net of Ranvir Sena is quite wide. It is not just concentrated in rural parts of Bihar but has pervaded all the "living tissues" of politics and society in Bihar. The urban-rural divide is not a barrier for the spread of the ideology of Ranvir Sena. One sena activist from Bhojpur says "our existence is at stake so fight becomes obligatory. Ranvir Sena is a collective reaction of the community, not an individual response. This war will

continue until we restore our land and pride. Our Sena symbolizes the bravery, sacrifice and sense of justice of Ranvir Baba." [512] Further, he says, "we do not kill lower castes indiscriminately. We are against communists because they instigate lower castes to break the code of village order and violate our honor in the village. We cannot tolerate this. We got to hit back because we are warrior Brahman unlike begging Brahman. We are going through bad times; the government in Patna is hostile to us, and no political party supports us. Therefore, we have formed the Sena to protect our *bahu-beti* (daughter-in law and daughter) and our family. Police do nothing; they harass us and protect Naxals."[513]

In one of the pamphlets, Ranvir Sena declares: "the Ranvir Sena will show the entire world that it will take a bath in the blood of the CPI (ML) through India." [514] Their hatred against communism in general, not just Maoist groups (Naxals) lends them a measure of acceptability among most non-communist political parties in Bihar. In its pamphlets, it claims "the communists have been defeated in Russia and Eastern Europe, now they must be uprooted in India also." [515]

Talking to the press reporter after the Bathe massacre on December1, 1997 in which 62 Dalits were brutally murdered, the sena commander justified killing children and women, even pregnant women. Without a trace of remorse, he said "yes, we kill the women because they give birth to Naxalites; when the children grow up they become Naxalites and kill us. They (the lower caste people) give shelter to the Naxalites. In Bara and Dalechak Bahgaura, they killed 53 Rajputs. We are farmers but we have decided that if they kill two of us, we will ruin their whole *khandan* (clan); we will kill 15 of them."[516] Violence is so routinely internalized that the sena

commander does not remember how many lower caste persons he has murdered. He simply says that "*uska koi register-bahi thode hi rakha jaata ha* (are we to maintain registers and accounts?)."[517]

The brutality against women and children is a conscious decision that stems from hatred of dalits. Brahmeshwar once said. "In his fight against Ravana, (mythical demon king) Hanuman (monkey-God) set afire the whole of Lanka (capital of Ravana). Anything is fair in the fight against demons, even destroying the womb."[518] Most ideologicals recognize the centrality of land in the rural power structure and use it as the rallying point to muster support among their community and beyond. Spiting fire on Naxals, a Sena activist says

> Since 1970 there have been problems. It has been difficult for farmers. We cannot even get out of our house. They steal our crops, and call strikes. We are farmers. That is how we earn. They destroy that. It is like kicking us in the stomach. We have to save ourselves and our crops. We need protection from Marxist/Leninists. After we got together, we began to give them an appropriate response, a jaw-breaking response. For all of Bhojpur district, we chose our men and from that year on, we have been battling with CPI (ML). Those who have land are with us, and those who do not are with them.[519]

They consider Maoists groups highly oppressive (*ataychari*) because they do not respect their traditional rights in land. Further, they feel slighted by the assertion of lower castes to demand higher wages. Interestingly, ideologicals do not describe themselves as landlords. As is common among most Bhumihars, ideologicals prefer to call themselves farmers. Noting this a People's Union of Democratic Rights (PUDR) report says:

> In Jehanabad, (a stronghold of Sena), Bhumihars, as members of a dominant caste, control land. No doubt, partition within household over time has led to fragmentation of landholdings, and there are a sizable number today which may own only an acre or two. This was noted by the team in all the Bhumihar-dominated villages it visited. However, in spite of disparities in landholding, all

Bhumihar households in a village constitute a close- knit group, sharing bonds based on caste, kinship, and affinity. Importantly, they all own land. Hence, it is in their collective interest to suppress wages to ensure that the contest over land remains in their control.[520]

Reflecting on the influence of ideological Ranvir Sena activists, the report further says:

(Most) urban Bhumihar professionals have links with the villages and land through their families. Thus, Bhumihars as a caste are well entrenched not only in rural society but also in the administration and among professions. It is the Ranvir Sena's perception of social relations and rationalization of their position in society that tends to be reflected in the interpretation of events in Jehanabad by those holding key positions in the administration, and by journalists and academics. The manner in which violence in the district has been reported in media testifies to this fact. This partly explains why, despite having shared interests with other dominant castes, the Sena has mobilized only Bhumihars. Not merely does this ensures the support of small Bhumihar landowners, it sharpens the caste loyalties of those Bhumihars who have no direct agrarian connection. This has ensured considerable clout within a relatively short period. [521]

Most Sena members support political Hinduism, a conservative political version of popular Hinduism. As they consider themselves Brahmins, they feel naturally attracted to the vanguard role of defending the cause of Hinduism. The Brahmanical idea of hierarchy leads ideologicals to conflate caste and religion encompassing religion and politics in one single text. Further, they seek alliances with conservative political and party forces to achieve their goals. It has come as no surprise that though they have allies in all non-communist parties, Sena members are hard-core supporters of the Bhartiya Janata Party (Hindu Nationalist Party), and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha, (RSS), notorious for their anti-Muslim politics in India. An example of their commitment to the forces of Hindutva is that in the aftermath of the massacre of Muslims in the Gujarat riots in 2002, the sena members took out a procession in Arah chanting slogans to the effect that they would turn Bihar into another Gujarat. [522]

The Utopians- Warrior Brahmin in a prison?

Facing challenges from the Mandalized state administration and Naxals, many Bhumihars suffer from "persecution complex". Utopians are those who view Bhumihars being in a prison or being surrounded by hostile forces. Therefore, utopians attempt to re-invent the old order, real or imaginary. Like ideologicals, they can be found at every level, from the village to the higher reaches of politics and administration. Unlike ideologicals, utopians have no clear-cut political approach or strategy. They shun political parties. They despise the emerging social, political and cultural order in the countryside as detrimental to their community.

For utopians, Ranvir Baba is the source of divine powers as well. Many in Belaur village believe that if they chant Ranvir Baba's name, they cannot be defeated by anyone. "We first felt the divine power of Baba in 1971 when we fought the people of Sakhuwa for irrigation water, Since then we have chanted the name of Baba before attacking the enemy." says Vishwanath Chaudhary of Belaur village. [523] Unlike ideologicals, utopians believe they are divinely ordained to stop the prevailing anarchy created by outsiders (Naxals). For most utopians, land and power are encompassed by the notion of a moral community. They consider lower castes, especially those who actively challenge their hegemony, as "corporate enemy" deserving punishment, i.e., massacre. Interestingly, though they often complain about being neglected by the Laloo Yadav government, most Ranvir Sena activists have never attacked police or government property. Occasionally, the state police arrest them, but they do not view the state as a morally impure leviathan trampling upon their rights in land and sense of honor. According to them, the state has failed to guard their interests and honor because of the invasion of the lower castes in the state

structures. The reservation of jobs in the government services for the lower and backward castes has eroded the capacity of the state to fight "enemies of the society". This necessitates the formation of a paramilitary caste army as a "surrogate paramilitary" arm of the state, according to sena activists. Thus, the state is not inherently against us, utopians point out.[524]

This partly explains why most utopians appeal to a "substantialised" notion of the community. Though ideologicals also use a substantialised notion of caste in order to transcend the class boundaries within the community, utopians are consistently more cultural purists than ideologicals. Most Bhumihars echo the feeling of being surrounded by predatory forces bent on violating the age-old principles of dignity, and honor (izzat).[525] Prof. Kedar Nath Singh, Secretary, Sri Sitaram Ashram, Bihta, on being asked what the future holds for the Bhumihars, sadly said

> Bhumihars face a bleak future because the ruling political class is not interested in us. Earlier nobody hated so much, but now it seems everyone hates us, in fact, people violate our caste pride (gaurav). You go to Patna (the state capital); you will find conspiracy to discredit the Bhumihars. We are no longer landlords, but politicians make us out as feudal lords inciting people from other castes against us. We may be having some land but we are not lording over anyone".[526]

Balkeshwar Singh is actively associated with Bhumihar Society magazine in Patna. Wondering about why Bhumihars are facing so much hardship, he says

> In my village, there are about 200 Bhumihar households. Though, there are various factions in our caste in the village, we all have the same *samskar* (qualities) We are not landlords, the size of the farm has shrunk so much that we can not rely on agriculture alone. Batwara (division) in the family is so endemic that our plots have become very small. And small plots are not good for agriculture. We still do not work on the farms but backward castes like Yadavs, Kurmi, and Koiris work on the farms so they are successful. Most of us do not pay to our laborers minimum wages guaranteed by the government. But we do not torture our labor force."[527]

On the future of the caste, he echoed the often-heard sentiment, "Bhumihars are neglected in all fields of administration in the present government. As long as Yadavs are in power, we have no future. Rather we are in a prison. We are basically religious people and we need to take interest in social issues. Politics does not address social issues,"[528]

Most utopians subscribe to an inherent and immutable idea of the Bhumihar caste. At least in this sense, the shift from an interactional view of caste to a substantialised view of caste is almost complete. According to sena activists, *narsanhar* (massacre) of lower caste men, women, and children is defensible, if legitimate, to stop oppression of the community and protect the hierarchical order of the society in which Bhumihars have preeminence. One of the pamphlets of Ranvir Sena declares its intent clearly "with the help of guns, we will re-establish the old order of our forefathers."[529]

Many Bhumihar intellectuals, students, journalists, bureaucrats and politicians I met in Delhi and Patna directly and indirectly supported the substantialised version of the caste leading them to appreciate the efforts of utopians in Ranvir Sena. Ramjatan Sinha, former working president of Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee says, "Bhumihars are a martial race, and we do not take up arms for unjust cause. Look around, in every Bhumihar, you will find the same pride (tej), a willingness to resist injustice and avenge wrongdoing."[530] The utopians seek no negotiation and no dialogue with real or potential enemies. For this reason, utopians acquire "folk hero" status in the community. In most parts of Central Bihar, particularly in Patna, Bhojpur, Gaya, Jehanabad, Aurangabad and Nawada the Ranvir Sena Chief

Brahmeshwar Singh has emerged as a God-chosen savior of the community. In the Tekari sub-division of Gaya district, the Bhumihar women sing songs in his praise on the occasion of birth and marriage ceremonies.[531]

There are, however, some utopians that do not like Ranvir Sena for its marauding practices and its unleashing of a sort of civil war against lower castes. Dashrath Tiwari, editor, "Brahmarsi Samaj Patrika (Bhumihar Society Magazine) does not support the idea of a violent war to protect the interests of the community. He, however, recognizes the immutable character of the community and says, "The Bhumihar community is going through a serious crisis. Our identity is at stake, the community is being targeted from all sides."[532] Like many Bhumihars, he also envisions return to a communitarian front, though a peaceful one, in order to protect Bhumihars from the attacks of Maoists extremists.[533]

Interestingly, utopians support the efforts of social reform to rid the community of the evils of social and moral corruption. They think social reform will help them to restore the purity of the community allowing leading personal and collective *dharmik* life (code of conduct). Most sena leaders and supporters claim that they are not just fighting Naxals but also working hard to rid Bhumihar society of social ills. They believe their society has become weak due to lack of internal social reforms. The society has lost vigor because we practice customs not originally part of our society, claims sena members. A supporter of Ranvir Sena, Janardan Rai, says, "the organization is fighting against evils like tilak (dowry). In Bihar, the bride's father has to pay a hefty sum to the bridegroom. At Ekwari, the Ranvir Sena made a

groom sit on the motor cycle at gunpoint and married him off to a girl whose father was killed by Naxalites."[534]

Himanshu Rai, a Bhumihar academic at the University of Delhi, confirms the social reform dimension of the sena. He says, "social reform affords a measure of increased social respectability and helps build inner cohesion of the community. This is also a legacy of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati who championed the cause of Bhumihar Brahmans in pre-independence era."[535] On condition of anonymity, an active member of Ranvir Sena, points out the financial and strategic implications of social reform. He says, "we stopped the practice of having natuch girls to dance at weddings. We also put a ban on the *launda* dance (male transvestite dancer). It was a wasteful expenditure and also a corrupting influence for the morals of our youth. It was also important from strategic point of view; most of these natuch girls and male dancers were spying on Sena. They would survey our villages and collect information on our strength. Later, they would inform Naxals. Naxals would then strike our villages."[536]

Rationalists: Community Warriors or Criminals?

Rationalists are those who use the notion of caste to maximize their personal and partisan interests. They place their faith in caste but they are practical individuals always calculating what will maximize their immediate interests. Like utopians, they too are critical of existing social, political and cultural order but they do not profess to re-invent the lost glory of the community. They always act keeping in mind their individualistic choices. Therefore, rationalists are not only self-interested but also motivated by community norms in terms of making alliances and seeking legitimacy for their actions. The influence of the community as the behavioral constraint is likely

to be less on the rationalist than on ideological and utopian. The rationalists embrace caste norms to evade insecurity in the larger society. Most of the rationalists are impoverished petty feudals, contractors, criminal elements (caste goondas) and violent unemployed youths seeking new avenues of job.

It is no secret in Bihar that Ranvir Sena's armed squads include many Bhumihar criminals. Sena also receives support from underworld dons who have become members of the legislative assembly. The criminal-politicians such as Sunil Pandey, Suraj Bhan, Rama Singh, Krishna Sardar etc. build a wide network of clients who support Ranvir Sena. Though he denies any contact with the Ranvir Sena, it is an open secret in Bihar that Suraj Bhan Singh supports the Sena.[537] Sunil Pandey's involvement with the Ranvir Sena is routine and legendary. During the Assembly elections in 2000, Sunil Pandey left the Sena and contested elections. After having won, he is de-facto heading one significant faction of the Ranvir Sena.[538] The ranks of rationalists swelled by the entry of veteran criminal Akhilesh Singh, husband of independent MLA (member of legislative assembly) Aruna Singh, into their fold.[539] The criminal-politicians run lucrative trade of extortion tax (*rangdari*), protection racket and government contract from the jail. They, however, prefer to don the mantle of "community warriors" when it comes to defending the interests of their supporters. Their participation in the Ranvir Sena activities stems primarily from their desire to control the area and make financial gains. For this, they rely on caste resources. Since many Bhumihar peasants need armed protection against Naxalites, they, in times of crisis, approach rural criminal gangs patronized by these criminal-politicians.

According to Umesh Singh, office secretary of the CPI (ML), "these criminal politicians defend the interests of their class and caste in order to boost their political position in the power struggle in Patna." [540] Suggesting the link between criminals and politicians, the CPI (ML) document points out, "it was the goonda (musclemen) and bank-robbers belonging mostly to the Bhumihar caste that constituted and led Sena. They were criminals coming from among the Kulaks -earlier enjoying the patronage of the Congress whose leader Ramlakhan Yadav was a Lok Sabha member (Lower House of Indian Parliament) from Arah."[541] The rationalists are prone to factional fights and internal squabbles because they lack the high degree of ideological and personal commitment as shown by ideological and utopians. Cohesion eludes them. They are, however, considered a significant segment of the community warriors. Their easy access to sources of arms and ammunition make them" armies of the night." They also contribute to the stock of violent political entrepreneurs involved in booth capturing and fighting Naxals.

Ranvir Sena's Organizational Structure

Adoption of Maoist Principles: Guerilla warfare technique

The Ranvir Sena follows a hierarchical command structure in which the Chief, who is also the supreme leader of the organization, is the most decisive link. The Sena leadership follows a highly secretive and centralized leadership style. Unlike Naxalites, the organization of the senas follows violent strategies for preservation of existing social order and ward off any challenge to their dominance. Using caste as the motivational and mobilizational source, the leadership nudges lower level cadres to transcend their own narrow self-interest in pursuit of higher goals dictated by the interests of the community. In this sense, Ranvir Sena claims to be a mass

organization representing the interests of all Bhumihars instead of few individuals. Combining popular obedience and monopoly over means of coercion, the sena aims at securing justice for "oppressed Bhumihar community". The organization of the Ranvir Sena performs ideological, strategic and communal functions.[542] This is achieved by a variety of ways:

Appeal to a better future: Using caste ideology and religious ideas, the leadership frequently assures cadres that Naxalites have limited life and the uncertainty about the future will end soon. This raises the status of the Sena to a quasi-millenarian movement. Although it is deeply implicated in the electoral politics of the state, it believes in the divinely ordained mandate. This helps it to legitimize its violent strategy to electoral battles.

Through simple communication: The leadership does not use complex language and transmits plans in a very simple manner. Using traditional means of collective communication, such as "gohar"(drum beating), the Sena's armed mobile squads roam around maintaining what one sena activist called "perpetual vigil" on Naxals and their supporters.[543]

Trust in the leadership: The leadership works hard to ensure that no factional conflicts emerge in the organization. To do so, the leadership attempts to induce cadres to repose trust in the integrity and identity of the leadership. This is part of the communal function of the organization. Wining not only the trust of the cadres but also the support of the community is considered crucial to the success of the Sena. Therefore, attempts are made to valorize the martial and charismatic character of the leadership.[544]

Centralism and Secrecy: The command structure follows the principle of centralism; the chief and his executive committee take all the decisions secretly. The mobile cell like village committees remain in touch with the central command structure through secret communication. Secrecy and centralism go hand in glove. The secrecy is, however, misleading. Sena activists wear a "thin veil" on their faces when they conduct their campaigns in the villages and the towns. Most of the faces in the Sena are well- known in the area. Secrecy is considered useful in order to evade capture either by the Naxals or the police. This excessive emphasis on centralism and secrecy has, however, led to emergence of elitism in the sena. Centralization of all powers in the hands of the supreme commander is both a source of advantage and weakness. The causal connection between violent strategy and centralization of power is absolute in the case of Ranvir Sena. The centralization of power has led to frequent squabbles among elites in the leadership.

Empowerment of the cadres: The Ranvir Sena, unlike earlier senas attempts to make cadres feel a sense of significance of community service. This ensures transformation and empowerment of the rank and file. Performing the communal function, the sena attempts to infuse the cadres with a sense of community.

Mobilization of resources: The Ranvir Sena like earlier sena uses caste as mobilizational resources. Though resources are understood mainly as economic goods, manpower, weapons, evoking caste adds ideological, religious and community resources to the Sena. The emergence and survival of the Sena is contingent not just on crude rationality of economy goods but also influenced by the ostensibly irrational power of the community.

The high level of organization in Ranvir Sena sets it apart from earlier senas. It is no longer a spontaneous gathering of caste members. Ironically, it is organized on the Maoist guerilla warfare principles adopted from Naxalites in Bihar. Following Naxalites, the strategic functions of the Sena organization are "to formulate strategies by maintaining a dynamic balance between the demands of ideology and pressures of the environment, to ensure maximum congruence between strategic stipulation and the actual implementation and to make strategic adjustments with the situation and even replace one strategy by another when necessary."[545] According to the Sena Chief Brahmeshwar Singh, "Ranvir Sena will not disintegrate because it has adopted Maoist principle of guerilla warfare. Following Mao, there are two wings in our organization; operational and political. The political wing chalks out the details of the plan and the operational wing executes the plans. So there is decentralization, the decision making level does not interfere with the executing wing. We also follow Mao's three guerilla war principles: One, never fight a losing battle, two, if you can win, you must fight and third, run away if you are losing. The earlier senas did not follow these principles. They secured weapons from the money and executing wing also made plans. This led to their defeat and disintegration."[546] This shows that Ranvir Sena attempts to be a copycat of the Maoist revolutionary organization. As the chief of the organization, Brahmeshwar Singh gives authoritative interpretation to the ideology, carries on propaganda, and consolidates the organization. For him, strategy stands more of as formulation and execution of plan. There is not much theoretical work on strategy in the Sena.[547] The Sena's outlook on strategy is dictated by the adversary's decisions. In this sense, sena follows a crude version of game theory in which the best course of action for each player depends on what the other players do. The elements of the Sena

strategy are interconnected. The formulation of the strategy depends on making rational calculation about the environment and the so-called enemy's resources. In this not just armed might of the Naxalite is taken into consideration but also the entire political environment. In the world of the Ranvir Sena, the distinction between armed struggle and electoral conflict is artificial and unnecessary. Following the Maoist practice, the military line of the sena is tied to the political line. In contrast to "armed feudal bandits", Ranvir Sena displays a sophisticated sense of organization, strategy and ideology.[548]

Elaborating on the organizational structure and the strategy, Brahmeshwar Singh points out that "in our organization, each district in our influence is divided in regions, each region further divided in three to five sectors. In each sector, we depute at least 25 hardcore fighters."[549] As for the sena, strategy and plan overlap. The rationality of the strategy consists in the detailed time and place bound plan. The sena is not just a static village defense committee but also a mobile force having well-armed operational cells spread across Central Bihar. It operates on military principles of hierarchy, the supreme commander followed by zonal commander, then sectoral commander, and finally the fighting rank and file. The operational cells comprise "armed squads" who operate under a zonal commander. Interestingly, Ranvir Sena is not a rule–oriented organization but a goal-oriented organization. The members are encouraged to provide safety to Bhumihars facing Naxalite challenge at any cost; massacres are not considered a bad word in the world of Ranvir Sena. According to police sources, Ranvir Sena is running 16-armed squads. "Four and five squads of the Ranvir Sena are engaged in Bhojpur and Jehanabad districts respectively."[550] The police acknowledge the Sena's superior firepower and arsenal.

According to a Sena activist, Ranvir Sena is not a band of crooked people or criminals. Each area has one commander who is responsible for the execution of the plans. All the area commanders are under the supreme leadership of the Chief Brahmeshwar Singh. If any rebels, the Chief suspends him from the organization. In villages of Bhumihar dominance, a village defense committee is created. All able–bodied male members become members of this committee. This is called the "executive committee". The committee has regular posts of president, secretary and treasurer. The leadership for the committee is not elected but selected by the Chief Brahmeshwar Singh. Each member who joins the committee gives Rs10 (20 cents) to become member as token money to show solidarity with the Sena."[551]

The Sena follows the Maoist policy of having roaming armed squad (dastas). According to the Sena members, the village committee is the public face of the Sena and the dasta (squads) is the military wing of the Sena. The village committee organizes money and men. The military wing is always on the move, no fixed place and quick to strike at enemies as soon as precise plan reaches it.[552] Mostly young Bhumihar men comprise the armed squads. It has, however, been reported that Ranvir Sena has also started recruiting women in their armed squads. The Sena has floated a "Ranvir Mahila Sangh" (Ranvir Women Association) to organize Bhumihar women and impart armed training to them. The women are not being used in mobile operational cells but mainly as village defense committee.[553]

The military wing is carefully selected and provided training in arms. In creating the armed squads, the Sena has been helped by Bhumihars working in the Indian Army and various paramilitary organizations such as CRPF (Central Reserve

Police Force), BSF (Border Security Force) etc.[554] Evidence of the involvement of Army men and BSF personnel came in the aftermath of Sendani massacre when Gaya police arrested two serving army men and a BSF constable[555]. Various Human Rights Organizations have noted that Ranvir Sena has been recruiting their caste men serving in the Indian army. According to a People's Union of Democratic Rights report, "retired army men provide extensive training to the Sena members. This explains the military prowess of Ranvir Senas unlike earlier Senas run by amateur people."[556]

The sena prefers complete secrecy. The violation of the secrecy principle is dealt with firmly. According to Sena members, their success lies in secrecy. Though, they move openly, their armed squad remains in unknown hideouts. The families, which provide shelter, are told not to spread a word about their presence in the village because the lower caste tolas (hamlet), sympathizers of the CPI (ML) often inform the armed squad of Maoist groups (Red Senas). The Dastas (squad) of Ranvir Sena do not stay for long in a village; they keep roaming from one village to another village, making it difficult for Red armies and the police to detect their presence.

The Ranvir Sena claims, "in total we have 5,066 armed jawans (armed men). Each carries a semi-automatic rifle. We are capable of fighting even the army."[557] As Bihar is notorious for illegal gun factories, guns can be acquired easily. Most importantly, come election time, guns become the order of the day. The Sena procures guns freely taking advantage of illegal gun factories, legal loopholes and police's complicity with the Sena. Many senior police officials that I met in Patna and in district towns of Bihar informed me that it is almost impossible to stop the free flow of sophisticated arms to Ranvir Sena. One a senior police officer on condition of

anonymity said "even if we stop issuing of licensing of guns for sena members, you think they won't get guns. Bihar is flooded with illegal arms of sophisticated nature. Come elections, you will find politicians issuing guns to these sena members for political purposes. Besides them, we have all kinds of criminal gangs, some under direct state patronage. So to cut the story short, we can not stop free availability of guns to any one who desires to have a gun here in Bihar."[558] The Sena claims to have sophisticated arms such as AK-47s and even light machine guns. According to People's Union for Democratic Rights:

> Regarding the control of weapons, the senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) at Patna, Sunil Kumar, finds it impossible to control the issue of gun licenses (which can be acquired from any where in the country) or confiscate licensed arms carried by landlords who are Ranvir Sena leaders. According to Home Ministry reports, the Ranvir Sena posses 4, 000 guns, both with and without licenses. Until they actually fire their weapons, a group of Ranvir Sena members could be merely a group of landlords carrying legal arms. On the other hand, guns carried by laborers and poor peasants are likely to be un-licensed. When they pick up arms against the exploitation of the landlords or against the Sena, their weapons and those of the ML groups would be illegal and liable to confiscation. *The SSP gave an interesting explanation for not trying to withdraw licenses from weapons-wielding members of the Ranvir Sena- that in the present state of agrarian conflict, the state could not protect all the Bhumihars.* (emphasis mine) Hence they had to be allowed to have guns for their security and to safeguard their properties. When asked whether likewise the state was in a position to defend all Dalits who did not possess weapons, he maintained a telling silence.[559]

Personnel Structure

The Ranvir Sena has a recruitment policy in place. The cadres are chosen by local village committees after due deliberation. In order to expand fast in the initial days, the sena did not do much screening of Bhumihar youths. This resulted in admission of many unscrupulous elements. During the days of my fieldwork, the Sena was planning to introduce a rigorous recruitment program aimed at riding the Sena of so-called unscrupulous elements. Added to this was a vigorous drive to strengthen ideological commitment to the cause of serving the community. The diversion from

the so-called noble ideals of community triggered off a communist style "purification" campaign in the organization. The most important post after the Sena chief is the Sena Spokesman. Appointed by the Sena chief, the spokesman publicizes the programs, plans, and issues clarifications. He meets media clandestinely and gives briefs on Sena activates. This helps the Sena to project itself as a "para-political party" rather than a violent illegal militia.

Many Sena members report that the Sena pays monthly salary to the members of its armed squad. The Sena leaders claim that "each armed man gets paid Rs. 2000 per month. Besides, all have been insured for Rs 2 Lakh ($ 4000 approx.)." [560] The members in the armed squads are called "active members", eligible for other benefits that include a program of life insurance. Members of the sena I met confirm this. Various non-governmental organizations in Patna also informed me about the existence of the insurance package. Human Rights Watch in its interview with members of Bihar Dalits Vikas Samiti (Bihar Dalit Development Organization) in February 26, 1998 notes the existence of the insurance scheme for the sena members.[561] In the event of death of armed member, it gives about Rs 5 lakh ($ 11000) and around Rs. 2000 ($400) monthly for the livelihood of the family. The Sena claims to run its own postal and medical services in the area of its influence. In his interview with local journalists, the Chief Brahmeshwar Singh acknowledged the existence of insurance and pension benefits for those Sena members who are killed by the Maoist groups. He, however, also conceded that the scheme had run into rough weather due to shortage of funds.[562] The Sena members are also supplied uniforms, usually those worn by local police or the paramilitary forces of the Federal Government.

Financial Network

Financially, Ranvir Sena is the most organized private caste sena in the history of Bihar. The Sena Chief is in charge of all the finances. The Sena raises money locally and from extra local-sources. Locally, it imposes a levy on the land, a kind of user fee. The fee is not very high. A Sena member says, "we pay levy on acre basis to the sena, and it varies from area to area. So in rich fertile area the levy is high as opposed to non-irrigated areas. After all, the Sena needs money to ward off depredations of Naxals and let us do agriculture without fear. The Sena also functions as traditional caste council arbitrating over land disputes and property disputes. The parties involved pay token money as fee that goes into building the organizational network of the Sena."[563]

Apart from generating money from local sources, the Sena also raises funds from local rich farmers, politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen, government contractors, etc, from the community. The rationalist such as Sunil Pandey, Suraj Bhan etc. are considered a big source of money. The criminal-politician network spends huge amount of in order to use the cadres for electoral purposes. Most of the Sena's benefactors spring up during elections when the Sena's cadres are needed for "booth capturing", without which many influential politicians would not win elections in Bihar. The Sena chief accepts that it takes money from the candidates in elections. However, he does not accept the charge that the sena is involved in blackmailing candidates.[564] The Sena also secures money by bargaining for the transfer of bulk community votes in elections. According to Sena activists, the Chief Brahmeshwar Singh frequently tours Delhi, Calcutta, and Gujarat to seek donations from wealthy patrons.[565]

Open Mass Organization (Public Face of the Sena)

Imitating the Maoist principles of a mass organization, the Sena has also floated a farmer's body called "Rashtrawadi Kisan Mahasangh" (Nationalist Farmers' Association or RKM). This body is also knows as Ranvir Kisan Maha Sangh. The Sena members use it as an overt wing of Ranvir Sena designed to appeal to a larger constituency. This body actively mobilizes public opinion in its favor by organizing public rallies, demonstrations, petitioning local civil and police authorities, lobbying politicians and even participating in elections; local and national. The RKM has branches in most districts of Central Bihar. It has headquarters in Patna, the state capital, which almost remains deserted due to the fear of police search and seizure. During elections, the body becomes active in mobilizing upper caste peasants in Central Bihar.

The RKM also maintains close contact with local branches of "Brahmarsi Samaj" (Bhumihar Caste Association). The cadres of Ranvir Sena move freely in the urban localities where Bhumihars are in majority. The migration of Bhumihars to the city sustains the Sena's open political activity. For example, the migration of Bhumihars from the neighboring villages to Gaya town is concentrated in a locality called "LakhiBagh". Most of the Bhumihars in this area told me that one of the main reason of mass exodus of Bhumihars from villages was greater security because of the threat posed by the Naxal organizations. Their preponderant numerical strength in the urban locality makes them feel doubly secure because even politically dominant Yadavs are not able to make inroads in their locality. A Bhumihar youth, Nehruji told me "Bhumihars in the area give donations to Ranvir Sena and organize meetings for Rashtrawadi Kisan Sangh as well."[566]

State, Politics, and Ranvir Sena

The Sena's close proximity with the BJP and Samata, the two main opposition parties in the state assembly in 2002, shows the way caste senas are tied to the electoral politics of the state. As discussed earlier in the dissertation, Laloo Yadav led Rashtriya Janata Dal, the ruling political party in the state, represents Yadavs, Muslims and bulk of Dalits, it is considered natural for the Ranvir Sena to align with the BJP-Samata combine that represents most of Brahmans, Rajputs, Bhumihars and upwardly mobile backward castes such as Kurmi and Koiris. As the Bhartiya Janata Party's espousal of Hindutva appeals to the ideological make up of many Bhumihars, this party has been closely identified with the Bhumihar caste in Bihar. With the rout of the Congress Party in the politics of the state in the late 1980s, Bhumihars have increasingly moved away from the Congress Party and emerged as strong backers of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP).

This electoral shift is attributed to the capture of political power by the numerically strong backward castes in the 1990s. As discussed earlier in the dissertation, Laloo Yadav, the charismatic socialist leader, led this battle from the front marginalizing upper castes in the political power struggles. The transformation of political power in the state has also witnessed the resurgence of powerful radical peasant politics led by various Maoist groups. This realignment of social forces and reversal of political fortunes of the various castes in the 1990s in Bihar was clearly reflected in the state assembly elections of 1995 and 2000. Caught between the prospects of class annihilation at the hands of violent Maoist groups and political subordination to the rising tide of backward castes, the Ranvir Sena emerged as a

band of ferocious community warriors at a crucial juncture of historically patterned class and caste power struggles in Bihar.

Most private caste senas in the past had close ties with non-communist political parties. The Ranvir Sena is no exception. Unlike earlier caste armies, it is closely entangled in the electoral and political incentive structures of the state. It is a common knowledge in the state capital of Patna that Ranvir Sena operates as a "surrogate political arm" of many politicians from various political parties including the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the Samata Dal, the Congress Party, and even the Rashtriya Janata Dal. [567] Many politicians routinely use the services of private caste armies for booth capturing and intimidations of voters during elections. The booth capturing, silent or violent is considered the necessary ingredient of political life in Bihar. Arthur Max of Associated Press gives a vivid account of booth capturing in Bihar:

> Armies formed by local politicians have intimidated villages during every election in the underdeveloped farmland of northern India...On Election day, hired thugs prevent many voters from reaching polling stations. Other voters arrive to find their ballots have already been cast. Sometimes, gunmen literally walk off with the ballot box, a tactic called booth capturing. Police, either overwhelmed or paid off, do little to interfere.[568]

Given this nature of the electoral battles, the Sena activists emerge as political entrepreneurs impacting the electoral outcomes in many places in Bihar. According to one estimate, "the Ranvir Sena was responsible for killing more than fifty people during Bihar's 1995 state election campaign."[569] Most of the victims belong to the lower caste supporters of Naxal groups. Intimidation of voters and killing of the supporters of rival political parties are one of the main functions of private caste armies. With the gradual exit from the corridors of state power, many

Bhumihar politicians grudgingly or ungrudgingly view Ranvir Sena as vital organizational and personnel resources to influence the political outcomes in the state.

But Ranvir Sena's close ties with politics and politicians created so much public outcry in the aftermath of Laxamanpur Bathe massacre in December, 1997 that the State Government was forced to constitute a single member judicial commission headed by Justice Amir Das to "inquire into the alleged nexus between the activists of banned Ranvir Sena responsible for the massacre in village Laxamanpur Bathe ... and some political parties and their workers."[570] For months, the commission did not have office space to operate. The example of the state being soft on Ranvir Sena became very clear when the Rabri Devi Government of Bihar did not extend the term of the Amir Das Commission and let it expire on June 30, 1999.[571]

However, to deflect mounting public criticism, the Bihar government immediately issued fresh notification extending the term and scope of the Amir Das Commission. Interestingly, the new notification says "after the Laxampur Bathe massacre, Ranvir Sena has also committed massacres in Khagari Bigha-Sadani Bigha in Gaya district and Mianpur in Aurangabad district. Therefore, it is proper and reasonable that the inquiry into the role of Ranvir Sena in these massacres is also instructed to this Commission. In addition, it also appears necessary to have an inquiry into the establishment of Ranvir Sena and suggestions regarding remedial measures to check its activities."[572] Predictably, many observers in Patna were quick to point out this as an attempt to dilute the earlier focus on "political parties and their workers". Since caste alliances constantly shift back and forth, most politicians are

careful not to antagonize patrons of caste armies, according to Ramjatan Sinha, a veteran in the politics of sena in Bihar. [573]

Commenting on the political backers of Ranvir Sena in the aftermath of Bathe carnage, Outlook, a major national magazine, writes:

> There are clear indications of a BJP-Ranvir Sena nexus: Harendra Singh, a former Bhojpur district secretary of the BJP was arrested on charge of throwing a hand grenade at the Mahadharana (sit -in) organized by the Liberation State BJP leader Swaminath Tiwari was present at the meeting called to form the Ranvir Sena at Belaur. The BJP organized "Gram Gaurav" (village pride) rally at Ekwari in which the Ranvir Sena's Santu Singh opened fire, killing a chowkidar (village guard). The names of BJP leaders CP Thakur and Jagdish Sharma figured in the Habispur massacre FIR (first information report) with the police." [574]

Politicians are good source of money in Bihar. This can be measured by their routine involvement in pervasive corruption scandals. The Sena gets good donation from political parties sympathetic to it for doing "dirty works" especially in the elections. Some politicians keep regular touch with them. On occasion, the lines between political workers and sena workers get blurred. Most Bhumihar politicians that I spoke with told me that they do not consider Sena workers untouchable. Many considered them as "political workers." [575] The political salience of the sena in politics is revealed in the brazen manner the BJP led Federal Government of India imposed Central rule in Bihar on February 12, 1999 in the aftermath of Narayanpur massacre by Ranvir Sena. Citing the failure of the state machinery to stop killings of dalits and stop deterioration in the law and order situation, the Federal Government took over the government of Bihar. This was seen by many observers as the "culmination of the effort by the BJP and the Samata party to get rid of the influence of Laloo Yadav in the state politics and government without recourse to elections."[576]

The Peoples' Union of Democratic Rights confirming the link between politics and Ranvir Sena writes:

> The Ranvir Sena's political connections are said to be far more favorable than those of earlier armies. The BJP and Samata party are its chief patrons. Prominent local leaders like C.P.Thakur and Janardan Sharma (both of the BJP) are known to be its supporters (and have been named in the FIR of Habispur killings of March 1997). Sivanand Tiwari of Samata (Now Minister in the RJD Government) is also said to be close to the Ranvir Sena. The Ranvir Sena leader, Brahmeshwar Singh is with the BJP. But the hands of the RJD are hardly clean. Even apart from the support of individual local RJD persons, the complicity of the RJD is stark. Brahmeshwar Singh, who has Rs 5-lakh($10,000) rewards on his head, was twice released after he was picked up by the police (in Dhanbad and Patna) at the behest of the former Chief Minster Laloo Yadav. The Sena is said to have assisted in the election campaign of the RJD candidate from Arah, Chandradev Prasad Verma. Not surprisingly, he was vehement in demanding that the ban on the Sena be lifted.[577]

According to Brahmeshwar Singh, Sena was actively involved in the parliamentary and assembly elections in Bihar. His organization also took money from the candidates.[578] The clearest public evidence of Ranvir Sena's link with political parties came into sharp focus when Amir Das Commission in October 2001 summoned 24 politicians including Central Ministers Murli Monohar Joshi (BJP), Union Human Resources Minister and C.P.Thakur (BJP) Union Health Minister. Prominent politicians from the state included leader of opposition Sushil Kumar Modi, former member of assembly Janardan Sharma, Samata Party member of Parliament Arun Kumar, Ram Prasad Kushwaha, the RJD national spokesman and Excise Minister Sivanand Tiwari, Minister of Health Akhilesh Singh (RJD), former Congress Minister Ramjatan Sinha, D.K. Sharma, (Samata) member of assembly and Sunil Pandey, (Samata) Member of assembly. [579]Predictably, all the politicians denied their involvement. Politicians belonging to opposition parties criticized the

commission and the Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Laloo Yadav for implicating their name in the controversy.

The leader of the opposition in the assembly of Bihar Sushil Kumar Modi went to the extent of criticizing the commission for not issuing summons against Laloo Yadav.[580] Ramjatan Sinha in conversation with me denied that he was in any way connected with Ranvir Sena. He said, "Who is this Mukhiya? He can not lead us, do you think a Mukhiya (village headman) can lead the Bhumihar society when there are so many educated and intelligent people in the community."[581] However, many senior police officers including senior superintendents of police in Central Bihar concede the link between politicians and Ranvir Sena. One Superintendent of Police in the intelligence branch said "it is well known in the area that Sardar Krishna who won election in 1990 as independent candidate and later joined Bihar People's party was chief of Jehanabad district unit of Ranvir Sena. On the occasion of Jayanti (anniversary) of the founding of Ranvir Sena in October 1998, in Belaur, Haridwar Singh, Member of Parliament, was present and addressed the meeting." [582]

Though police officials often blame politicians for giving patronage to Ranvir Sena, they themselves either actively align with them or at least sympathies with them. The village and district level police functionaries overwhelmingly belong to upper castes and rich sections of backward castes. This ensures the continuing influence of caste at the local level of administration in Bihar. Bhojpur, the birthplace of Ranvir Sena is often cited in press reports as one of the few places where caste and dominance positively correlate. According to a correspondent of the Indian Express,

The police force has traditionally been dominated by Bhumihars and Rajputs. Since the implementation of the Mandal reservation, the OBCs (other backward castes) too have been represented, but these are primarily Yadavas and Kurmis who also happen to be the new landlords in these districts. Caste as a factor in the police and administration is relevant in Bhojpur more than anywhere else in Bihar.[583]

Electoral Performance?

In the parliamentary elections of 1998, Ranvir Sena emerged as a quasi-political party. Though banned by the state government, it actively sought a larger political space. It gave the slogan, "Belaur - Bhatuali Jhanki hain, Sampurn Bihar baaaki hain" (Belaur and Bhatuali were mere sideshows, total Bihar is ours). In Arah and Bikramganj parliamentary constituencies, it is widely believed that Ranvir Sena's opposition resulted in the defeat of the Janata Dal (United) candidate. The Ranvir Sena supported candidate Rangbahadur Singh of Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh, secured about 87,000 votes but lost the elections. However, Sena's efforts succeeded in defeating the Samata candidate Harihar Parsed in 1999 parliamentary elections. The main charge of Sena against Harihar Singh was that after having got elected to the parliament, he treated Ranvir Sena like an untouchable. And worse, he was accused of hobnobbing with Peoples War Group, a Maoist group. Following the Sena directive, Bhumihars by and large boycotted the Janata Dal (United).[584] As a result of division in votes, the RJD candidate supported by his Koiri brethren won the election.

The 1999 parliamentary elections put a dampener on Ranvir Sena's grand plan of political expansion. Supporting independent candidates, the Sena failed to get lead in even one assembly segment in the Arah parliamentary constituency. Worse, even in Sahar, the birthplace of Ranvir Sena, the Sena supported candidate secured only 26,445 votes, whereas its main rival CPI ML got 40,000 votes. Another area in

Bhojpur where sena is strong is Sandesh. Here too, the Sena supported candidate secured only 14,822 votes compared to the CPI (ML)'s 30,182 votes. Nowhere did the Sena make any significant electoral impact.[585] Their ambition to emerge a significant political player at the state level has suffered badly. One of the reasons of the electoral failure is rejection of Sena candidates by Rajputs, another dominant caste of the region and its inability to break out of narrow confines of caste in electoral politics.

The Sena, however, continues to be effective at the local level elections. In the recently concluded Panchyati Raj (local self government) elections in June 2001, held after 1979, Ranvir Sena made impressive gains in Central Bihar. The Sena ensured the defeat of the candidates sponsored by the MCC, a Maoist outfit. Candidates backed by the Sena won 9 out of 18 seats of Mukhiya (Village headman) in the Konch block of Gaya. A similar story has been repeated in Tekari. In Tekari block of Gaya district, 15 out of 23 seats of Mukhiya have gone in favor of Ranvir Sena supported candidates. The Sena sponsored candidates have also won seats in Zilla Parishad elections (District Council) ensuring dominance of Bhumihars at the local level of governance.[586]

The Ranvir Sena supported candidates also won in some villages in Bhojpur district, In villages such as Belaur, Ekwari, Badki Khrwain, Kon Dehri, Khopira etc, Sena candidates became *Mukhiya* (village head)[587] However, during the Panchayat elections, the bickering between Ranvir Sena and its open mass organization Rashtrawadi Kisan Sangh (RKS) came to the fore. In February, 2001, the Sangh issued a secret letter warning its members not to contest the Panchayat elections. However, the dictat was violated in most cases. Many Sena activists

contested elections and got elected. Nathun Singh, close to the Chief of Ranvir Sena and General Secretary of the Rashtrawadi Kisan Sangh contested election from Ekwari, and won. During the elections, the supreme commander of the Sena Brahmeshwar Singh traveled across Bhojpur to patch up inner contradictions.[588]

Factional Strife in Ranvir Sena

War for supremacy?

The Ranvir Sena is not immune to the iron law of factions. Stories abound about the growing factional warfare in the sena. Since it is not ideologically and politically homogeneous, factions are more or less organized along these fault lines. Newspaper reports, police sources, and observation in the field lead one to conclude that the supreme leader Brahmeshwar Singh's authority has been challenged. Three power centers seem to have emerged. Sunil Pandey, an MLA (member of assembly) from Piro constituency of Bhojpur district, represents one powerful faction in the sena. Though he claims to have no contact with Ranvir Sena, he is known to harbor ambition to become the Sena Chief. He has questioned the authority of Brahmeshwar Singh.[589] In 1999, Shivaji Singh, (area commander of the sena in Arah district) one of the commanders of Brahmeshwar Singh was killed by Sunil Pandey faction in Dehri in Rohtas district.[590] In this connection, three persons including Gopal Pandey who happens to be one of the pillars of Ranvir Sena were arrested. Gopal Pandey was considered a rival to Brahmeshwar Singh. Gopal Pandey killed Shivaji Singh for his alleged role in the killing of two Bhumihar youths; Jeetran Singh and Rupesh Singh in 1998.They were close to Gopal Pandey faction. To avenge the killing of his supporters, Gopal Pandey masterminded Shivaji's killing. Gopal Pandey surrendered

before the police after Ranvir Sena stepped pressure on him. He is currently lodged in the jail[591].

Another interesting development has been the formation of "Krishi Suraksha Sena (Agriculture Protection Army) by a former Sena leader VaidVyas. He leads the second faction in the sena. He has accused Brahmeshwar Singh of corruption and nepotism. According to him, the Chief Brahmeshwar Singh misappropriated 50 lakh Rs.($100,000) which were meant for arms purchase. The front floated by VaidVyas blames Brahmeshwar Singh for the bickering and the split in the Sena. Most Sena members claim that it is passing through acute crisis, a crisis of confidence. The biggest reason for this crisis is attributed to the "politics of personality" growing in the form of factional fights.

The third faction is called Belaur committee. It has accused the Chief Brahmeshwar Singh of nepotism and personality cult. According to Sena sources, initially it was run along the principles of "collective leadership". The ideal of individual leadership did not find favor with the founders of the Sena. The three men considered to be main players in the founding of the Sena were Shamsher Bahadur, Vijay Krishna, and Prabhakar. Brahmeshwar Singh was a late entry, according to dissidents. It was also decided in the beginning that village committee would control the organization. The dissidents point out that Brahmeshwar Singh brought the personality cult and the Sena gradually became identified with one person. This relegated the Belaur committee to the background. In the recent Panchyati elections, Belaur committee suddenly resurfaced attempting to influence the outcome of elections. The Belaur committee has strong influence in the Rashtrawadi Kisan Sangh

(RKS). In fact, in 1991, Udwantnagar branch of Rashtrawadi Kisan Sabha had issued a pamphlet-asking people to reform Ranvir Sena. The Sangh decided to meet, according to the pamphlet, at the memorial statue of Ranvir Baba in Belaur on April 1, 2002. The Sangh claimed that it is open to all regardless of caste, class, creed, religion, and gender. And it claimed that no person with a bad character would be admitted into the Sangh. The purists charged Brahmeshwar Singh with deviating from the noble ideals of Ranvir Baba. The Sangh had also announced its new team as well. Rajendra Choudhary of Belaur village was designated as executive president, and Master Ravindra Choudhary as the central spokesman.

According to locals, Master Ravindra Choudhary is considered one of the pillars of Ranvir Sena. He is one of the accused in Sarthua massacre on July 25, 1995. In an interview with a local Hindi magazine, Master Ravindra Choudhary spelled out his program of action to rid Ranvir Sena of the distortions it has been facing. However, it was apparent that his main aim was to restrain Brahmeshwar Singh. The war for supremacy in the organization has reached a stage where Ranvir Sena's capability to survive has seriously been questioned. Sunil Pandey declares, "Nobody is willing to accept Mukhiya(leader of Ranvir Sena) as supreme. The people here want peace not violence. Only people who are absconding from the police are with Mukhiya. The Bangar massacre will be the last nail in his coffin." [592] The Bangar massacre is considered a fratricidal massacre in which people close to the Sena chief killed Bhumihars.[593] To allay the fears about power struggles in Sena organization, in June 1991, the Sena Chief in a sensational press conference in Patna, asserted that there was no inner contradiction in the Sena and that he was working on making the Sena more powerful and united. According to the Sena's so-called official

spokesman, Shamsher Bahadur "there is no factional fight in the organization. The Sena follows its principles strongly. Anyone, who deviates from the principles of Sena, will not be tolerated."[594]

The internecine warfare in the Sena has brought good news for Naxal groups in Bihar. Ram Naresh Ram, leader of the CPI (ML) in the Bihar assembly, says that "the internal power struggle in the Sena has intensified, Peasants are being subjected to Rangdari tax (extortion money) and those reluctant to pay it are being killed. As a result, Bhumihars themselves are putting pressure on police for the arrest of sena leaders."[595]

Sena in Crisis?

Arrest of Ranvir Sena Chief: Savior or Sinner?

The Ranvir Sena met with its nemesis on August 29, 2002, when Patna police on the basis of a tip-off arrested the Chief of Ranvir Sena, Brahmeshwar Singh from a hotel in Patna. The elusive Mukhiya who ran the most dreaded private caste militia in the history of Bihar came to a denouement uncharacteristic of his public image. Looking sick and tired, he did not offer any resistance. The manner of his arrest was so dramatic that it left people in Patna guessing about the circumstances leading to his arrest. According to newspaper reports, he may have surrendered to the police because of threat to his life from factions hostile to him within his organization. He also perceived increasing fear of execution at the hands of radical Maoists armies in the region. A former Director General of Police believes "it is unimaginable that he would be found in a busy area such as Exhibition Road without being guarded by an armed squad. His security guards are equipped with sophisticated weapons such as AK-47 and automatic self-loading rifles."[596] The popular view is that his arrest came

as a result of factional warfare in the Sena that prompted one of his rival factions to inform police about his presence in the hotel.

At a press conference arranged by the Police, the Sena Chief refused to accept responsibility for the killings carried out by the Sena. "I am not involved in any of the cases cited by the police."[597] However, talking to journalists while in police custody, he acknowledged, "I don't have remorse over the massacres carried out by Ranvir Sena in its fight against Naxalites groups such as the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation or the Maoist Communist Center (MCC) and the People's War (PW) and their supporters, particularly among the landless poor and the backward Dalit community". [598] He told journalists, "Any doubt about my identity? ... I am a simple Brahmin working for the farmers." [599]Changing his tack to break out of caste image, he claimed to follow the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose. He, however, justified his decision to form the Sena, as "it was right as per the demand of the given situation then to protect and counter the enemy." [600]

To show that there is no succession crisis, the hardcore members of Ranvir Sena quickly elected Shamsher Bahadur Singh as its new Chief on September 7, 2002. The press release of the Sena claimed that Shamsher Singh has been working within the Sena since its inception. He was official spokesperson of the Sena during Brahmeshwar Singh's tenure as Chief of Ranvir Sena. The first task of the sena, according to its newly appointed spokesperson Sahastranshu, is to nab the informer.[601] Brahmeshwar Singh's supporters still cling to his "community savior" image. Expressing anguish, one member of his community in his village said "pura gaon marmahat hai muhiyaji ki girfatari se (the whole village is distressed with the arrest of

Mukhiya).[602] His family members claimed that he worked for the greater good of his community. Prabha Devi, wife of Brahmeshwar's younger brother Umanath Singh, talking to the Times of India correspondent said "Ghar Parivar tyaag kar woh jaat aur samaj ke liye kam karte hain (he works for the society and his caste after leaving behind the family)."[603] Shivamangal Singh, a local farmer of Khopira, raved about his integrity. He said "he is a man of character for the people of Khopira and other adjoining villages despite being labeled as a dreaded extremist. Although Mukhiya was held responsible for several massacres, he is a firm believer in non-violence as propounded by Gandhiji." [604]

The arrest, however, has not put an end to politics over Ranvir Sena. In fact, his arrest seems to have opened a Pandora's Box. The Patna Police claimed to have recovered a diary and documents that may reveal his connections with politicians in the state and the structure of the sena organization. Police sources admitted that the Sena Chief was arrested with the help of inside informers within the Sena. The main opposition party in the Bihar Assembly, the BJP, attributed the arrest of Singh to a plot of Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Laloo Yadav to win back the support among the dalits. According to the leader of the party in the assembly Sushil Kumar Modi, Bihar police had many opportunities to arrest the sena chief but let him remain at large at the behest of Laloo Yadav. He also demanded the arrest of the leaders of Maoist organizations as well.[605] In contrast, the ruling party Chief Laloo Yadav threatened to expose the alleged links between the Ranvir Sena and the oppositions parties especially the BJP.[606] This shows the extent to which the senas have become embedded in the increasing politicization of senas in Bihar.

Whither Ranvir Sena?

The evidence from Ranvir Sena demonstrates that Ranvir Sena has clearly emerged as the most sophisticated and organized private caste army in the history of Bihar. Even in the face of the arrest of its dreaded chief, "with a structured organization and pronounced hierarchies", as many police officials admit, the sena has shown resilience to survive and continue massacring lower castes in the region.[607]On February 6, 2003, the Sena killed two lower caste supporters of CPI (ML) in Mirapur village of Jehanabad district.[608] Unlike earlier caste senas such as Bhoomi Sena or SLF, Ranvir Sena has been more successful in performing a variety of functions ranging from violent defender of class interests of Bhumihars to the defender of the caste as a moral mandate. It has also come to perfect the so-called macabre art of massacre by killing lower caste Naxals. The growing criminalization of the rank and file and intense factionalism are reminder of the earlier caste senas. Unlike earlier senas, this sena is more deeply implicated in the politics of the state. Representing the growing political marginalization of Bhumihars, this sena works as a bridge between violent agrarian conflict and equally ruthless political conflict between upper castes and backward castes especially Yadavs. With the arrest of the Chief Brahmeshwar Singh, Ranvir Sena is going through the worst crisis in its history, yet it may continue to impact local and supra-local political struggles as "violent political entrepreneurs" in the short term. In the long term, the idea of community warrior will continue to inspire at least some to justify caste massacres in order to restore real or imagined purity of the community. The rise and continuity of the Ranvir Sena not only shows the beginning of a new phase in the politics of caste senas but also affirms the continuing powerlessness of the state in Bihar.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Focusing on the dynamics of class, caste and state power, this dissertation describes and explains the phenomenon of private caste senas (armies) in Bihar. This leads one to explore what is often called violent caste wars between landowning castes and lower castes. Recognizing the influence of history in shaping outcomes, the analysis of caste senas in Bihar captures the historically patterned social and political constraints and also appreciates the agency of human actors. The continuing influence of caste in structuring social and political outcomes reminds us that social actors invent and re-invent the meaning of their actions. The emergence of caste senas is not just a reminder of the growing powerlessness of the state or increasing agrarian conflict, but also the shifting and fluid nature of caste ideology in Bihar.

One of the central arguments of this dissertation is that the increasing ineffectiveness of democratic institutions and political leaders to resolve violent power conflicts and growing radicalization of peasant unrest has led to the emergence of private senas in the state of Bihar in India since the mid 1970s. This lends support to the arguments of a number of scholars that troubles of democracies arise not solely from the socioeconomic crisis. The crisis of state power in democracies result from unrestrained political struggles exacerbated by deepening economic crisis.[609] Atul Kohli's perceptive thesis of the "crisis of governability" explains the puzzle of private caste senas only partially as it ignores the ideological dimensions of caste system. Additionally, Kohli's otherwise rich description of breakdown of order in Bihar is

silent on how history has influenced the complex structuring of caste and agrarian struggles in Bihar.[610] Therefore, this dissertation attempts to place the emergence of caste senas in a long history of agrarian disturbances in the region. The historical dimensions of agrarian struggle suggest that proliferation of caste armies in post-independent Bihar is not sudden and spontaneous arising out of a *tabula rasa.* In contrast, the study argues that the legacy of what Anand Yang calls "limited Raj" of British colonialism is a continuous saga. The state in Bihar has never been so powerful as to act autonomous of social classes and castes. This study argues that emerging from the vestiges of the traditional lathials (musclemen) who formed the coercive arm of big Zamindars, senas came into existence as a private response to the upsurge of radical peasant movements in the early 1970s in Bihar. Although there is no evidence of caste-based senas in the colonial history of Bihar, caste riots between locally dominant castes and backward castes involved violent mobilization of caste in the early 1920s. For instance, the Lakhochak caste riot ascertains the influence of history in producing a vicious cycle of strife in Bihar. In this sense, senas are path-dependent. But this path-dependency is neither unilinear nor mechanical. The emergence and development of private caste senas are rooted in the contemporary experience of the gradual ineffectiveness of state power, rational calculus of political elites, and economically insecure landlords in Bihar. Contrary to popular imagination, the senas underscore the point that caste has never been static, fixed and monolithic. The increasing ineffectiveness of state power is not a sudden cataclysmic event leading to breakdown of order in Bihar. Therefore, the focus on history of the region not only yields significant insights into peasant unrest and emergence of caste senas as violent warriors but also This understanding will help us to situate the specificity of

Indian case in a comparative framework. The major findings of this dissertation can be put as follows:

The perpetration of violence on rural poor by private caste armies stands in sharp contrast to the usual image of the Indian state as "the principal planner, energizer, promoter, and director of social change". [611] The state in Bihar has been anything but monolithic, all-powerful and decisive particularly in the periphery or grassroots of politics in India. The evidence from Bihar supports what many scholars have come to recognize, the paradoxical capacities of state power in India.[612] This finding fits well into the theoretical framework of this study that state power is not hegemonic in terms of establishing its control over society. In other words, autonomy of the state is a misnomer. In a comparative perspective, state power may look rational, purposive and all-powerful in the center of power. In contrast, state power is weakly articulated at the local level leading it to contest, negotiate, bargain, and compromise with powerful social classes or locally dominant castes in the case of Bihar. To put it more clearly, the evidence from private caste armies in Bihar strengthens Migdal's perceptive argument that the domination of the state is best characterized by "dispersed" domination rather than "integrated domination." According to him, in the integrated domination, the state radically transforms the entire society and establishes its hegemony over the society. On the contrary, in the dispersed domination, neither the state nor any other social group manages to achieve transformative societal domination. [613] Historically, British rule in Bihar was neither deep nor pervasive leading the colonial state to share its powers with existing upper caste Rajas (small kings) and Zamindars. This architecture of what was called "the limited Raj" created during the British rule has increasingly come under strain due to

the penetration of democratic politics and resurgence of lower castes at the grassroots. This has exposed the limits of state power forcing it to negotiate and compromise with new players and social groups including private caste armies.

This study further suggests that the origins and proliferation of private caste armies in Bihar lie not only in subterranean structural forces but also in the vast array of state and societal institutions that influence how political actors define their interests and structure their relations of power to other groups. The private caste armies of landed castes in postcolonial Bihar, are rooted in complex patterns of agrarian crisis and declining autonomy of democratic institutions and political players to resolve violent power conflicts both in the arena of state and society. It is argued in this dissertation that the emergence of private caste senas in Bihar is not entirely rooted in agrarian struggles between landless lower castes and landowning upper and backward castes. The evidence from Bihar suggests that the emergence of senas has also coincided with a no-holds-barred political struggle for the control of the state power pitting upper castes against the backward castes in Bihar. The state's incapacity to mediate power struggles has led to fragmentation of state power or what is popularly called "withering away of state" in Bihar especially since the late 1960s. This runs counter to the traditional Marxist and Developmental theoretical perspectives that pit the society against the state. The emergence of private caste armies is, therefore, located in the decline of dominant role of the Congress Party, acute power struggles between traditionally dominant upper caste and emergent backward castes, increasing loss of the autonomy of bureaucracy, and emergence of a new wave of social movements especially radicalization of lower caste peasantry by Maoist groups in the late 1960s. Therefore, the increasing ineffectiveness of state

power and emergence of private caste armies are not rooted in intensification of crude class struggles or "ancient caste hatred". Caste senas do imply a rootedness in political struggles.

The dissertation's comparative exploration of Central Bihar and North Bihar as two qualitatively different ecological and social regions sets the stage for understanding the uniquely localized nature of private caste armies in Central Bihar. Demographically speaking, private caste armies have originated and proliferated in Central Bihar, a region described by CPI (ML) as the "flaming fields" of Bihar. Central Bihar, like other parts of Bihar is predominantly rural. As explained in chapter one, Central Bihar is better placed in terms of economic development. Despite semi-feudal relations of production, this region has seen a modicum of economic progress. This has led to ruthless struggles over whatever surplus in agricultural is available. The Kulak thesis or polarization thesis of Marxist analysts is important causal variable here, yet not sufficient to account for concentration of senas in Central Bihar. A multicausal interpretation emerges as one looks at the long history of peasant unrest, mobilization of backward castes by Triveni Sangh and peasant movements of Kisan Sabha of Swami Sahajanand in the region. The nature of social oppression and cultural traits also seems to have played in the radicalization of the lower caste peasantry against dominant castes. Therefore, objective conditions do set the stage for peasant unrest but do not themselves lead to uprising. The spark comes from culturally constructed perception of power. This is what caste seems to have done in the case of Bihar. Herein lies the explanation of why caste rhetoric is often used to justify instances of so-called cases of class war between landed castes and landless lower castes.

One of the central findings of the dissertation is that private caste senas are related to political power struggles in Bihar. As has been explored in chapter three, the tradition of fierce and unrestrained intra-elite struggles for state power has necessitated forging not very covert relationships with caste armies. In the scenario of intense power struggles and centralization of political power in the person of one leader, winning elections becomes more important than anything else. The numbers matter more in the making, breaking and remaking of new alliances, factions and groups in politics. Lack of stable social coalition becomes routine and normal. This is best illustrated by a focus on the factional feuds, fragmented governments, increasing criminalization of politics, deprofessionalization of bureaucracy and growing anarchy in Bihar especially since mid 1970s. It is well known in comparative literature that personalized power leads to destruction of parties and stable basis of power. Strong leaders detest parties and bureaucracy everywhere. And Bihar is no exception. The search for new sources of power accords respectability if not legitimacy to crime in politics. This also leads to recognition and acceptance of private caste armies by many politicians as surrogate arm of the state and unavoidable violent political entrepreneurs in order to stay in power. This is exactly what has happened in Bihar in the recent past.

One of the unintended consequences of Naxal mobilization in most parts of Central Bihar is the rising cost of elections. Most of my respondents in the villages and district towns informed me that the cost of hiring musclemen, buying guns and bombs has become increasingly high. This has put high pressure on politicians for diverting "developmental fund" to winning elections by hiring either criminals or caste senas who often double as "booth capturers". The conventional pork barrel

politics has gradually given way to violent political entrepreneurship. The distinctions between underworld, social bandits, and routine politics have increasingly become blurred. The growing alliance between village, and district level politicians and the criminal world has become a convenient alliance for appropriating not only rural surplus but also state property i.e., development fund. Corruption causes public outrage but does not substantially alter political fortunes in Bihar. In this scenario of plunder of state's resources and patronage politics, it is no surprise that private caste Senas have also emerged as the violent political entrepreneurs serving as the link between winning and losing elections for many politicians, if not all, in Bihar.

Described variously as "caste wars", "caste atrocities", "unofficial civil wars" or "class war", the emergence and proliferation of caste armies are not a hangover from the primordial past or rooted in some orientalist's fantasy. As has been explained in the exploration of various private caste senas in chapters five and six, senas reveal the dynamics of caste as one of the master narratives in structuring the engagements between state and society in Bihar. Although since independence, the ritual considerations of caste have ceased to be paramount in public, the influence of caste has been clearly significant on a variety of "everyday forms of democracy" in India.[614]

Undeniably, caste has adjusted to the requirements of democratic politics rendering inherited relations of power contestable. This has also resulted in what Louis Dumont calls "substantialisation" of caste. The shift to an idea of innate and fixed caste substance or identity leads private caste armies to imagine themselves as "community warriors", defending a real or imaginary pure moral community. This

explains why most caste armies seek to reject class, rank, and status differentiation. However, this shift is not yet complete but combines with many other different kinds of interests-sectarian, political, ethnic, agrarian, class etc. Therefore, the evidence from the Ranvir Sena partially supports Louis Dumont's "substantialisation" thesis. Furthermore, the sena demonstrates the colonial construction of caste as essentializing identity and its influence in structuring of engagements between state and society in India. However, this also points out that so-called caste wars between landed castes and landless are not manifestations of "primordial" or "ancient" hatred in Bihar. Conversely, modern politicians and state functionaries have often encouraged and also endorsed the caste senas that has led to the recognition of the caste senas as surrogate arm of the state. Aside from being class warriors, senas are deeply entrenched in the dynamics of electoral politics in Bihar. It is well known that the electoral politics in Bihar is not just reflection of regime change but also "defines and redefines political hierarchy" in the society.[615] The Ranvir Sena's not so-covert participation in the elections shows that the survival and re-emergence of senas in Bihar is influenced and constrained by unmediated political power struggles in Bihar especially since the late 1970s. Therefore, the emergence of the Ranvir Sena as "community warrior" lends support to the "modernity of the caste war".

It is also evident that unlike Dumont's mechanical view of caste system, caste identities are multidimensional and fluid, changing in response to ideological, material and political incentives. Rather than being abstract and ahistorical, the construction of the caste identity is immanent in the historical process. As explained in chapter five, the term Bhumihar is testimony to the colonial census's power to construct a new identity for the caste. It is only during colonialism that the idea of

military Brahman (Sainik Brahman) emerged in the popular consciousness of many Bhumihars. This acceptance required them to recognize some immutable, inherent qualities in the caste. Therefore, although Ranvir Sena attempts diligently to override all relevant distinctions such as rank, status or power, the shift from a traditional interactional view of caste to a substantialised notion of caste identity is incomplete and artificially constructed. Many Bhumihars perceive themselves as real or imaginary "community warriors", but only utopians among them strongly endorse certain "immutable, fixed, and unchanging" qualities of caste. Contrariwise, ideologicals among Bhumihars recognize caste but also appeal to material and political interests of the community. This leads them to forge wider network of class and political alliances. In this sense, the Ranvir Sena is not attempting to re-invent traditional Brahmanical order but seeking to adapt to changing reality of democratic politics in Bihar.

Undergoing rapid social and political marginalization, exacerbated by the stagnant economy in the state, Bhumihars have turned back to caste not as an immobile, otherworldly, and fatalistic ideology but as an assortment of relatively progressive modern resources to cope with increasing power struggles in the state and civil society. The evidence from the Ranvir Sena supports the view that Ranvir Sena has been formed to eliminate so-called "left-wing extremism" of Naxalites in Bihar. Furthermore, the emergence of Ranvir Sena as a violent political entrepreneur points out that caste violence is not the result of a crude class war between dominant class/ ruling class and subalterns. It is worth noting that state power in Bihar is no longer monopolized by the upper castes. Slowly and surely, lower castes, especially backward castes, have captured the state power. One of the major consequences of

this process has been the gradual decline of the capacity of the state to resolve violent power struggles.

Indeed, caste massacres are ugly, nasty and inhuman; they have acquired the dimension of "politics by other means". The analysis of so-called caste wars in Bihar suggests that that they are mostly in the nature of low intensity conflict. They are unquestionably part of violent peasant conflict but also are undeniably part of politics. The small level caste massacres are routine and predictable. Big caste massacres such as Bathe massacre of December 1997 are rare in Bihar, but they do occur. Big massacres produce huge political and policy consequences. They often spill over into national politics raising the stakes in the violent power struggles in Bihar. The relationship between the ruling party in the Federal government and the political party in power in the state hugely affects the outcomes of caste massacres. Claiming that law and order had failed in the event of Ranvir Sena's massacre of dalits in February 1999, the Federal Government of India led by the Bharatiya Janata Party dismissed the Rashtriya Janata Dal government in Bihar. Under the constitutional provision of the Article 356, the state government was placed under "presidential rule." Considered a brazen violation of the constitution, the dismissal of the state government indicated the extent to which rival political parties made political and electoral gains out of caste massacres. Condoned and backed by politicians and local authorities, caste massacres widen and augment the political fissures that often beget more awareness of caste hatred and violence. The analysis of Ranvir Sena suggests that caste massacres increasingly evolve into what Paul Brass calls the "institutionalized riot system" in the state. [616] In this sense, the violent caste wars in

Bihar are causally connected to state and society engagements in multiple contexts, often contradictory and ambiguous.

In sum, the emergence of private caste senas in Bihar not only makes the gradual decline of state power and ruthless peasant unrest more understandable to us but also proves that "caste must be neither disregarded nor downplayed –its power has simply been too compelling and enduring."[617] Caste as we know today is not a specter of the ancient past or a reminder of primordial animosities in India. Imagined as the fundamental organizing principle of Indian society during colonial rule, caste has been in perpetual flux. It has constantly been constructed and shaped by larger political struggles and processes in the arena of state and civil society in postcolonial India. Notwithstanding the ruthlessness of violent power struggles, the modernity of caste senas in Bihar leads us to recognize that "politics has changed beyond recognition" in India.[618] In other words, caste continues to remind us that politics is not only an art of possible but politics is often contentious, sometimes violent, claims about privilege, participation and exclusion. Capturing the travails of democracy in India, Khilnani says, "the democratic idea has penetrated the Indian political imagination and has begun to erode the authority of the social order and of a paternalist state. Democracy as manner of seeing and acting upon the world is changing the relations of Indian to themselves."[619] Therefore, the anxiety to usher in what Granvile Austin characterized as "third transfer of power" i.e. power sharing with the bottom half of society, is perhaps reflected in some Indians being class warriors and some becoming community warriors.[620] And this does not make Bihar more backward, anarchic, or dangerous than many places in India and elsewhere. Therein lie the beauty, power, and indeed the dilemma of democracy.

Beyond India: Micro-level Findings and Macro-level Comparison

Although the dissertation is India-specific, its conclusions have resonance elsewhere. In terms of a macro theoretical framework, the empirical findings of the study support neither a state-centered approach nor a society-centric perspective. Rather than a transcendental explanation of state power, we must search for mutually transforming nature of state-society interactions especially in the developing societies. Therefore, "bringing state- society together" perspective will help us understand not only state power but also the different ways in which the state-society interactions influence the patterns of breakdown, consolidation, and deepening of democracy across the world. Scholars are increasingly becoming aware of the recursive relationship between state and society as O'Donnell argues "states are interwoven in complex and different ways with their respective societies. This embeddedness means that the characteristics of each state and of each society heavily influence the characteristics of what democracy will be likely (if at all) to consolidate-or merely endure or eventually break down."[621]

The dynamics of private caste armies in Bihar focus on the significance of peasant unrest and state formation in post-colonial societies and elsewhere. The evidence from peasant unrest, symbolized by the violent conflict between Naxals and caste senas in Bihar, brings to light that peasant insurgency or revolt in India has been local, but not brief and momentary. More importantly, peasant unrest has been protracted and also muted into newer forms such as social movements and legally recognized political parties. The evolution of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) from a violent illegal social movement to a participant in electoral democracy shows the gradual incorporation of peasants as active and conscious

agents in the democratic forms of state power in post –colonial societies. Instead of being eliminated in the march of modernity, peasants in India elsewhere continue to shape the outcomes of the historical development of capitalism. In many places in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, peasant revolts have impacted the paths of transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Therefore, Barrington Moore's description of ineffectual nature of peasant revolts in India needs to be revised and refined in order to appreciate the contributions of peasants in the making of the modern world especially in the post-colonial societies.

It is also important to recognize that although peasant revolts are significant, the chances of a violent peasant revolution are remote in many places including India. This leads us to suggest that the emergence of private caste armies as surrogate coercive arm of the state in Bihar reaffirms Theda Skocpol's classic observation that peasant rebellions are function of whether the state penetrated the peasantry and consequently did not rely on local elites for social control and also "the relaxation of state coercive sanctions against peasant revolts."[622] Therefore, this dissertation confirms the prevailing wisdom in comparative politics that peasant insurgency is necessary but not sufficient cause for social revolution in agrarian societies. This, however, should not lead us to stereotype peasants as passive, mute and meek. As the analysis of caste senas in Bihar has demonstrated that the moral economy world is always fragile and everyday resistance not always adequate, leaving scope for violent eruptions on occasion. The "Brechtian forms of class struggle" or the long silence between various forms of everyday resistance is broken by open and violent rebellion by peasants against the state power and locally dominant classes. Instead of viewing everyday resistance and extraordinary forms of violent peasant rebellion as two

separate domains of peasant struggle, the findings of this dissertation suggest adopting a unified framework of peasant revolt. This will help us to explore the significance of the notion of community, peasant consciousness and patterns of state power in many peasant societies in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Although some sociologists and anthropologists such as A.M. Shah refuse to conflate caste and ethnicity, caste has increasingly come to be viewed as ethnic category.[623] Adopting a border notion of ethnicity helps us to generalize the findings of this dissertation. Caste appears like ethnic groups in many other places in the world. To understand the analytical import of caste, however, one has to keep in mind as Fuller points out that "ethnic distinctiveness is evaluated positively in modern America, whereas caste division is not, so that urban, middle class Indians are highly ambivalent about the place of caste in defining their own identities."[624] In the narrow sense of the term ethnic, caste conflicts in Bihar cannot be called ethnic. However, as Horowitz suggests that all conflicts based on ascriptive group identities- race, language, religion, tribe or caste-can be called ethnic.[625] According to him, the relationship between class and ethnicity can be captured by making the distinction between ranked and unranked ethnic groups. According to him, in the ranked ethnic system, the class and ethnicity merge. In the unranked ethnic system, the class and ethnicity cross each other. In the ranked ethnic system, the ethnic groups are ordered in a hierarchy, with one superordinate and another subordinate, ethnic conflict moves in one direction".[626] Further, in the ranked ethnic system, "the unequal distribution of worth between superiors and subordinates is acknowledged and reinforced by an elaborate set of behavioral prescriptions and prohibitions. In unranked system, relative group worth is always uncertain."[627] For instance Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda and

Burundi belong to ranked ethnic system. On the contrary, Sinhalese and Tamils, Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia include unranked ethnic system. The broader notion of ethnic conflict helps us distinguish caste conflicts from the class or economic basis. Although it is argued here that caste wars do not lack socioeconomic or class basis, the focus on caste wars as ethnic conflict will allow us to draw macro-level lessons from micro-level findings. Seen from this comparative understanding, caste can be understood as a good example of ranked ethnic system.

The analysis of private caste armies in Bihar corroborates the findings of recent scholarly literature in comparative politics that "ethnic violence tends to be highly local or regionally concentrated, not even spread across the length and breadth of the country. Characteristic more of civil wars, a countrywide breakdown of ethnic relations is rare."[628] According to scholars on ethnic violence, the data from the United States and Northern Ireland lend support to this important insight about the ethnic violence. The caste conflicts or atrocities on lower castes are not uncommon to many parts of India. More importantly, Maoist groups, one of the major actors in the so-called caste violence is also active in many parts of India. However, the castes wars between private caste senas and the lower castes mobilized by Naxals (Maoist groups) are regionally concentrated in Central Bihar. Not to speak of the entire country, despite exaggerated impressions of the destructive power of caste, caste wars do not spill over to other regions of Bihar. In other words, consistent with the macro hypothesis on ethnic violence, the violence of private caste senas is quarantined regionally in Bihar.

Although caste and class factors are important causal factors in ethnic conflict, the role of state power and political power struggles in ethnic violence is no less significant in India and elsewhere. It is well known and well documented that upper castes and emergent backward castes dominate local civil and police administration in Bihar. Since caste is structurally a local reality, the local mechanisms of power and control matter rather decisively. Caught in the ruthless power struggles between upper castes and backward castes, the local state authorities either condone or abet the violence of private caste armies. Furthermore, ruling political elites in the state capital reap heavy dividends from the political incentives rooted in the politicization of caste wars between private caste senas and Naxals. What would have been usual class conflict between landowners and landless lower castes gets easily embedded in the political power struggles. Given the fragmented nature of the state power, the power conflicts spill over in caste massacres initiated against some caste groups with the connivance of state authorities. Therefore, the findings of this dissertation tend to support institutionalist argument advanced by Arend Lijphart and Donald Horowitz that elite compromise and electoral incentives prevent ethnic conflict and promote peace. The private caste senas in Bihar indicate that unmediated power struggles between upper castes and backward castes have contributed to caste violence. The so-called failures of land reforms are not unconnected to growing crisis in the state in Bihar. Paraphrasing Horowitz, virtually all-political events in Bihar have huge ethnic consequences leading to caste riots on occasion. That politics is no less thicker than blood is the lesson one draws from the caste violence in Bihar.

The dissertation's findings also offer important insights about how and why ethnic identities have been constructed in recent history especially in colonial societies. As has been shown in the discussion of the formation of caste identities in Bihar, colonial officials and modern knowledge mechanisms such as census produced artificially and politically constructed castes identities leading people to view caste as the fundamental and durable building blocks of the Indian society. Furthermore, the distributions and allocation of public goods and services followed this construction of identity resulting in struggles for power in terms of ethnic category. Once created, ethnic categories acquire the status of a powerful and enduring narrative creating their own social, political and cultural effects.

The Ranvir Sena, a private caste army of upper caste Bhumihars, refers to the way ethnic identities have been created recently and become politically manipulated representation in many post-colonial societies. Given the existence of "institutionalized riot structure", in many places in India, caste easily acquires the status of master narrative of antagonism and hatred in popular consciousness. This leads to violent conflicts. The implication of this constructivist interpretation here is that the popular portrayal of caste armies as community warriors defending caste as an embodiment of hierarchy and purity has been politically constructed in the recent history of domination and resistance in Bihar. Evoking the spirit of selfless piety, caste armies fight lower castes as real or imaginary enemy of the traditional notion of the community. This may be an extreme example of ethnic antagonism but not unique. Malays often consider Chinese as impure and crude. The Nigerian Kanuri dislikes and even despises Ibo. Therefore, the dissertation suggests that a combination

of constructivist and institutionalist arguments would provide us a better understanding of ethnic conflict and violence in many places in the world.

The limited but ruthlessly violent warfare between private caste armies and Maoist Subalterns in Bihar also illuminates the fact that state power in developing societies seldom operates in a rational, purposeful, and hegemonic manner. It is worth noting that although fired by the ideology of social justice for the lower castes in Bihar, ruling political leaders and front line state officials often find it hard to achieve the declared goals and objectives of the state. Facing unmediated power struggles among elites in the arena of state power and violent peasant unrest, the state in Bihar has wittingly and unwittingly found it easier or perhaps natural to compromise, bargain and negotiate with private caste armies. The failure to implement redistributional polices, and inability to contain violent non-state actors including Maoist guerrillas stem from the diverse ways in which the locally powerful social classes, politicians, and state officials structure political outcomes. The instance of state being embedded in the struggles for domination is often articulated in the elusive discourse on the "lack of political will", a characteristics feature of many regimes in the Third World. Although private caste senas in Bihar reflect the specificity of the dynamics of class, caste and state power in India, they are not unusual from a broader comparative perspective.

It is well known in comparative politics literature that most of the existing models of state formation and capability have been derived from the West European experience. This has, however, led to ignorance of instances of states struggling to achieve their domination especially in the context of transition from authoritarian rule

(colonial or otherwise) to consolidation and deepening of democracy. The works of Michael Mann, Charles Tilly and others offer insightful explanation of the evolution of the European state formation but fails to explain the fluidity and variance in the state power elsewhere. Not in all historical circumstances have states been able to control or crush other alternate wielders of coercion within their territories and establish hegemony. The classic Weberian formulation of state's monopoly of coercive force is nowhere monolithic. The notion of an all-powerful, autonomous and purely legitimate state does not work in many places of the World. Instead, a limited, fragmented and not too efficient state has come to dot the social and political landscapes in many places. Deploring the Eurocentric tendency of social scientists "to create an aura of invincibility about the state", Migdal argues:

> Like any other organizations, states have real limits to their power: what they can do and what they cannot do, when they can collect taxes and when not, which rules they can make binding and which not. Ambitious goals for states-aims of actually penetrating throughout the society, regulating the nitty-gritty of social relations, extracting revenues, appropriating resources that determine the nature of economic life, and controlling the most dearly held symbols-have seldom been achieved, certainly not in most of the new or renewed state organization in the Third World.[629]

Most scholarly works in comparative politics have noted the fact that in many places in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, ineffective states coexist with autonomous spheres of power, often in connivance with the state authorities and politicians. In many democracies including old ones like India, the spread and effectiveness of the state power evaporates as one reaches subnational or local level. At the local level, state organizations exit but not able to impose its regulatory powers on a variety of systems of private power and social actors. Commenting on the privatization of state power in Latin America, O' Donnell says:

The mistake of reifying the state may not be evident when theorizing about homogenous countries; but it becomes apparent when the obliteration of their public dimension makes of some state organizations parts of circuits of power which are perversely privatized. Parts of the northeast and the whole Amazonia in Brazil, the highlands in Peru and various provinces in the center and northwest of Argentina, are examples of the evaporation of the public dimension of the state and consequently, of the odd "reification" of the state as exclusively consisting of organizations that, in those regions, are part of privatized, often sultanistic, circuits of power.[630]

In this sense, the emergence of private caste senas as surrogate arm of the state in Bihar is not exceptional. The picture of Bihar as a place where government and political parties often function on the basis of personalism, nepotism and clientialism is not unusual. A highly politicized and corrupt bureaucracy is considered normal because patronage becomes the *raison d' etre* of the state power. In this setting, the state's ineffectiveness to enforce its own power comes to support what O'Donnell calls "a democracy of low-intensity citizenship".[631] This is what caste wars between private caste armies and lower caste Naxals have come to symbolize in the state of Bihar in India. Therefore, the so-called "withering of the state power" in Bihar is not *sui generis.*

Further more, caste armies are again not unique. In many places in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, militias, guerrillas, terrorists, vigilante groups, mafias, paramilitary groups have often emerged and defined themselves in terms of ethnicity, language, region or religion. They have also frequently questioned and undermined state's efforts to control coercive monopoly and establish total domination over the civil society. In some places, for instance in Colombia, guerrillas and militias maintain not very unambiguous relationship with state elites including military and police officials.[632] Instead of total war, Latin American elites have preferred "limited war" leading to the wide dispersion of the means of coercion in the society.[633] The

so-called end of "Clausewitzian" warfare in the post-cold war world has led to proliferation of "irregular armed forces" held together by what Charles Tilly calls "embedded identities."[634] Commenting on the significance of "irregular armed forces" and their role in state formation, Diane Davis points out:

> In those places with particularly vulnerable political and economic conditions, the strong arm of the state is directed inwardly as much as outwardly, as is increasingly evident in Central and East Europe, Latin America, Africa, Central and East Asia and the Middle East. In many of these locations, specialized paramilitary forces and police now replace the national military on the front lines of violent conflict, while citizens arm themselves both offensively and defensively as vigilante force, militias, terrorists, and even mafia organizations *seeking to counteract or bypass the state's claim on a monopoly of legitimate force.* (emphasis mine) These developments not only suggest that further study of the origins and larger political impacts of these new patterns of armed force might take us far in explaining the potential obstacles to world peace, and even the erosion of democracy and citizenship's rights in the contemporary era; they also shed light on a potential paradox during the celebratory dawn of the initial post Cold War euphoria: as the probability of world war diminishes, the likelihood of "internal" war and subnational violence may be increasing, at least for certain countries.[635]

Therefore, from a comparative perspective, the case of private caste armies in Bihar draws our attention to the crucial but neglected aspect of the significance of violence and coercion in the process of the evolution of the state power and deepening of democracy in many places. Private caste senas reveal how deeply violence and coercion are embedded in social, political and cultural interactions. Although morally troubling, violence continues to be an intrinsic and almost unavoidable aspect of human existence. And it is deeply tragic. Both Community Warriors and Maoist Subalterns in Bihar are inspired by the notion of ultimate sacrifice, the willingness to die for their cause. If collective violence is about material and political power, it is also about honor, prestige and dignity.

References

[1] According to Varshney, India has broken the strong association between affluence and stable democracy. Rejecting the thesis of India being a sham democracy on account of prevalence of social and economic inequalities, Varshney argues that if inequality, despite democratic institutions, comes in the way of free expression of political preferences, such inequality makes a polity *less* democratic, but it does not make it *undemocratic.* So long as contestation and participation are available, democracy is a *continuous variable* expressed as "more or less"), not a *dichotomous variable* (expressed as "yes or no"). See Ashutosh Varshney, Deeper but Unfinished", **Seminar**, 485, (January, 2000).

http://www.india-seminar.com/2000/485/485%20varshney.htm. 4/10/2003.

Also see Ashutosh Varshney, "Why Democracy Survives?" Journal of Democracy, (1998), 36-50. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v009/9.3varshney.html.4/10/2003. See Atul Kohli, ed., **The success of India's Democracy**, (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 2001).

As opposed to positive and optimistic appraisal of Varshney and Kohli, "democratic authoritarianism", Ayesha Jalal argues, explains the polity in India. Minus political superstructure, According to her, there are no fundamental differences between India and Pakistan as both exhibit profound socio-economic inequalities and continuation of colonial state structures. Through the sham ritual of elections, parliamentary form of government in India has produced a partnership between the political leadership and the non-elected state institutions. This has created democratic authoritarianism in India. See Ayesha Jalal, **Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia**, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 249-50.

Yan Martel, winner of Booker Prize for 2002, describes India as "all the wonder and horror" of life. In an interview with Outlook, a national weekly in India, Martel said, "India is all lives in one place, India is all emotions in one place. It's an extra-ordinary, dazzling place; it's all the wonder and horror of life".
http://headlines.sify.com/1316news4.htML?headline=India~is~the~richest~place~on~earth:~Booker~winner .4/10/2003.

[2] There are around 17 Maoist left groups in Bihar. However, in terms of influence, three groups are significant: Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)-Liberation Group or Maale in popular parlance, Maoist Communist Center (MCC) and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Party Unity. The beginnings of these groups are traced to the Naxalbari Movement led by legendary Maoist leader Charu Mazumdar in the late 1960s in the Naxalbari region in West Bengal. The first spark of Naxalbari uprising was started in Mushari block in Muzaffarpur district in North Bihar in 1969. The armed struggle of CPI (Marxist –Leninist) party, a breakaway group of Communist Party of India (Marxist) was quickly crushed by the police and army action in West Bengal and other regions in India. However, in Bihar, few Naxal groups such as CPI (ML) Liberation and CPI (ML) Party-Unity survived mainly in Central Bihar districts. Over time, these groups have evolved reflecting changes in their strategy and tactics toward revolution and the class nature of the Indian State.

[3] According to Marc Galanter, the term Backward Castes or Backward Classes had a less fixed and definite reference at the time of independence in 1947. The term has come to mean different things in different places. The Constitution of India refers to backward Castes as groups other than Scheduled Castes and Tribes. See Marc Galanter, **Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in Indian**, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). This dissertation uses the term lower castes to include not only untouchables but also lower Shudras comprising the lower sections of the Backward Castes. The avoidance to use the term untouchability in the dissertation does not mean untouchability has ceased to exist in India. Although the Constitution of India has legally abolished untouchability, lower castes particularly so-called former untouchables are still subjected to severe material, social, ritual, symbolic, and political discriminations. T.K.Oommen defines untouchability as a system of "cumulative domination", in which untouchables have low ritual status, wretched economic life, and no independent political power. See T.K Oommen, "Sources of Deprivation and Styles of Protest: The Case of the Dalits in India", **Contributions to Indian Sociology**, vol.18 (1984), 45-61. Since most untouchables I met do not use the term untouchable, I preferred to use the term Harijans or Scheduled Castes (SC) or Dalits interchangeably in the dissertation. The term untouchability frames the discussion of lower castes in binary categories; touchable v untouchables, or pure or impure. On the contrary, the dissertation emphasizes not only exclusion of untouchables but also their inclusion in the society. Mahatma Gandhi coined the term Harijan in the 1930s to refer to untouchables. The Government of India Act 1935 invented the term " Scheduled Classes" that was picked up by Ambedkar and his followers to describe untouchables in India. Followers of Ambedkar see the term Harijan as paternalistic and a ploy of the upper castes to perpetuate the caste system. Although it is true that untouchables are generally reluctant to reveal their social background in public, lower castes in Bihar no longer show any reluctance to conceal their caste identity in the changed political environment in the 1980s and 1990s. Due to mobilization by various Maoist groups, and increasing Mandalization of politics, lower castes nowadays routinely assert their caste identity in order to demonstrate their growing empowerment. Bihar is known for peasant movments or revolts during colonial rule, however, interestingly as Gail Omvedt suggests that there had been little of anti-caste movement in Bihar before independence. Therefore, the Naxal movement in Bihar can be understood not only as class war but also manifestation of anti-caste upsurge. See, Gail Omvedt, **Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India** (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 58-61.The term Dalit that means "the downtrodden", has come from the Dalit Panthers, a radical political movement of untouchable castes in India. Organized along the lines of American Black Panthers, the Dalit Panthers was founded in Bombay in 1972. Known for radical ideology, the movement also started a new literary tradition called Dalit Sahitya (Literature of the Downtrodden). Although the Dalit Panthers failed to become a mass movement, the term dalit has come to symbolize the militancy of lower castes in India .See Robert Deliege, **The Untouchables of India,** (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1999), 9-22. Also see E. Zelliot, **From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on Ambedkar Movement,** (Delhi: Manohar, 1992). In many villages of Central Bihar, the term dalit is increasingly being used by radicalized sections of the lower castes. Most upper castes refrain from using the term dalit and prefer to use the term Harijan or Scheduled castes. Although the term dalit has become popular among politicians, intellectuals and militant activists, the term Harijan or Scheduled Castes (SC) continues to be used by many lower castes in Bihar. It is worth noting that long before the term dalit came to describe the radicalization of the lower castes in India, the monk peasant leader Swami Sahajanand had started using the term dalit to refer to exploited lower caste poor in Bihar. See Walter Hauser (ed), **Sahajanand on Agricultural Labor and the Rural Poor,** (Delhi: Manohar, 1994).

[4] Rudolph I. Lloyd. and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, **In Pursuit of Laxmi: the Political Economy of the Indian State,** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 16. The Federal Government in India is often referred to as the Central Government or the Union Government in the political and legal discourse.

[5] See Ministry of Home Affairs (Government of India), **Causes and Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions,** (New Delhi, 1969). In 1982, a Central Government team headed by eminent economist Dr. Manmohan Singh was established to study so-called extremist activities in the country and to suggest remedial steps. The team pointed to the correlation between the agrarian unrest and lack of effective implementation of land reforms in areas affected by peasant unrest. Note, bureaucrats are not often shy in accepting the role of the state in exacerbating the agrarian disturbances. Commenting on lack of land reforms in Bihar, K.B. Saxena, Joint Secretary, and Rural Development for the Govt. of India, an experienced hand at land reforms says "little has changed in Bihar in terms of land reforms. Old landholders and new class of cultivators mainly belonging to backward castes have asserted their interests against landless". Quoted in Tomasson F. Jannuzzi, India's **Persistent Dilemma: the Political Economy of Agrarian Reform,** (Boulder: West view Press, 1994), 171-73.

[6] Arvind Das, **The Republic of Bihar,** (Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992), 100.

[7] Ibid. 107.

[8] Prakash Louis, **People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar,** (Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2002), 6.

[9] James C. Scott, **Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance,** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

[10] Anand A Yang, **the Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793-1920,** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 206.

[11] Anand A. Yang, **Crime and Criminality in British India,** (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 113.

[12] Ibid. 114.

[13] Atul Kohli, **Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability,** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 205.

[14] Dumont, Louis, **Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications,** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 210-226.For Dumont, the caste system is a system of ideas and values. Caste is mutually related through a system of oppositions, a structure in terms of the opposition between the pure and the impure. He stresses the importance of caste as consisting of hierarchically arranged hereditary groups, separated from each other in certain respects (caste endogamy, eating restrictions etc.), but interdependent in others (traditional division of labor) These principles rest on a fundamental conception that is the opposition of the pure and the impure. According to him, this opposition underlies separation and division of labor. Therefore, the whole is founded on the necessary

and hierarchical coexistence of the two opposites. Thus, hierarchy is the key notion, which is independent of natural inequalities or the distribution of power allowing subordination of the king to the priest in Hindu society. Hierarchy then is distinct from power and authority and classifies things and beings according to their degree of dignity Therefore, the political and economic factors are epiphenomenal to caste. Dumont asserts the power-status opposition to explain the specificity of Indian society. So Dumont emphasizes the importance of ideology in molding human behavior. Commenting on the modernity-induced changes, Dumont argues, "the *society as an overall framework has not changed*"; He asserts "there *has been change in the society and not change of the society*". (218) However, he does know that significant changes have taken place in the caste society. Relying on the works of Ghurye and Bombay school of sociologists, Dumont says that the traditional interdependence of caste has been replaced by a "universe of impenetrable blocks, self-sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another, a universe in which the caste appears as a collective individual as a substance". He calls this "substantialisation" of caste. However, despite all changes, the general form has taken place is one of a combination of traditional and modern features". (221) For a brilliant post-modernist critique of Dumont's view on caste in India, See Nicholas B. Dirks, "The Original Caste: history and hierarchy in South Asia", **Contributions to Indian Sociology**, 23(1989), 59-77. Rejecting the conceptual separation of religion from the politics, Dirks argues "caste is a colonial construction...Caste, if ever it had an original form, was inscribed from the beginning by the relations and conceits of power."(74)

[15] Master narratives, according to Ashutosh Varshney, refer to the leading political idioms that help mobilize people, build coalition, win power, and organize politics. There are three master narratives in Indian politics; secular nationalism, religious nationalism, and caste politics especially lower caste unity. Master narratives often leave their imprint as distinctive ideologies in politics. The post –modern interpretation of master narratives is different. The postmodernist focuses on master narratives as constructed by the knowledge elites (colonial power in India's case) and promoted by the institutions of power. These master narratives create their own social, political and cultural effects. Therefore, master narratives are contested representation of power struggles between knowledge elite and masses. However, both non-postmoderns and postmoderns agree that master narratives are not fixed; they are fluid and contingent. According to postmoderns, colonially created master narratives lead to caste violence. See, Ashutosh Varshney, **Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India,** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 55-57.

[16] Adam Smith, **The Wealth of Nations: Inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations**, (New York: Penguin, 1999), 122.

[17] Theodore Shanin, ed, **Peasant and Peasant Societies**, (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 332.

[18] Barrington Moore, jr., Social **Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World,** (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 202.

[19] Ibid. 383.

[20] Kathleen Gough, "Peasant Uprisings in India," **Economic and Political Weekly**, (January 1974), 1391.

[21] The Tebhaga Movement (1946-47) was a revolt of the sharecroppers (bargadars) against the landlords for reduction of rent in West Bengal. The Telengana Movement (1946-51) that took place in the former princely state of Hyderabad was most prolonged-armed peasant revolt in the history of India. The revolt was finally suppressed by the military intervention of the national government in 1951. For a brilliant account of these powerful peasant revolts .See AR Desai, ed. **Peasant Struggles in India,** (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979); DN Dhanagre, "Social Origins of the Peasant Insurrection in Telegana", **Contributions to Indian Sociology,** New Series, No., (1974); Balgopal K, **Probings in the Political Economy of Agrarian Classes and Conflicts,** (Hyderabad: Perspectives, 1988); Ranjit Guha, **Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India,** (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[22] According to Myron Weiner, critics of Green Revolution suggest that the relative economic position of rural poor has worsened as a result of the adoption of the capitalist agriculture. See Myron Weiner, **The Indian Paradox: Essays in Indian Politics,** (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989), 103-104. See Alice Thorner for a good review of the Marxist debate on mode of production in rural India. Alice Thorner, "Semi-Feudalism or Capitalism," **Economic and Political Weekly,** (Dec.4, 11, 18, 1982). A sample of Marxist writings on effects of capitalist agriculture are cited below:

Terrence J.Byres, The Political Economy of Technological Innovation in Indian Agriculture," in **Science, Politics, and the Agricultural Revolution in Asia,** Robert S. Anderson et al., (Boulder, West View Press, 1982),

Francine R Frankel, **India's Green Revolution: Economic Gains and Political Costs,** (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

_____ **India's Political Economy, 1947-1977: The Gradual Revolution,** (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).

Farmer, B.H., "The Green Revolution" in South Asia Rice fields: Environment and Production", **Journal of Development Studies,** vol. XV (1979), 309-319.

Bardhan Pranab, **the Political Economy of Development in India,** (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984).

Arvind N. Das, **Agrarian Unrest and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar: 1900-1980,** (New Delhi: Monohar, 1983)

Prasad, Pradhan H, "Agrarian Violence in Bihar", **Economic and Political Weekly,** (May30, 1987), 851.

_____" Caste And Class in Bihar", **Economic and Political Weekly,** (February, 1979),

Kalayan Mukherjee and Rajendra Singh Yadav, **Bhojpur: Naxalism in the Plains of Bihar,** (Delhi: Radha Krishna Prakashan, 1980), 120-161.

Sinha Arun, "Bihar: Bajitpur Landlord's Violence," **Economic and Political Weekly**, (December 16, 1978), 2031-2032.

_____ **Against the Few: Struggles of India's Rural Poor,** (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1991), 21-23.

Arun Srivastava, "Landlords' Mafia in Bhojpur", **Economic and Political Weekly**, (January 3, 1979), 17.

[23] Frankel, 1978, op. cit.

[24] Patnaik, Utsa, "Some Aspects of Development in the Agrarian Sector in Independent India", **Social Scientist**, Delhi, vol .16 (1985), No.177, 17-40.

[25] The term Dalit means "the oppressed" and has almost replaced "untouchables" or "scheduled caste", (invented by colonial government to describe lower caste) or Harijans, a term coined by Mahatma Gandhi to describe lower castes in India. The oppressed groups in India also use dalit as a term of empowerment. So in this sense, dalit refers to anti-caste struggles and social justice movements in India. Note, dalit signifies the growing militancy of oppressed lower castes and increasing appeal of Ambedkar in contemporary politics in India.

[26] Pradhan H. Prasad "Agrarian Violence in Bihar", **Economic and Political Weekly**, (May 30, 1987), 847.

[27] Arun Sinha "Class War, Not Atrocities against Harijans", **Economic and Political Weekly**, (December 10, 1977), 2037.

[28] Arun Sinha, "The Awakening in Bhojpur", *Frontier*, (December 24-31, 1977), 6.

[29] B, N. Prasad, **Radicalism and Violence in Agrarian Structure: The Maoist Movement in Bihar,** (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 2002), 322.

[30] Chaudhary K. Praveen, "Agrarian Unrest in Bihar: A Case Study of Patna district 1960-1984", **Economic and Political Weekly**, (January 2, 1988) 56.

[31] Prakash Louis, 2002, op.cited, 6.

[32] Chaitanya Krishna, "Caste, Class and Agrarian Movements in Bihar", **Economic and Political Weekly** (May 29, 1999), 1084.

[33] Herring J.Ronald J " Economic Consequences of Local Power Configurations" in **Agrarian Power and Agricultural Productivity in South Asia**, eds. Meghnand Desai, Susanne Rudolph, Ashok Rudra (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1984,198-249.

[34] Paul Brass, **The Politics of India since Independence**, (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 301-3.

[35] Ibid., 305

[36] Ibid. 309.

[37] Ibid. 303.

[38] Zagoria Donald S. "The Ecology of Peasant Communism in India," **American Political Science Review,** vol. 15, (March 1971), No.1, 152.

[39] Marshall M. Bouton, Agrarian **Radicalism in South India,** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 110.

[40] Rejecting the increasing polarization in the countryside, Rudolph and Rudolph develop the thesis of non-revolutionary "bullock capitalists" to describe the numerically preponderant middle peasants in the countryside. According to them, the bullock capitalists are neither capitalists nor workers. They are neither exploiter nor exploited. They are self-exploited. See, Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987, op. cited, 377.

[42] Kohli, op. cited, 205.

[43] Ibid. 225.

[44] Anand Chakravarti, "Caste and Agrarian Class: A view from Bihar", **Economic and Political Weekly,** (April 28, 2001), 1449.

[45] C. Fuller, Caste Today, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 21.

[46] A. M.Shah and I.P.Desai, Division and Hierarchy: An Overview of Caste in Gujarat, (Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 1988), 36.

[47] Cited in Gail Omvedt, **Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist tradition in India,** (New York: M.E.Sharp, 1993), 61.

[48] Susan Bayly, **The New Cambridge History of India: Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age,** IV-3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 343.

[49] Robert, Delige, **The Untouchables of India,** (Oxford: Bertg Publishers, 1999), 25.

[50] Bayly, Christopher A, " Rallying Round the Subaltern: A Review Article of Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society, Vols I-VI ed., Ranjit Guha, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982-1985) in **The Journal of Peasant Studies,** vol 16, (October 1988), No 1,113.

[51] The genealogy of this interpretation is traced back to the first massacre of lower castes in 1968 Kilvenmani in Tanjore region of the Tamilnadu in India. In this massacre, killers belonged to the local caste Hindu landowners.

[52] Hindwan, R.K, "Caste War in Bihar", **Mainstream,** (February 10, 1996), 23-26.

[53] Bindeshwar Pathak, **Rural Violence in Bihar**, (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1997)

[54]Hutton, J.H., **Caste In India,** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 151. According to Inden, the essentialist view of caste defined Indian society as static and also led to the justification of colonial rule in India. See R. Inden, **Imagining India**, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

[55] For a brilliant anti-essentialist understanding of caste, see Nicholas B. Dirks, **The Hollow Crown: Ethno History of an Indian Kingdom**, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Arjun Appadurai, "Is Homo Hierarchicus?" **American Ethnologist,** vol.13, (1986) No.4, 216-59. B.Cohen, **An Anthropologist Among the Historians**, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[56] For a fascinating analysis of caste see, Louis Dumont, 1970, op. cited. Central to caste, according to Dumont, is the doctrine of opposition of purity and pollution represented by Brahmans and Kings. And political power is completely subordinated to religious power.

[57] Dipankar Gupta, "Caste Chemistry", **India Today**, April30, 1996, 41.

[58] Susan Bayly, 1999, op. cited, 348.

[59] For a classic description and analysis of the multidimensionality of caste or modernity of caste see, M.N. Srinivas, **Social Change in Modern India**, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, **The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India,** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

[60] Kohli, 1990, op. cited, 1-21.

[61] Migdal, Joel S., Atul Kohli, Vivienne Shue, **(eds.) State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World,** (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[62] Theda Skocpol, **States and Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China,** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 12.

[63] Using Skocpol's analysis of state structures, state autonomy refers to "states conceived as organizations claiming control over territories and people may formulate and pursue goals that are simply not reflective of the demands or interests of social groups, classes, or society". And capacity of state refers to the ability of the state to "implement official goals, especially over the actual or potential opposition of powerful social groups or in the face of recalcitrant socio-economic circumstances". See Peter B. Evans, Rueschemeyer Dietrich, Theda Skocpol (eds.) **Bringing the State Back In,** (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1985), 9.

[64] See, Theda Skocpol, **States and Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China,** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Peter B. Evans, Rueschemeyer Dietrich, Theda Skocpol (eds.) **Bringing the State Back In,** Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1985); Peter B. Evans, **Dependent Development: the alliance of multinational, state and local capital in Brazil,** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Joel S Migdal, **Strong Societies and Weak States: state-society relations and state capabilities in the Third world,** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[65] Migdal, Kohli, Shue, op. cited, 1994.

[66] See, Joel S Migdal, **State in Society: studying how states and societies transform and constitute one another,** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Peter B Evans, **Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation,** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Atul Kohli, **Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability,** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

[67] Migdal, op. cited, 1994, 14

[68] Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987, op. cited, p.14.

[69] Atul Kohli (ed), **India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations,** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 16.

[70] Theda Skocpol, (ed), **Vision and Method in Historical Sociology,** (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1984), 1.

[71] In this study, upper castes and forward castes are referred interchangeably denoting the high caste Hindus in the local caste (jati) hierarchy. The scheduled castes are at the bottom of the ritual and social hierarchy of the caste society and are also referred to as Dalits or Harijans. These categories not only indicate social and political distance but also the changing nature of caste identity in modern India.

[72] John Houlton, **Bihar- The Heart of India,** (London: Orient Longman Ltd, 1949).

[73] Gyan Prakash, **Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India,** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 2.

[74] Walter Hauser, " General Elections 1996 in Bihar: Politics, Administrative Atrophy and Anarchy," **Economic and Political Weekly,** (October 11, 1997). Among few individuals who have shown a great deal of sensitivity in describing social reality in Bihar are Walter Hauser, Gyan Prakash, Arvind Das, Arun Sinha, Pradhan Prasad, Januuzzi, Shaibal Gupta, Prakash Louis, Bella Bhatia.

[75] See, Census of India, Bihar, Series-11, and Paper 1 of 2001 Provisional Population Totals, (Directorate of Census Operations: Bihar), 11. According to 2001 census, there are 37 districts in Bihar. In terms of population; the three top districts are Patna (5.68%), Purba Champaran (4.75%) and

Muzaffarpur (4.52%). The three new districts created after 1991 census are Sheohar, Sheikhpura, and Lakhisarai. The literacy rate as per the 2001 census is 47.53% (Men-60.32% and Women-33.57%).

[76] The Parliament of India passed the Bihar reorganization Bill on August 2, 2000 to create a new state of Jharkhand (land of bushes). The new state consists of eighteen districts of the erstwhile Bihar, the southern part of the old Bihar- Ranchi, Gumala, Lohardaga, East Singbhum, West Singbhum, Hazaribagh, Giridih, Kodarma, Chatra, Dhanbad, Bokaro, Palamau, Garhwa, Dumka, Deoghar, Godda, Pakur and Sahebbgunj.35 percent of the population of former Bihar is in the new Jharkhand state. About a total of 63 percent of revenue of former Bihar came from this region. Apart from being home to some of the finest indigenous tribes in India, Jharkhand is the mainstay of coal and other important mineral sources in the country. This makes Jharkhand one of the most industrialized areas in India. However, the region suffers from acute poverty and lack of employment opportunities. In the recent days, the entire region is hit by dislocation and closure of many public sector industries. Interestingly, the entire Jharkhand State is under the grip of tribal rebellion led by Maoist groups such as MCC and PW. Police and par-military forces are prime targets of Maoist/Naxal groups.

See, http://www.mapsofindia.com/stateprofiles/jharkhand/.4/4/2003.

[77] Hindi was introduced in Bihar in 1871 as the medium of instruction in schools in Bihar .The colonial state did not consider Maithili as the medium of instruction in schools in north Bihar. See Paul Brass, 1974. op.cited, 70.

[78] G.A. Grierson in his book entitled, An Introduction to the Maithili Dialect of the Bihari Language as Spoken in North Bihar, published in 1881, refused to accept Maithili as a provincial form of Hindi. He discovered sufficient similarities among the three major mother tongues of Bihar and also differences between these tongues. He coined the term Bihari to refer the common language to which Maithili, Magahi and Bhojpuri belonged. However, not many people think that there exists a Bihari language. See Paul R Brass, **Religion, Language and Politics in North India**, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 69.

[79] The CPI (ML) Liberation's document entitled "Flaming Fields of Bihar" describes Central Bihar as the region where unprecedented momentum of peasant movement has developed involving mobilization of dalits around issues of class, caste, and gender oppression. Observers regard this document as the most accurate account of the agrarian struggles in contemporary Bihar. This document is based on scholarly literature as well as on the account of peasant activists.

[80] Most of the people in north Bihar speak Maithili, a distinct dialect of Hindi that has a rich literary heritage and distinct territorial reach. It has also been claimed by some that the people of Mithila including all castes forma territorial community called Maithils. However, this identification is found mostly among high castes such as Brahmans and Kayasthas. The largest castes in the region is Yadavs who are the largest caste in every region except Purnea and who do not strongly identify with the Maithili culture. In fact, Yadavs are known for challenging the hegemony of the Maithil Brahman in the politics of the State of Bihar. The demand for a Mithila state dates back to a formal resolution passed in 1940 at the meeting of the Maithil Mahasabha at Darbhanga. The demand for separate state was taken up the Maharaja of Darbhanga, many Maithili organizations and individuals such as Lakshman Jha in the post-impendent era. The most serious manifestation of the demand fro the

separate state was raised in 1954 when a memorandum was handed over to the States' Reorganization Commission by Jankinandan Sinha of Darbhanga. The demand was not considered so unimportant that the Commission did not mention it its report. Inspite of objective evidence of economic, political discrimination, the people of north Bihar have by and large remained indifferent to the demand for a separate state. For a brilliant description of Maithili movement in north Bihar see Brass, 1974, op, cited, 51-118.

[81] Stephen, Henningham, Peasant **Movements in Colonial India: North Bihar 1917-1942**, (Canberra: Australian National University, 1982), 6.

[82] Ibid., 10-11.

[83] Praveen K. Jha, **Agricultural Labor in India**, (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Put Ltd, 2000), 102-5.

[84] According to one account, about nearly 3, 00000 thousand migrants mainly comprising lower caste peasants, and agricultural labor from Bihar annually visit Punjab, the agriculturally most developed region in India. See Iyer, Gopal K, " The subaltern on tradition and Development" Paper presented in a seminar on " **Tradition and Development in India with Special reference to Eastern India,** ANS *Institute of Social Studies, Patna, October, 4-6, 1990.*

[85] See, Chaudhuri Binay Bhusan, "Movement of Rent in Eastern India-1793-1930", **The Indian Historical Review**, Vol.III, ICHR, New Delhi, (January, 1977), 74.

[86] A common refrain in Central Bihar during the months of paddy cultivation is lack of labor and the issue of wages. When asked about the wages, most rich farmers in Patna, Gaya and Bhojpur told me that they do not make enough profit from agricultural because wages of labor have gone up due to their mobilization by Naxals. Coupled with the rising prices of agricultural inputs, agricultural is no longer a good investment. Keeping wages low at least makes sure they are able to generate some profit, they pointed out.

[87] Gyan Prakash, 1990, op.cited, 16.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Henningham, 1982, op, cited, 50.

[90] Shaibal, Gupta, Roots of Peasant Movement in Central Bihar", in Sharma Kishore Kaushal, Prabhakar Prasad Singh and Ranjan Kumar (eds.), "Peasant **struggles in Bihar 1831-1992: Spontaneity to Organization**, (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1994), 176.

[91] Ibid., 208.

[92] Alakh N Sharma, "Political Economy of Poverty in Bihar", **Economic and Political Weekly**, (October 14-21, 1995), 2591.

[93] Ibid. , 2588.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Green Revolution refers to effect of technological transformation of agriculture aimed at creating capitalist development in Indian agriculture. The term was coined in the 1960s in the wake of introduction of the modern technology in Indian agriculture leading to quantum jump in the agricultural productivity. Very soon, witnessing the wave of peasant movements in many parts of India, many observers started predicting that Green revolution would turn the countryside into Red revolution.

[96] *Census of India 2001, op. cited,* 11.

[97] Susan Bayly, 1999, op.cited, 8.

[98] R. S. Khare, Normative Culture and Kinship: Essays on Hindu Categories, (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1983), 85.

[99] M.N. Srinivas, **Social change in Modern India,** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 3.

[100] Louis Dumont, 1970, op.cited.

[101] Andre Beteille, **Castes: Old and New. Essays in Social Structure and Social Stratification,** (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1969), 6. In opposition to the works of those sociologists who emphasize ritual and symbolic considerations of caste, Andre Beteille's works stress the changing nature of caste system by focusing on the social, economic and political forms of inequality. See Andre Beteille, **Caste, Class, and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratifications in a Tanjore Village,** (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1966).

[102] Harry Blair originally prepared this table in his study of elections in Bihar in 1967. Blair relied on 1931 census for tabulation on caste groups. Since then, the table has seen many incarnations. Most recently, Francine Frankel has heavily relied on this table to announce the end of Brahmanical order in Bihar. In the original table, Blair uses the term "twice-born castes' to describe upper castes. And he includes Bania in his classification of twice born castes. He also split backward castes in two neat blocs; upper shudras and lower shudras. His claim that the twice-born castes and upper shudras have been listed in socially accepted order of precedence should be taken with caution. Castes have generally struggled against the idea of a fixed place in the social hierarchy. This is clearly evident in various caste movements of the late nineteenth and twentieth century of Bihar. Based on socio-economic and political criterion, so-called upper shudras have certainly made tremendous advance in Bihar especially since 1976. After the division of Bihar in 2002, this data on caste composition is at best an approximation and does not fully match up ground realities. Moreover, this data based on 1931 census does not take into account population growth and migration rate since independence. The 1941 census was limited due to the difficulties of the Second World War and the Individual Sataygrha movement of the Indian National Congress. The 1931 census remains significant because this census did not witness much drive by the lower castes to get registered as higher caste as part of movement for social mobility. Therefore, in conjunction with the census data on scheduled castes since independent, Blair's estimate seems reasonably good approximation. Many caste surveys include Bania in upper

backward caste. However, Banias are for all practical purposes considered part of upper layer of the backward castes. Banias are mostly town-based caste and have little political influence. The information on the caste background of social groups in Bihar is compiled using colonial census. The last caste-based colonial census was done in 1931. The 1931 census concerns caste data at the district level. Additionally, since 1911 no caste data has been obtained for level lower than district. Caste data were collected only for some states in 1941 as a wartime economy measure, but these were never tabulated due to controversies regarding caste identities. The federal government in 1949 discarded caste-based census. The modernizing elite led by Jawaharlal Nehru at the time of independence thought that caste data would defeat the goal of building a non-hierarchical society. The first Home Minster of independent India, Sardar Patel instructed the Census Conference in February 1950 not to use caste for enumeration of the population and delivery of administrative goods. Though considered detrimental to the nation building, the realties of the caste society forced the modernists on the back foot. Since the beginning of elections in India in 1935, caste calculations have influenced the selection and nomination of candidates to political offices. This has led to what Rudolph and Rudolph have famously called "modernity of tradition". Although reluctantly, the government of India, however, collects caste data only on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for the purpose of census and providing public goods. Various commissions set up both at the center and in states to suggest constitutionally sanctioned affirmative actions for certain social and economically backward castes sometime collect caste data. These commissions use different data procedures that often generate bitter public debates. Most politicians have excellent unofficial information about the caste composition of their constituencies. Infact, Blair's method of ascertaining the caste data by asking the candidate to go through the official list of booths and describe the dominant castes in each booth is a creative way to check the genuineness of colonial data on caste. Almost every politician knows who gets what, when and where in terms of caste in Bihar. Although it is impossible to a have absolutely accurate and pure picture of the caste figures at the local level, the colonial data still remains the most useful way to figure out the caste composition especially in Bihar, the most rural state of India.

See Harry W. Blair **Voting, Caste, Community Society: Explorations in Aggregate Data Analysis in India and Bangladesh**", (New Delhi: Young Asia Publications, 1979), 5. Also see W.G. Lacey, **Census of India**, 1931, Vol. II, Part II, Patna, 1932, 136-9.

[103] Most studies, however, refer to only two branches of Brahmans in Bihar. See, Girish Mishra and Braj Kumar Pandey, **Sociology and Economics of Casteism in India: A Study of Bihar**, (Delhi: Pragati Publications, 1996).

[104] The main center of Mathil Brahman's influence is Darbhanga, the former seat of power of the Darbhanga Rag, the biggest landlord of Bihar. The Raja of the Darbhanga used to be the community leader of the Brahmans. The Maithil Brahmans are known for their distinct customs and traditions. They derive their high status from their mythical association with the land of Videha (Mithila), the birthplace of Sita, wife of Lord Rama, the epic God of Hindus. The Maithils speak a language called Maithili, which has rich literature. In contrast to Maithil Brahmans, the Paschima Brahmans are concentrated in the districts of Central Bihar such as old Sahabad, Patna, and Gaya. Some of them can found in certain areas of north Bihar as well. The Saryuparins and Kanyakubjas are the two big groups in the Paschima Brahmans. Most of the Saryuparins live in the villages and Kanyakubjas are found in the cities involved in secular professions such as trade and government jobs. The Magadha Brahmans

or Sakadwipiya Brahmans are largely found in Magadh region of the central Bihar. According to legends, they came from Persia and practiced medicine, sun worship and astrology. One of the greatest Indian astronomers Varahmihira was a considered as Sakadwipiya. The famous sun-worship festival (Chhatha) in Bihar is credited to the Sakadwipiyas. The few surviving temples of the Sun God are only found in the Magadh region of the Central Bihar.

[105] The Kayasthas are divided into twelve sub castes such as Srivastvas, Ambasthas. Karnas etc. The Srivastvas are most numerous and they are found mainly in central Bihar districts. The Kayasthas were the most literate could be seen from the census records. In the Census of 1931, there were 1000 Kayasthas literate in English per ten thousand populations. See Mishra and Pandey, 1996, op. cited, 14.

[106] Many Hindu scriptures such as Viyas Samhita put Kayasthas in the category of untouchable and prohibited them from religious rites reserved from high castes. The Kayasthas came to prominence as a separate caste group in the medieval times. Their association with the demonstration and keeping of revenue records gave them access to power and extract wealth through legal and bribery as well. The acquired so much notoriety that a famous poet –historian of medieval times Kalhana comments that Kayasthas symbolized greed, oppression, selfishness, untrustworthiness, etc. Even in many popular sayings, Kayashtas came to be referred to as the most notorious caste for bribery. Colonial census takers also took these sayings on their face value and described Kasthyas as lower than shudras. In the early decades of twentieth century, few judgments of Calcutta high Court termed Kayasthas as shudras and denied them upper caste rights in matters of property and inheritance. However, Kayasthas protested these descriptions by adopting a variety of methods; ranging from legal challenge to the movement for social mobility. They formed caste association to advance the status of the community as Kshatriya (warrior) and also petitioned the courts to get recognized as one of the upper castes. With the help of Lucknow based lawyer Kali Prasad, the Kayasthas of Bihar and UP founded the Kayasath Conference in 1887.Immedeaitly, caste associations of Kayasthas in many districts of Bihar were established. The most effective Caste Sabhas of the Kayasthas were concentrated in central Bihar especially in Sahabad district. Much before the formation of Kayasatha Caste sabhas, a popular social reform movement had been launched in Shahabad district by Munshi Pearey Lal .The movement for social mobility took the form of adopting surnames such as " Sinha" and " Verma", wearing sacred thread, becomng vegetarian, curtailing the expenses on weddings, and performing Brahmanical riutals. Books, Journals such as Kaysath Messenger, Kayasth Gazette etc flourished expressing the political, social and cultural grievances of the community. The Kayasthas of Bihar received a shot in the arm when Allahahabad High Court in 1890 announced that the Kayasthas were Kshatriyas (one of the twice born varnas). Later, The Patna High Court in 1927 in a comprehensive judgment decided that Kayasthas of Bihar were not Shudras but belonged to the upper caste. The Census of 1931 listed Kayashtas as one of the upper castes. The Kayastha Conference remained confined to manly social issues neglecting the crucial question of national independence. Many leaders of the Conference were avowedly pro-British government. See Mishra and Pandey, 1996, op. cited, 14-20.

[107] The founding of The Behar Times in 1894 is considered by many as the beginning of the "period of renaissance in Bihar". Mahesh Narayan, a Kayastha was the founding editor.

[108] See M.S A.Rao, **Social Movements and Social Transformations: A Study of Two Backward Class Movements,** (Delhi: Macmillan, 1978). William Ralph Pinch undertakes a fascinating analysis

on the changing caste identity of Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris in North India during 1800-1940. See William Ralph Pinch, **Being Vaishnava, Becoming Kshatriya: Culture, Belief, and Identity in North India, 1800-1940**, Ph.D Diss., University of Virginia, and August 1990.

[109] Gyan Pandey, "Rallying Round the Cow: Sectarian strife in the Bhojpuri Region, C. 1888-1917", in Ranjit Guha (ed.), **Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society** (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 62-3.

[110] See the communication entitled "The Goalas Movement, Its causes and Character" from the District magistrate of Bhagalpur to the Commissioner of the Bhagalpur division on 7 the July 1925 in the "Proceedings of the Government of Bihar and Orissa, Department of Political (special), File NO. 171 of 1925.

[111] Arvind N. Das, "Class in Itself, Caste for Itself: Social Articulation in Bihar", **Economic and Political Weekly**, (October 12-19, 1986), 1618.

[112] K.K. Verma, **Changing role of Caste Associations**, (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1979), 12.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Mishra and Pandey, 1996, op. cited, Ibid., 81.

[115] Ibid., 99.

[116] Pradhan H. Prasad, "Caste and Class in Bihar", **Economic and Political Weekly**, (February 1979) Annual Number, 483.

[117] This supports the view that numerical strength is not the only predictor of dominant caste. Control of the socio-economic resources most importantly land in vastly rural setting is also a major predictor of dominance.

[118] The Pioneer, Delhi, December 8, 1995.

[119] Kohli, 1990, op. cited, 205-237. This observation is fairly accurate description of the social and economic power of Yadavs and Kurmis. Koiris are also relatively prosperous but not as ruthless as Yadavs or Kurmis. They are generally considered quiet and peace loving. Incidentally, Koiris have not formed their own Senas but support the senas politically and economically. In some way, Yadavs and Kurmis have come to imitate the norms and behavior patterns of Bhumihars.

[120] Agricultural Census of 1980-81 in Bihar quoted in the "Report from the Flaming fields of Bihar", **A Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Document**, (August 1986, Patna) 52.

[121] Cited in Atul Kohli, 1990, op.cited, 208.The table has been prepared on the basis of a sample survey of 2, 531 households that included 564 upper caste households and 955 backward castes households in 1983. Pradhan H. Prasad and G. B Rodgers as part of a project conducted the survey. Though the survey is bit dated, it still reflects the reality of landownership pattern in Bihar. The results

of the survey are presented in an unpublished report: P.H. Prasad and G.B. Rodgers, " Class, Caste and Landholding in the Analysis of the Rural Economy," Population and Labor Policies Program, Working Paper NO.140, World Employment Program Research (Working Papers), International Labor Office, Geneva, 1983, Table 1, p.12.

[122] Anand Yang, **The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793-1920",** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 7.

[123] Ibid., 226.

[124] *Ibid.*

[125] Anil Seal quoted in Yang, 1989, op. cited, 229.

[126] Das, 1983,op.cited, 142. During my fieldwork, I observed that the issue of sharing produce between landowners and sharecroppers is extremely contentious. Most of the villagers informed that tenancy relations are quite varied and unpredictable. Most of the tenancies are unrecorded and depend on the whims of the landowners who often indulge in extra- economic coercion of his tenants and sharecroppers. Sharecropping (known as bataidari) in which produce is shared between landowners and the cultivator of the land is mostly oral. In this arrangement, the tenant puts in all the inputs such as fertilizer manure seeds etc. and then has to give half of the produce to the owner of the land. In Central Bihar districts, mani (annual system) and nagdi are also prevalent. In mani system, the tenant leases in land for a year and pledges a certain amount of produce, using his own inputs. Since the amount pledged remains fixed, the tenant alone is responsible for all the risks. In nagdi (cash) system, a sum of money is paid in advance of the season .The tenant gets to keep all the produce. This favors only well-off peasants who have some cash. A vestige of unfree labor is also practiced in many places of Central Bihar. This is known as banihar or harwaha (bonded labor). In this, the cultivator pledges their labor power for a season or year against a loan and work on the landowner's land. This is certainly a form of attached labor which is one the causes of violent conflict between landowners and their laborers.

[127] For excellent reports of tribal uprisings in Bihar see K., K Datta, Santhal **Uprisings in Bihar,** (Patna: Government Press, 1965); K Suresh Singh, **Birsa Munda and His Movement, 1874-1901: a study of a milienarian Movement in Chotanagpur,** (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1983), Also see Ranjit Guha, **Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India,** (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983)

[128] Das, 1983, op. cited, 57.

[129] Much has been written on Champaran movement in Bihar considering its significance to Gandhian politics. See, Judith Brown, **Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922,** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Rajendra Prasad, **Satyagraha in Champaran,** (Ahemdabad: Navjivan Press) 1949; D.N. Dhanagre, **Peasant Movements in India: 1920-1950,** (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982); Mishra Girish, " **Agrarian Problems of Permanent Settlement: A Case Study of Champaran,** New Delhi: Peoples' Publishing, House, 1978)

[130] Poucheapadas Jacques, "Local Leaders, and the Intelligentsia in the Champaran Satyagraha", **Contributions to Indian Sociology**, New Delhi, (November, 1974), p.26.

[131] Cited in Das, 1983, op.cited, 12. Many peasant leaders and local intellectuals I met in Muzaffarpur in December 2001 expressed the similar sentiments about the outcome of Champaran movement. According to them, sugar mills boomed in those days bringing substantial profit. This profit was used by upper caste peasantry especially Bhumihars in the buying of big estates. Therefore, the profit from sugar cane did not lead any change in the relations of production. The semi-feudal mode of agricultural economy continued.

[132] William Pinch, Being **Vaishnava, Becoming Kshatriya: Culture, Belief, and Identity in North India, 1800-1940,** Ph.D Diss.., University of Virginia, 1990, 260.

[133] Letter from Y.A. Godbole, D.O of Purnea, to the Commissioner of the Bhagalpur Division, 15, July, 1925, "in Political Special File No.171 of 1925, p.106.

[134] A British report in 1926-27 points out " the realization of illegal exactions by the landlords, such as abwabs and begari (labor without pay), is undoubtedly on decline, but it can not yet be said d that such practices are rare...Strained agrarian relations commonly lead to an epidemic of applications for the commutation of producer rent, while these applications themselves are often responsible for a further exacerbation of feeling...This feeling is to be found mainly among the upper ranks of the Shudra Castes, who for some years have been striving to improve their social status. Some of their ambitions are legitimate enough, but the danger arising therefrom is obvious in "Relations between Landlords and Tenants". Cited in Pinch, 1990, op, cited, 178.

[135] Government of Bihar and Orissa, Political Department, Special Section, File No. 171 of 1925, " Subject: Serious Riot between Babhans and Goalas at Monghyr, Lakhochak Riot", See also Hetukar Jha, " Lower-Caste Peasants and Upper Caste Zamindars in Bihar (1901-1925): An analysis of Sanskritization and Contradiction between the two Groups, " **Indian Economic and Social History Review**, vol. XIV, (1977), No.4, .550-554. Hetukar Jha has published extracts from this file, comprising the following: "Reports on the Riot at Kiul by D.IG. Bihar and Orissa; "No 1077 dated 11 the June, 1925 from J.D.Sifton, C.S. to Government of India, Home Department; "and "No 108 Confidential From S.A.Khan, District Officer, Bhagalpur, to the Commissioner of Bhagalpur Division. & the July, 1925, "Re: The Goala Movement, its Causes and Character."

[136] Government of Bihar and Orissa, Political Department, Special Section, File No.79 of 1921, " Goala Movement in Patna City and other districts of Bihar".

[137] Letter from J.D.Sifton, C.S. to Government of Bihar and Orissa, to the Secretary the Government of India, Home Department, No.1077, Dated 11the June, 1925 cited in Jha, 1977, " Lower Caste Peasants and Upper Caste Zamindars....". 553.

[138] There is controversy as regards the date of the origin of the Triveni Sangh in the literature. Many historians have referred to its formation in the 1920s. However, one of the original publications of Triveni Sangh titled "Triveni Sangh ka Bigul (The call of Triveni Sangh) has now become available. In my conversation with Patna Based Journalist Srikant who has done extensive research on Triveni

Sangh confirmed it. For an excellent discussion of the organization, leadership and ideology of Triveni Sangh, See Chaudhary P.K and Srikant, "Bihar **Mein Samajik Parivartan ke Kuch Aayam: 1912-1990**", (Patna: Vani Publication, 2001), 112-173.

[139] Chaudhary and Srikant, 2001, op. cited, 120.

[140] Ibid., 119.

[141] For an authoritative account of the formation of Kisan Sabha and its politics, see Sahajanand Saraswati, Swami, **Mera Jeevan Sangharsha** (Hindi), (Bihta: Sitaram Trust, 1952), 159-295.However, it goes to the credit of Walter Hauser to rescue the contributions of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati from the obscurity and focus on the radical and autonomous character of peasant politics in pre-independence India. Hauser has also published some of the original works of Sahajanand that throw light on the achievements and limitations of Kisan Sabha. See, Walter Hauser, **Peasant Organization in India: A Case Study of the Bihar Kisan Sabha, 1929-1942**, PhD Diss., University of Chicago, Microfilm, 1961.

[142] Sahajanand Saraswati, **Abolition of Zamindari: How to achieve it**, (Bihata: Sitaram Ashram, 1989), 27.

[143] Hauser, 1961, op. cited, p.97.

[144] Speech of the Bihar Premier (Chief Minister of the province called so in the colonial days), Sri Krishna Sinha in the Muzaffarpur district Kisan Conference at Riga (1945) Cited in Ramvilas Sinha, " The Man behind Zamindari Abolition in Bihar", **The Searchlight**, September 1, 1949.

[145] Das, 1983, op. cited, 189.

[146] In 1947, one group of Zamindars from Bihar appealed to the then President of India Rajendra Prasad telegraphically as follows:" Hon'ble Rajendra Prasad New Delhi In Honor Gandhijayanti Appealing Peace Kindly Drop Abolition Zamindari Save Country Civil War," cited in Jannuzzi F. Tomasson, **Agrarian Crisis in India: A Case of Bihar**, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974), 167.

[147] In a prayer meeting in Patna on 10 August 1947. Mahatma Gandhi criticizing the Zamindars, said "this system has to go...Many Zamindars were busy organizing private armies, perhaps to browbeat the tillers." Cited in Das, 1983, op. cited 191-92.

[148] Das, 1983, op. cited, 148.

[149] Sahajanand Saraswati, the monk peasant leader used the word Maharudra (Lord Shiva) to describe the revolutionary potential of the peasantry especially landless to change the society. Lord Shiva is worshiped and also feared for his destructive powers. See Sahajanand Saraswati, **Maharudra ka Mahatandav"**, (Hindi), cited in Das, 1983, op. cited, 142.

[150] The Sathi Farms Struggle took place in Champaran district of North Bihar .The Sathi struggle was about the distribution of surplus land of the Zamindars in which major Congress leaders were involved.

Many Congress leaders had got land settled under their relatives' name creating a huge political scandal. The struggle increasingly assumed a protest against the Congress party in Bihar.

[151] Jannuzzi, 1974, op. cited, 131.

[153] Daniel Thorner, **The Agrarian Prospect in India" Five Lectures on Land Reform,** (Delhi: Delhi University Press, 1956), 16.

[154] India National Commission on Agriculture, Working Group on Land Reforms, "A Field Study: Agrarian Relations in Two Bihar Districts", **Mainstream,** (June 2, 1973), 13-15,

[155] Mainstream, May 11, 1973, 40.

[156] Indu Bharti, "Bihar's Bane: Slow Progress on Land Reforms", **Economic and Political Weekly,** (March 28, 1992), 628-29.

[157]Indu Bharti, 1992, op.cited, 628. Although Laloo Yadav supported the Land-Grab movement of the left parties in 1992, his support to land reforms emanated more from electoral compulsions and the growing dissidence in the party rather than a genuine commitment to social justice to poor peasants. Pointing out the failure of the state on land reforms, M.N. Karna says "the implementation of land reforms and ceiling acts in the state is dismal. Only 1.53 percent of the total land has been acquired whereas the surplus amounts to 20.5 percent (of all land-holdings)'. Cited in Walter Hauser, "Violence, Agrarian Radicalism and electoral Politics: reflections on the Indian People's Front", **The Journal of Peasant Studies,** vol.21. (October 1993), No21, 122.

[158] Louis Prakash, 2002, op.cited, 104-106.

[159] Quoted in Jannuzzi, 1994, op. cited 145.

[160] Government of India, "The Causes and Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions", **Ministry of Home Affairs,** (Delhi: Research and Policy Division, 1969).

[161] Ibid.

[162] The term, spring thunder, was used by Chinese Communist Party to refer to the emergence of Naxal movement in West Bengal. Radio Peking on 28 the June 1967 had welcomed the onset of peasant insurrection in the Naxalbari village of West Bengal as "the front paw of the revolutionary armed struggle launched by the Indian people under the guidance of Mao Tse Tung's teachings". Cited in Sachchidanand Pandey, **Naxal Violence: A socio-political Study,** (Delhi, Chankaya Publications, 1985), 143. Interestingly, though the supreme leader of the Naxalbari movement Charu Mazumdar had declared China's Chairman as his chairman as well, there was no formal contact between Communist Party of India (Marxist –Leninist) and the Communist Party of China. Legendary Maoist leader Charu Mazumdar started the Naxalbari Movement in the late 1960s in the Naxalbari region in West Bengal. Naxalbari is a sleepy village in the Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district in the state of West Bengal. Charu Mazumdar was a local leader of the pro-China Communist Party of India (Marxist). The Communist Party of India (Marxist), popularly known as CPM, was a coalition partner in the ruling

government in West Bengal that had come to power as a result of the defeat of the Congress Party in historic elections of 1967. Under Charu Mazumdar's leadership, the Darjeeling district unit of the CPM raised banner of revolt against the local landlords and also against the revisionist leadership of the CPM. Immediately along with Kanu Sanyal, Charu Mazumdar started armed attacks on the landlords and setting up parallel government in the liberated villages. The West Bengal leadership of the CPM attempted to negotiate with the rebel leaders without any success. By May 1967, Charu's armed bands got involved in attacks on the police, and other symbols of so-called counter-revolutionary state. The West Bengal Chief Minister Ajoy Mukherjee (an ex-Congressman) was forced to admit on 12 June 1967 that a reign of terror had been created in Darjeeling. The Central Governemnt also took note of it and decided to crush the radical movement. See Sumanta Banerjee, "Naxalbari and the Left Movement, in Ghanshyam Shah, ed., **Social Movements and the State**, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002), 125-192. The armed struggle of CPI (Marxist –Leninist) party, a breakaway group of Communist Party of India (Marxist) was quickly crushed by the police and army action in West Bengal and other regions in India. Though, the supreme leader Charu Mazumdar had declared that poor peasants fought for political power and not for land, the Naxals as they came to called also got involved in urban terrorism in Calcutta attacking police, governments officials, universities, members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) etc. The agrarian revolution got entwined with spontaneous nihilistic upsurge of middle class students and youths in Bengal. This has led some scholars such as Biplab Das Gupta, Mohan Ram and Sumanta Banerjee to argue that the failure of Naxals in during 1967-1969 emanated from a wrong understanding of the Indian society and degeneration of movement into individual terrorism. The excessive emphasis on secretive and conspiratorial methods was part of this wrong understanding. On the other hand, some scholars attribute the failure of Naxals to their failure to build viable organization. For instance, Manorhanjan Mohanty writes "this movement (naxalism) was pre-organizational in character because it was confined basically to mass activity without a net work of organization". See Manoranjan Mohanty, **Revolutionary Violence: A Study of the Maoist Movement in India**, (New Delhi: 1977), 221.

In an interesting interpretation of the Naxalism, Rabindra Ray suggests that the government considered Naxalism as an expression of socio-economic and disintegration of law and order in certain areas. All most all-political parties looked at Naxals as political challenge because of the breakdown of the law and order. In this sense, Naxals dented the legitimacy of the state as the guarantor of the law and order. See Rabindra Ray, **The Naxalites and their Ideology**, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 24. For general information on Naxal movement in historical perspective see Biplab Das Gupta, "The Naxalite Movement", and New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1974; Mohan Ram, **Maoism in India**, (Delhi: Vikas Publication, 1971); Sumanta Banerjee, In **the Wake of Naxalbari**, (Calcutta: Subarnekha, 1980); Also see Ghosh, Shankar, **The Naxalite Movement: a Moist Experiment**, (Calcutta: Firma, K.L. Mukhopadhya, 1974).

[163] The beginnings of Naxals groups are traced to the Naxalbari Movement led by legendary Maoist leader Charu Mazumdar in the late 1960s in the Naxalbari region in West Bengal. The first spark of Naxalbari uprising was started in Mushari block in Muzaffarpur district in North Bihar in 1969. Following West Bengal, the Naxal uprising was quickly crushed in Bihar. However, in contrast to West Bengal, a few Naxal groups such as CPI (ML) Liberation, CPI (ML) Party-Unity and MCC (Maoist Communist Center) survived mainly in Central Bihar districts. CPI (ML) is also referred to as Liberation group or Vinod Mishra Group for its General Secretary and Ideologue. Over time, these

groups have evolved reflecting changes in their strategy and tactics toward revolution and the class nature of the Indian State. The evolution of CPI (ML) Liberation as a major force in parliamentary and peasant politics in Bihar has largely been attributed to its movement away from " excitative and class liquidation" to adoption of mass movements and parliamentary politics. In the 1980s, claiming continuity with the monk peasant leader Swami Sahajanand Kisan Sabha, (Peasant Association), the CPI (ML) liberation revived Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha, set up mass bodies such as Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti (MKSS). Jan Sanskriti Manch (JSM), All Indian Students' (AISA) etc. In 1982, this mass organization came together in an umbrella organization called Indian People's Front to enter parliamentary politics. In the parliamentary elections, the IPF secured only one seat in the parliament. However, in the state assembly elections of 1989, 1995, and 2000, the IPF secured 7, 6, and 6 seats respectively. The "New Left" being largely represented by the CPI (ML) Liberation, has effectively been mobilizing poor and lower caste peasants in the countryside of Bihar. In this sense, CPI (ML) Liberation legitimately claims itself to the heir of radical peasant politics of pre-independence period. For a detailed analysis of IPF, see Walter Hauser, "Violence, Agrarian Radicalism and electoral Politics: reflections on the Indian People's Front", **The Journal of Peasant Studies,** vol.21. (October 1993), No21, 122.

The Party Unity and the MCC, banned by the government, have been waging violent war against the governmental machinery and the feudal classes in the countryside in Bihar. These Maoist groups are also involved in a war of supremacy with each other triggering off killing and counter killing. On August 11, 1998, the Party Unity merged with the CPI (ML) - People War popularly known as the People's War Group. The unified Party is renamed as CPI (ML) People's. MCC, Party Unity and PWG advocate the use of violence against the dominant landed castes in mobilizing the lower castes. The MCC is involved in some of the worst massacres of upper caste peasants such as Dalelchak Baghura massacre in May 1987 in which 44 Rajputs were brutally murdered, Bara massacre in February, 1992 in which 44 Bhumihars were murdered, Senari massacre etc. MCC and PWG also attack police and government machinery. Like Ranvir Sena, MCC and PWG are infamous for their ruthlessness and brutality. Most Bhumihars I met in Gaya and Patna were more fearful of MCC and PWG than CPI (ML) Liberation. MCC and PWG are also known to have developed contacts with the Ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal led by Laloo Yadav. They are also known for imposing levy or fines on government officials, contractors, and politicians in their area of influence. This account is based on observation and secondary sources as well. For an excellent discussion on the evolution of what is called "New Naxals "in Bihar see Arvind Das, **The Republic of Bihar,** (New Delhi, Penguin Books Ltd, 1992), 102-120. For an analysis of the contemporary Naxal movement in Central Bihar, see Prakash Louis, **People Power: The Naxal Movement in Central Bihar,** (Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2002).

[164] Although the information on the first phase of Naxal movement in Bihar is fragmentary and limited, a wealth of information can be found in newspapers particularly The Indian Nation and the Searchlight published from Patna. Not surprisingly, these newspapers reported Naxals incidents as " breakdown of law and order" in the countryside without much reference to mobilization of lower caste peasantry along the lines of class issues. See The Indian Nation, Patna, 1 and 2 July 1967, The Searchlight, Patna, 10 August 1967. There was no systematic reporting of Naxal movement in the print media in the early years of the Naxal movement in Bihar. One of the best sources of Naxal movement in the early phase comes from the writings of Satyanarayan Singh. See Satyanarayan Singh, "Mushari and its Lessons", **Liberation Anthology**, vol. II. (1993). Of late, Prakash Louis and Bella Bhatia have provided a vivid account of Naxal movement in Central Bihar. It is important to note that the first phase of the Naxal

movement in Bihar was spearheaded by a nine-member Bihar State Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (BSCCR) of the CPI (ML). Formed on 10 December 1967, the committee, under the leadership of Satyanarayan Singh, organized peasant rebellion in Mushari in Muzaffarpur district. The police and the landlord combine crushed the Mushari revolt. See Prakash Louis, 2002, op. cited. 147-150.

[165] Satyanarayan Singh, **Liberation,** vol.2, (October 1969), No.12.

[166] Arun Sinha, "Bihar Advancing Class interests in the name of Caste", **Economic and Political Weekly,** (April 1978).

[167] In my conversation with villagers of Mushari and members of local voluntary organizations, they told me J.P. never appreciated the methods of Naxals and he literally took a vow to make Mushari a symbol of peaceful social transformation. However, soon he became frustrated in his attempts to change the hearts of landlords and realized the irrelevance of his peaceful methods.

[168] For an excellent first hand account of early Naxal movement in Bhojpur district, see Kalyan Mukherjee's ""Naxalism in the plains of Bihar", op. cited.

[169] This narrative is based on accounts provided by Arun Sinha, Arvind Das, and "A Report from the Flaming Fields" the party document of CPI (ML) Liberation.

[170] A Report from the Flaming Fields, 1986, op. cited, 89.

[171] Ibid., 94.

[172] Prasad H.Pradhan, " Poor Peasant Movement in Central Bihar" in Sharma Kishore Kaushal, Prabhakar Prasad Singh and Ranjan Kumar (eds.), " **Peasant struggles in Bihar 1831-1992: Spontaneity to Organization,** (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1994), 176.

[173] Seema Singh, " Political Economy of Peasant Movement in Central Bihar", in Kaushal Kishore Sharma, et al, (eds.), 1994, op. cited, 214-15.

[174] Das, 1992, op. cited, 45.

[175] Shaibal Gupta, " Socio-Economic Roots of Peasant Movement in Central Bihar", in Kaushal Kishore Sharma et al, (eds.), 1994, op. cited. 205.

[176] Ibid., 205

[177] Paul Brass, 1990, op. cited, 302.

[178] Gupta, 1994, op.cited, 196.

[179] Kohli, 1990, op. cited, 232.

[180] Gupta, 1994, op. cited, 207.

[181] Describing bullock capitalists, Rudolph and Rudolph write, "bullock capitalists resemble yeoman farmers in that they are independent agricultural producers. They are not kulaks if that word is used to designate wealthy producers relying on tenants or wage labor in imperfect labor markets and on control of credit and marketing to enforce dependency and support for their local power. Bullock capitalists are self-employed and self-funded. Their holdings are large enough to support the use of a pair of bullocks and the new inputs associated with the green revolution. Typically they operate between 2.5 and 15 acres... size per se is an imperfect means of identifying bullock capitalists. At the same time, their assets are not large enough to enable them to engage in capital-intensive agricultural production based on extensive use of machinery or require them to rely wholly or manly on wage labor. We prefer the term "bullock capitalists" to "middle peasants" because of the mix of capitalist, pre industrial and non capitalist features that characterize their economic circumstances." See Rudolph, Lloyd I and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, **In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of India,** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 52-53.

[182] Historian Arvind Das argues that rental income form Dumaron estate was so large that many top nationalist leaders such as Motilal Nehru, C.R.Das, Rajendra Prasad, Sachidanand Sinha and others benefited from the large rental income of Dumaroan Estate in old Shahabad. See Arvind Das, 1983, op.cited, 245.

[183] Peter Robb, "Officials and Non-Officials as Leaders in Popular Agitations: Shahabad 1917 and other Conspiracies", in B.N.Pandey (ed.), **Leadership in South Asia,** (Delhi: Manohar Publication, 1977), 189.

[184] Henningham, 1982, op. cited, 14.

[185] Ibid., 14-15.

[186] Ibid., 178.

[187] Das, 1983, op. cited, 247.

[188] Walter Hauser, 1993, op, cited, 95.

[189] During my fieldwork in Arah I found that nature of recourse to violence has been changing largely due to the mobilization of lower caste peasants by the CPI (ML). Now the focus is more on caste and class oppression than on distorted forms of social banditry. This has in fact contributed to reducing cases of rape, murder and burglary in the region. The armed squads of Maoist groups sometimes clash among themselves in a war of supremacy but it has rejected traditional culture of brashness and violence in the region. Most of the new violence emanates from the agrarian conflict and bitter political rivalry between upper castes and backward castes. Therefore, though the culture of violence is still continuing, it has taken new dimensions in Central Bihar.

[190] Ram Sharan Sharma, **Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India,** (Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), 161-63.

[191] Anand Yang, Bazaar **India: Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Gangetic Bihar,** (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 45.

[192] George A. Grierson, **Linguistic Survey of India,** Vol.I, Part I, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1967), 151.

[193] For soft Culture of North Bihar, see Paul Brass, **Language, Religion and Politics in North India,** (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 231. For the culture of brashness and violence in Central Bihar, see Manju Kala, R.N.Maharaj and Kalyan Mukherjee, " Peasant Unrest in Bhojpur: A Survey", in A, R, Desai, (ed.) **Agrarian Struggles in India After Independence,** (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 257.

[194] Francis Buchanan, An **Account of the Districts of Bihar and Patna in 1811-12,** (Patna: Government Printing Press, 1929), 198-204

[195] Rahul Sankrityayan, **Ghumakkar Sanyasi** (Hindi), (Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1978).

[196] Jha, Hetukar, **Social Structures of Indian Villages**: A Study of Bihar, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991, 186.

[197] W.W. Hunter, **a Statistical Account of Bengal,** Vol.XII, (London: Trubner & Co., 1877), 74.

[198] Ibid., 74

[199] Monk Peasant leader Sahajanand Saraswati quoted in Das, 1983, op. cited, 318.

[200] Louis, 2002, op.cited, 91.

[201] Ibid., 90.

[202] Kala Manju, R.N.Maharaj and Kalyan Mukherjee, "Peasant Unrest in Bhojpur: A Survey", in A.R.Desai (ed.) **Agrarian Struggles in India after Independence,** (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1986), 256.

[203] Various Human Rights reports have pointed out the increased atrocities on women of lower caste by Kurmis and Yadavs. In fact, many villages in Central Bihar Yadavs and Kurmis have clearly become new power elite. Emboldened by the capture of political power, these backward castes attempt to assert their sense of social power by outraging the modesty of lower caste women. Although ritually backward castes occupy middle place in the caste hierarchy, they tend to display upper caste mentality when it comes to oppress lower caste (so-called untouchables).

[204] See Walter Hauser, "General Elections 1996 in Bihar: Politics, Administrative Atrophy and Anarchy", **Economic and Political Weekly,** (October 11, 1997), 267; Prem Shankar Jha, "A Crisis of Governablity", The Hindu, March9, 1997; N R Mohanty, "The Laloo Curve: From Messiah to Mere Leader", **The Times of India,** June 6, 1997.

[205] Harry W. Blair, **Voting, Caste, Community, Society: Explorations in Aggregate Data Analysis in India and Bangladesh,** (New Delhi: Young Asia Publications, 1979), 14; Kothari Rajni and Tarun Seth, "Extent and Limits of Community Voting: The Case of Baroda East", in Myron Weiner and Rajni Kothari (eds.), **Indian Voting Behavior,** (Delhi: Monohar Publication, 1967) p.24; Paul Brass, **Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh,** (Berkeley: University of California, 1965).

[206] In a classic study of the politicization of caste in modern India, Rudolphs have observed the relationship between caste and politics in terms of three types of political mobilization: vertical, differential, and horizontal. Vertical mobilization refers to mobilization of mutually dependent relations (Jajmani relations) by dominant castes into a vote bank. The increasing intraelite conflict and competition among political parties lead to a situation of factional conflict and short-term alliances referred to differential mobilization. Horizontal mobilization refers to further loosening of patron-client relationships in the caste system. In this case, castes situated at nearly similar level in the local caste hierarchy come together in caste association by making direct appeals to common economic and social interest. The emergence of lower castes political parties in north India in recent days has been marked by horizontal mobilization. Therefore, caste has not only adapted to the conditions of democratic politics, its mobilization has rendered of all inherited relations of privilege and power contestable and also illegitimate in contemporary India. This is what has come to be called modernity of caste in India. See Rudolph Lloyd I and ÿSusane Hoeber Rudolph, **The modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India,** Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967, pp.24- 131. Also see Mitra K Subrata, "Caste, Democracy and the Politics of Community Formation in India", in Searle –Chatterjee Mary and Ursula Sharma, (eds), **Contextualizing Caste: Post-Dumontian Approaches",** (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), pp. 49-71.

[207] In a pioneering analysis of elections of 1967 in Bihar, Harry Blair remarked that "dominant castes do fragment, it is true, and their fragmentation allows men of other castes to win elections. And certainly there has been a tendency for upper caste like the Bhumihars to split and permit lower castes like the Kurmis to return men to office. But this process appears to go only a certain distance down the caste ladder, for there is no tendency for the Kurmis, Yadavs, and Koiris to fragment in favor of caste groups beneath them in the ritual rank-order." The most important reason for this, according to Blair was the numerical concentration of backward and upper castes in certain areas. Using caste-based census of 1911, he calculated that the Yadavas comprised up to 35 percent of population in revenue thanas. Like wise Kurmis' percentage went up to 21 percent in places lower than district level. Similar level of concentration, he noted for the upper castes. In places, the percentage of Rajputs went up to 22 percent, Bhumihars notched up to 20 percent and Brahmans saw themselves making up to 15 percent of the population. See Blair Harry W. **Voting, Caste, Community, Society: Explorations in Aggregate Data Analysis in India and Bangladesh,** (New Delhi: Young Asia Publications, 1979), 14.Writing way back in the late 1970s, Blair sounded pessimistic about the political significance of lower backward castes (lower shudras). The pessimism no doubt explains the relative absence of lower shudrea at the state level politics. However, the recent panchayat (local) elections of 2001 in Bihar has demonstrated what Shaibal Gupta calls " resurgence of subalterns" in the form of lower shudras coming into power at the lowest but most immediate level of democratic politics in Bihar.

[208] The term upper castes and forward castes refer to "twice-born castes" in the local hierarchy of the caste system and used interchangeably in this dissertation.

[209] Interview, with a senior police official of Police in Patna. July 20, 2001.

[210] Under various acts of Colonial Government, such as Government of India Acts of 1907, 1917 and 1935, the Congress Party contested elections to acquire governmental power at the municipal, district and finally the state level in 1937.

[211] The term was coined by Rajni Kothari to demonstrate the dominance of the Congress Party in the political system in India since intendance. Characterizing India as a system of one party dominance, he referred to the Congress system as consisting of a party of consensus and parties of pressure. The Congress Party being the party of consensus dominated the party system. This party of consensus functioned through an elaborate networks of factions performing the corrective and balancing functions by articulating and aggregating the various demands and interests. Parties of pressure referred to several opposition groups, parties, and dissident groups from the ruling party and other important individuals. These groups are not alternative to the ruling party but influence the ruling party by criticizing and pressurizing it. See Rajni Kothari, "The Congress System in India", **Asian Survey**, vol.4, No, 12, (December 1964) 1161-73.

[212] Ibid.

[213] W.H. Morris Jones, "Dominance and Dissent: Their Inter-relations in the Indian Party System," **Government and Opposition,** vol.I, No.4, (1966), 460. Morris-Jones's model of "one dominant party" is similar to the one developed by Rajni Kothari.

[214] A brilliant discussion of caste and politics in early years in Bihar can be found in the writings of Ramashray Roy, Chetakar Jha, Girish Mishra, Paul Brass, Mahendra Prasad Singh, Walter Hauser, Arvind Das and others.

[215] Ramashray Roy "Caste and political recruitment in Bihar", in Rajni Kothari (ed.) **Caste In Indian Politics**, (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970), 242.

[216] Reflecting on the pervasive influence of caste in politics, Rajendra Prasad, the Chairman of the BPCC (Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee), said: we had to consider the caste of a person while deciding about the candidature, it was not a matter of satisfaction for Congress. But due to the exigencies of situation, we could not avoid it. It was a matter of great shame and sadness that we could not forget caste. We had to think that if we do not choose a man of particular caste from a particular area it would have adverse effect on that particular caste and ultimately on the chances of success in election. Further we had also taken from caste in proportionate number so that we can please all the castes. This was not a happy situation for a nationalist organization, but we had to do it. See Rajendra Prasad, **Autobiography**, (Ahemdabad: Navjivan Prakashan, 1963), 555-556.

[217] Anugrah Narayan Sinha, **Mere Sansmaran**, (Memoirs) undated, typescript copy, Bihar State Archive, Patna, Bihar.

[218] Girish Mishra, and Braj Kumar Pandey, "Sociology and Economics of Casteism in India: A study of Bihar", (Delhi: Pragati Publications, 1996), 299.

[219] Roy, 1970, op. cited, 711.

[220] Upendra Mishra, Caste **and Politics in India: A Study of Political Turmoil in Bihar 1967-1977,** (New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1986), 176.

[221] Mahendra Prasad Singh, **Cohesion in a Predominant Party: The Pradesh Congress and Party Politics in Bihar,** (New Delhi: S.Chand&Co. 1975), 62-63.

[222] Roy, 1970, op. cited, 711.

[223] On 27 July, 1957, JP wrote a long letter to S. K. Sinha presumably to impress upon him the need for suitable memorial for AN Sinha. The letter turned out to be a mud-slinging match between two top raking leaders of Bihar exposing the pervasive influence of caste and faction in the politics of Bihar. The full text of the JP's letter along with the S.K. Sinha's reply appeared in the "The Indian Nation, 8 August 1959.

[224] The Indian Nation, Patna, August 8, 1959.

[225] Kohli, 1990, op. cited., 212,

[226] Singh Mahendra, 1975, op. cited, 65.

[227] Ibid.

[228] Mishra and Pandey, 1996, op. cited, 318.

[229] GeorgeT.J.S, **Revolt In Bihar: A Study of the August 1965 Uprising,** New Delhi: Perspective Publications, 1965, 14.

[230] Singh Mahendra Prasad, 1975, op. cited, p.65.

[231] The High Command refers to the national leadership of the Congress Party. Although not a part of the formal structure of the Congress leadership, it is the highest level of decision making in the party. The high command comprises of the trusted political confidants of the Prime Minster who act as his or her mediators and arbitrators in cases of political crisis. During the heydays of Indira Gandhi, the High Command had become the epicenter of power in the Congers party. For a brilliant discussion of the decision making structure of the Congress Party in the early years of independence see Stanley A. Kochanek, **The Congress Party of India,** (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

[232] Atul Kohli, 1990. op.cited. 212.

[233] The Congress Party led by then Prime Minster Indira Gandhi, daughter of the first Prime Minster Jawahar Lal Nehru, lost elections in seven out of the 17 states-Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Madras

(now Tamil Nadu) Punjab, Kerala and Rajasthan. (and later in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh for a short period).

[234] Paul Brass, "Coalition Politics in North India", The American Political Science Review, Vol.62, No, 4, (December 1968), 1174.

[235] Pradeep K. Chhibber, **Democracy without Associations: Transformation of the Party system and Social Cleavages in India**, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 82-84.

[236] Francine R. Frankel, "Caste, Land, and Dominance in Bihar: Breakdown of the Brahmanical Social Order", in Francine R. Frankel and M.S.A.Rao (eds) **Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order**, Vol. I, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 99.

[237] Brass, 1968, op. cited, 1176.

[238] Frankel, 1989, op. cited, 89.

[239] The Shoshit Dal (the party of exploited people) was formed as result of defection of Bindeswari Prasad Mandal (the architect of controversial Mandal commission), health minister in the United Front government, along with 25 supporters.

[240] The Venkataram Aiyar Commission of Inquiry was instituted by Mahamaya Government to probe into the charges of corruption and abuse of power against the top stars of the Congress Party such as K.B.Sahay, M...P. Sinha, Satyendra Narayan Sinha, and Ramlakhan Singh Yadav etc. The commission took more than two years to finish probe and indicted K.B. Sahay, M.P. Sinha, Satyendra Narayan Sinha, Ambika Saran Singh, and Raghvendra Narain Singh. This caused enormous damage to their political standing. Therefore, there is merit in the evidence that Congress leaders wanted to topple the united front government so that they could be saved from conviction.

[241] Kamal, K, L. and Ralph C.Meyer, **Democratic Politics in India**", (New Delhi: Vikas, 1977), 123.

[242] Frankel, 1989, op. cited, 90.

[243] Ibid., 98.

[244] Ibid., 100.

[245] Ram Chandra Prasad, "Bihar: Social Polarization and Political Instability," in Iqbal Narain, ed. **State Politics in India**, (Meerut: Meenaskhi Prakashan, 1967), 57.

[246] Atul Kohli, 1990. op.cited, 214.

[247] At the time of split in the Congress Party at the national level, the party vertically split in two factions; Congress (R) And Congress (O). The Congress (R) was led by then Prime Minister and came to be refereed to as Congress(R) for Requisitioned—referring to a requisitioned party meeting summoned by Indira Gandhi. Later, Congress (R) stood for Ruling Congress Party. The Congress (O)

referred to Congress (Organization) symbolizing the hold of organizational wing in the controversial split in 1969.

[248] Interview with a former General Secretary of the Congress (I) in Patna, October10, 2001.

[249] Mishra and Pandey, 1996, op. cited, 372-76.

[250] Asian Recorder, July 16-22, 1973, 11499.

[251] Ibid., 11500.

[252] The Statesman, June 27-28, 1973.

[253] Frankel, 1989, op. cited, 102.

[254] Ghanshyam Shah, Protest **Movement in Two Indian States**, (Delhi: Ajnata, 1977), 91.

[255] Frankel, 1989, op. cited, 103.

[256] Shah, 1977, op. cited, 99.

[257] Kohli, 1990, op. cited, 215.

[258] Frankel, 1989, op. cited, 104.

[259] The Searchlight, Patna, July 4, 1971.

[260] Ibid.

[261] The Searchlight, Patna, June 26, 1971.

[262] In the course of my field work in Bihar, I met many politicians, bureaucrats and ordinary people. They all confirmed the widely prevalent perception that Laloo Yadav is presiding over the withering away of the state, a trend that was set in motion by Jaganath Mishra.

[263] Interview in Patna, October 11, 2001.

[264] Interview in Patna, April 20, 2002.

[265] The Indian Nation, Patna, May 28, 1975. Also cited in Atul Kohli, 1990, op.cited, 218-219.

[266] Ram Naresh Ram is currently leader of the CPI (ML) group in the state assembly in Bihar. Interview, Patna, October 10, 2001.

[267] Quoted in Frankel, 1989, op. cited, 104.

[268] Along with Bihar, ministries in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Rajasthan were dismissed and fresh elections were ordered.

[269] Frankel, 1989, op. cited, 106.

[270] Kohli, 1990, op. cited, 219.

[271] Harry W. Blair, "Rising Kulaks and Backward Classes in Bihar: Social Change in the late 1970s", **Economic and Political Weekly**, (January, 12, 1980), 64-72.

[272] The Mungeri Lal Commission on reservation for backward castes had recommended only 26 percent. Bowing to pressures of anti-job quota lobby in the government, the Karpoori Thakur government issued a notification on 10 the November 1978 for the reservation of 20 percent government jobs for the backward castes. This was in addition to the existing 25 percent reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

[273] Mishra and Pandey, 1996, op. cited, 362.

[274] Blair, 1980, op. cited, 67.

[275] Interview of Karpoori Thakur, Patna quoted in Kohli, 1990, op. cited, 221.

[276] Frankel, 1989, op. cited, 109.

[277] Ibid.,109.

[278] Ramashray Roy, "Battle **before Ballot**", (Delhi: Ritu Publishers, 1983), 22-25.

[279] India Today, March 15, 1987.

[280] Kohli, 1990, op. cited, 223.

[281] Ibid., 234.

[282] Prasad, Pradhan, 1987, op. cited, 852.

[283] Times of India, Patna, July 14, 1986.

[284] Mishra and Pandey, 1996, op. cited, 367.

[285] Frankel, 1989, op. cited, 117.

[286] Ibid.

[287] Atul Kohli, 1990, op.cited, 224. Also see The Times of India, Patna, and August 22, 1986.

[288] Faizan Ahmad, 'Revenge of the Reds", Sunday, 26 October-1November 1986.

[289] The Hindustan Times, Patna, November 28, 1988.

[290] The Hindustan Times, 28 November, 1988. On coal Mafia see Indu Bharti " Usurpation of the State: Coal Mafia in Bihar", Economic and Political Weekly, (21 October, 1989)

[291] Jagannath Mishra quoted in Kohli, 1990, op. cited, 235.

[292] Chaudhary and Srikant, 2001, op. cited, 247-49.

[293] Ibid.,248

[294] Ibid, 249.

[295] During my field work in Patna, many people who otherwise are strongly opposed to Laloo Yadav's so-called yadavaization of administration and politics contended that Lalooo Yadav was political invincible. The MY (Muslim-Yadav) combine has made his regime almost permanent. More so, the growing fragmentation in the opposition and its inability of the fight unitedly against the regime of Laloo Yadav has made Laloo Yadav's regime less vulnerable, many opined.

[296] India Today, March 15, 1991.

[297] Fodder scam refers to alleged involvement of politicians including Laloo Yadav and bureaucrats in the defrauding of state exchequer money worth millions of rupees The scam is the biggest scam in the history of Bihar since independence. It came into public view in January 1996 as a result of public interest petition filed by a few politicians belonging to BJP and socialist party in Bihar. It is believed that Laloo Yadav and his cohorts defrauded the government of Bihar by the tune of Rs 950 to 1, 500 crore (Rs one core stand roughly at $2, 85, 71428).The major part of scam took place since 1990, a period when the chief minister Laloo yadav held the department of finance, one of the main departments involved in the scam. The scam showed the fierce judicial independence of Patna High Court which monitored the investigation of the scam by the Central Bureau of Investigation, (CBI) the premier federal law enforcement body entrusted to crack down on cases of corruption.

[298] The then top civil and police bureaucrats in Bihar, Chief Secretary B.P. Verma and Director General of Police S. K. Saxena regularly visited the former chief Minster in the jail to seek instructions. See India Today, December 1, 1997.

[299] Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987, op. cited, 50-53.

[300] Arvind Das, "Para-Democracy in Bihar", **Economic and Political Weekly**, (November, 21, 1998), 2959.

[301] Chaudhary and Srikant, 2001, op. cited, 326.

[302] Many people especially lower castes believe that Bihar lives in worlds; the rural world dominated by folk culture and urban world dominated by Brahmanical values. One of the General Secretaries of the Janata Dal, Rambaccahn Rai told me that Laloo represents the folk, non-Brahamnical world and all the talk of anarchy is just a figment of imagination of some urban intellectuals. Interview July1, 2002.

[303] Roma Mitra, **Caste Polarization and Politics**, (Patna: Syndicate Publication, 1992), 137.

[304] Sunita Parikh, "Religion, Reservation and Riots: The Politics of Ethnic Violence in India", in Amrtia Basu and Atul Kohli (eds.), "Community, **Conflicts and the State in India**", (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 40.

[305] India Today, November 15, 1990.

[306] The Hindustan Times, 16 October 1990,

[307] Many of my respondents told me that Mandal stir was the watershed event in the history of Bihar as it almost destroyed all links of associational life in Bihar. The intercaste engagements suffered in towns, cities, professional bodies, and educational institutions and in a variety of everyday forms of engagements. Not surprisingly, the Mandal stir promoted intracaste social capital leading to mushrooming of caste associations belonging to both upper castes and lower castes. For some time, caste appeared the only significant cleavage and mobilizer of masses in Bihar.

[308] Parikh Sunita, 1998, op. cited, 52.

[309] India Today, March 15, 1991.

[310] Sideshwar, **Kal Hamara Hain**, Patna: Sardar Patel Sahitya Prakashan, 1994. Piqued at the neglect by the Laloo Yadav government in the power sharing especially in the reservation for Kurmis, the Kurmis mobilized their community by organizing a massive Rath Yatra (Chariot Procession) through the state. Started on January 2, 1994 in Patna, the month long procession covered various parts of Bihar. The Great rally of the Kurmis was the culmination of the month long procession. Although the rally ended up being a launching pad for new political career for Nitish Kumar, the rally attracted Kurmi politicians from all political parties. Interestingly, the Kurmi rally did not raise any slogans against upper castes showing the potential of anew alignment in the politics of Bihar.

[311] Tilak .D. Gupta, "Elections with a Difference", **Economic and Political Weekly**, (April 15, 1995), 789.

[312] Sanjay Kumar "New Phase in Backward Caste Politics in Bihar: Janata Dal on the Decline", **Economic and Political Weekly**, (August21, 1999), 2473.

[313] Ibid., 2474.

[314] Gupta, 1995, op. cited, ibid.

[315] Chaudhary and Srikant, 2001, op. cited, 248.

[316] Kumar Sanjay, 1999, op. cited, 2475.

[317] The Frontline, November 27- December 10, 1999.

[318] The Frontline, March 18-31, 2000.

[319] Ibid. Note, the politics of manipulation rather than normal institutional politics, has emerged the clear winner in the recent decade in Bihar. The installation of Nitish Kumar in March 2000 came as no surprise to anyone in Bihar. According to many, this was the culmination of the BJP led NDA politics to grab power at any cost in Bihar. Despite losing popularity, the alliance of Muslims and Yadavs(popularly called MY) led by Laloo Yadav has proved so strong that in February 1999 the National government sacked the government of Rabri Devi citing failure of law and order machinery to stop increasing caste massacres in Bihar. However, the government of the Rabri Devi was restored quickly because of the failure of the Bhartiya Party to secure majority in both houses of the parliament to support the action of the national government under Article 356 of the Constitution. This was second return of the Rabri government in Bihar.

[320] Once Laloo Yadav had claimed to rule the state for 20 years as the leader of the backward castes, Muslims, and all oppressed. Gradually, his position has been marred by Journalist N.R. Mohanty calls "tunnel vision" that has reduced him to the status of a caste leader of numerically powerful Yadavs. Even this position is shaky and fragile as demonstrated by the revolt of his long time friend and political associate Ranjan Yadav in the RJD. Though the revolt of Ranjan Yadav, backed by the opposition parties in Bihar, failed to make much impact, it, however, demonstrated the vulnerability of the RJD to inner squabbling and infighting. See N.R Mohanty, "The Laloo Curve: From Messiah to Mere Leader", **The Times of India**, June 6, 1997.

[321] Das, 1998, op. cited, 2959.

[322] Hauser, 1996, op. cited.

[323] The Observer, February 19, 1999.

[324] India Today

http://www.indiatoday.com/webexclusive/despatch/20020831/ahmed.html.4/4/2003.

[325] India Today http://www.indiatoday.com/webexclusive/despatch/20020831/ahmed.html.4/7/2003.

[326] The Week, September 1, 2002. http://www.the-week.com/22sep01/events1.htm

[327] The Week, September 1, 2002. http://www.the-week.com/22sep01/events1.htm. 4/10/2003.

[328] http://www.travelintelligence.net/wsd/articles/art4print831.html. 4/7/2003.

[329] India Today January 31, 1992.

[330] Ibid.

[331] Nalin Verma , " Bihar and Abductions are made for each other", The Bihar Times.

http://bihartimes.com/articles/nalin/kidnapping_recent.html. 4/11/2003.

[332] Ibid.

[333] Ibid.

[334] India Today, January 31, 1992.

[335] http://www.lib.virginia.edu/area-studies/SouthAsia/bihar/sp99.html. Date4/10/2003.

[336] Kohli, 1990, op. cited, 237.

[337] Arvind Das, "Landowners' Armies Take Over Law and Order", **Economic and Political Weekly,** (January4, 1986), 15-18.

[338] Himanshu, a Bhumihar Delhi University lecturer says "the world of Sena is short, brutish and nasty. It will remind you of Hobesian state of nature. It is also not as glamorous as the underworld of coal mafia or mumbai mafia. So tell me why would any one join it unless he is guided by some higher community ideals." Interview, Delhi 15 February 2002.

[339] I was taken to undisclosed location in Patna where some of the Ranvir Sena activists were holding meeting. When asked about the top leadership, they told me they are busy having meeting with Vidhayak ji (member of assembly) in order to lessen the stepped up police pressure. One of them said "this is the reason we do not meet media frequently, it exposes us to the publicity .Publicity is double edged sword for us (dudhari talwar).It demonstrates to our opponent our resolve and influence. On the other hand, it also politicizes our issues .Our rival parties take advantage and pressurize government to take police action on us". Patna, October 2001.

[340] The dreaded commander of Swarna Liberation Force, Ramadhar Singh after being released from the prison took to supplying illegal weapons to local politicians in Gaya and Nawada districts .In fact, one of his neighbors in Nawada told me that his was financially broke. Probably he spent all his money on fighting court cases. So he took to petty crimes helping locally powerful politicians. He was later arrested in during panchayat (local) elections in June 2001 while carrying illegal weapons.

[341] Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987, op. cited, 390.

[342] People' Union of Democratic Rights, **Killings in Bihar**, Delhi, 1987, 21-31.

[343] The Government of Bihar launched in June 1985 a large-scale police operation called "operation Black Panther" to crush so-called Naxals who were running parallel government in various parts of the state. The government arrested several what it called "criminals" and killed 49 in police encounters. In the wake of this operation, the Bihar government conceded that Gaya, Aurangabad, Patna, Bhojpur, Rohtas, Munger, Bhagalpur, West and East Champaran districts were extremists or Naxals controlled areas. See, The Statesman, 20 June, 1985.

[344] Ranvir Sena activists and many upper caste farmers in interview in Gaya repeatedly drew attention to this fact. They often criticized the ruling political regime for not doing enough to save them from the attacks of Naxals. Critical of casteist politics of Laloo Yadav, they, however, fully endorsed their faith in the state and the nation as moral and righteous entity.

[345] Most bureaucrats and politicians in Patna despise the Naxals. They are considered morally impure and rogue as "they indulge in mindless violence against innocent citizens and hapless police forces"; said one senior police officials in Patna.Worse, Naxals are not concerned about class war. "They are exploiting caste sentiments to weaken the power of the state and establish disorder in the countryside. Look at the MCC, the dreaded Naxal outfit in Bihar, murders, extortions, and violence is their philosophy of life," said he. In a moment of despair, he said "we have withdrawn from the basic function, not able to maintain law and order in the Naxals dominated areas." Interview in Patna, March 20, 2002.

[346] Bayly, 199, op. cited, 347.

[347] Based on interactions with Ranvir Sena activists and CPI (ML) Liberation activists during my field work between June 2001 and July 2002 in India.

[348] Susan Bailey, 1999, op.cited, 349-353.

[349] People Union for Democratic Rights, **Behind the Killings in Bihar: A Report on Patna, Gaya, and Singhbhum**, Delhi, July 1986, 30.

[350] Yang, 1989, op. cited, 215.

[351] Ibid., 224-239.

[352] Das, 1986, op. cited, 15-18.

[353] Ibid., 15.

[354] Chaudhary Praveen, 1988, op. cited, 52.

[355] People's Union of Democratic Rights, **a Time to Kill: A report on Massacres in Jehanabad**, (Delhi, August 1999), 18.

[356] Interview with a senior civil bureaucrat, Patna, September 2001.

[357] The term "Spring Thunder" was coined by the Chinese Communist Party to describe the uprising of peasants in Naxalbari region of West Bengal in India. The People's Daily of Chinese Communist Party in its editorial on July 5, 1967 described the uprising pf peasants as "a peal of spring thunder crashed over the land of India". It is no secret that the Chinese Communist Party had applauded and provided moral support to the uprising of peasants in India. The open Chinese support made so much impact on the Naxal movement that Charu Mazumdar, the top leader and ideologue of Naxal movement, announced that " Chinese Chairman is our Chairman , the Chinese path in our path". See, Pandey Sachchinand, **Naxal Violence: A Socio-Political Study**, (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, Delhi, 1985), 58.

[358] Nakshatra Malakar was legendary hero of peasants in Purnea, Bhagalpur and Saharsa in North Bihar. Born in 1909 in a poor peasant family of Purnea, he joined Congress Socialist Party in 1936 and led Mill workers of Purnea Jute Mill. He was arrested several times by the Colonial government. Later,

he joined the Communist Party of India and conducted a series of popular attacks on the local Zamindars. Between 1949-and 1950, under his leadership poor peasants mainly lower castes snatched food stuff from the local landlords. These food riots were described as dangerous disturbances by the government. See. Chaudhary and Srikant, 2001, op. cited, 145.

[359] Mukherjee and Yadav, 1980, op. cited, 123.

[360] Atul Kohli, 1990, op.cited, 225.

[361] The Searchlight, Patna, January 23, 1970.

[362] People's Union of Democratic Rights, **Behind the Killings in Bihar: A Report on Patna, Gaya and Singhbhum,** Delhi, 1986, 29. The People's Union of Democratic Rights' information reflects a fair assessment of the ground reality in Bihar as many top police official acknowledge its version of violence not in public but in privacy.

[363] Many of my respondents including top police officials confirmed the prevalence of illegal arms industry. They also pointed to the nexus between booth capturing and the illegal arms industry. According to them, it is hard to control the illegal arms industry because it is considered vital for winning elections in Bihar. This explains why elections are so bloody in Bihar.

[364] Cited in Kalyan Mukherjee and R.S. Yadav, "For Reasons of State: Oppression and Resistance, a Study of Bhojpur Peasantry", in Arvind Das, (ed.), **Agrarian Movements in India: Studies on 20th century Bihar,** (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 28. Also see The Indian Nation, May 28, 1975.

[365] Dayal Lakshmeshwar "State **and People: Political History of Government in India,** (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1998), 250-51.

[366] The report of Central team which visited " extremist affected areas in Central Bihar said " The Team has no hesitation in recording that a the heart of the problem lies the desperation of the poor and the lowly and their loss of faith in the established order to come to their aid and mete out social and economic justice to them." The team further pointed out "Once the root cause of the recourse to violence by the traditionally weak and suppressed are recognized, it would be readily agreed that the solution to the problem does not lie in crushing their efforts for assertion of minimum dignity and aspiration as human beings, but in devising effective lawful instruments of delivering to the poor social and economic justice. In this view of the matter, excessive dependence on strong armed police methods of putting down "violence" of the left wing extremists with a heavy hand restoring normalcy, can not but be counter productive", cited in People's Union of Democratic Rights, **Terror in Jehanabad: A Report**, Delhi, April 1989, 22-25.

[367] Mammen Matthew, "Caste, Politics and Cycle of Strife", **Journal of Conflict Resolution**, vol. 4, (1996), New Delhi, 144.

[368] Indian People's Front (IPF) was formed as an umbrella organization of various Naxal organizations in April 1982 to focus on open mass activities. In the formation of the front, CPI (ML) liberation group played a major role.

[369] Not only CPI (ML) workers corroborated this resistance to booth capturing by village notable, many old hands in Bihar's politics acknowledge the contribution of liberation group. Arun, a lower caste youth from Bikram, in conversation with me said "Naxals made it possible for us to caste vote for the first time ever .Casting vote was upper caste privilege in our region. And it was never considered booth capturing as we were never considered fit to caste vote. So Naxals made the beginning of real democracy (asli loktantra)". Interview, Patna, December 24, 2001.

[370] See Human Rights Watch, **Broken People: Caste Violence Against India's Untouchables,** (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), 53-81.

[371] The Hindustan Times, Patna, July17 1995.

[372] People's Union of Democratic Rights, 1986, op.cited, 44-46.

[373] The Searchlight, Patna, October 8, 1970.

[374] Based on newspaper analysis and conversations with many journalists and politicians in Bihar.

[375] People's Union of Democratic Rights, **Koel Ke Kinare: Agrarian Conflict in Palamu Plains, Delhi,** April 1990, 14. The sena never faces serious challenges from the state. During the controversial imposition of President Rule in March 1999, the Governor, Sundar singh Bhandari released list of arrested extremists. Of the toil 221, oon that list only 30 were sena members, cited in PUDR report **"A time to Kill: A Report on massacres in Jehanabad"**, August 1999, p.22.

[376] People's Union of Democratic Rights, 1999, **a time to kill...**, op. cited. 19. The Government frequently links the lack of infrastructural facilities and massacres in the region. Lack of roads is cited as a crucial issue in tackling massacres. However, these issues may be important, but the state seems to have ignored the issues of land, minimum wages and social exploitation of Dalits. During my field work in Patna, Jehanbad, and Gaya, Nawada, I did notice woeful conditions of roads and public transport and also pathetic conditions of police stations. However, most police officials told me that given the free will, meaning less political interference from the state capital, they would finish criminals, and private armies. They also pointed to enormous "political incentives" that lead to flourishing of private caste armies.

[377] People's Union of Democratic Rights, 1999, **A time to kill...**, op. cited, 19-20.

[378] Ibid., 20.

[379] Vikas Jha, 1990, op. cited, 130-131.

[380] This table is compiled on the basis of local media reports, police sources, and secondary sources .One of the best sources on the origins of private caste armies is CPI (ML) Liberation party' document titled " The Flaming Fields of Bihar". Laloo Yadav resigned in March 1995 as a result of fodder scam and made his wife Rabri Devi chief minister. It is no secret in Bihar who runs the government. Rabri Devi government has earned the epithet of "proxy government" being run by Laloo Yadav. The late Arvind Das used to call them "Raja-Rani" of Bihar. With a brief interregnum of short-lived Nitish

Kumar government after assembly elections in February 2000, Rabri Devi bounced back to power on 13 March 2000. See, http://www.flonnet.com/fl1706/17060040.htm.4/6/2003.

[381] In my fieldwork in Patna, I came across members of former Bhoomi Sena and Lorik Sena who have now joined Samata Party and Rashtriya Dal respectively. Baju Yadav, a former commander of Lorik Sena in Nalanda district won assembly election in 1995 on the Janata Dal ticket (later Rashtriya Janata Dal). In most district towns, a random check would lead anyone to confirm the general perception that traditional parties in Bihar have stopped performing the role of maintaining a continuing link between state and civil society. The parties such as Rashtriya Janata Dal, the ruling party in the state have become only electoral machine or at the most, expert in organizing public rallies in support of the supreme leader. Most parties, barring CPI (ML), are actually political rally parties engaged in one day massive mobilization of people around mostly single issue such as quota in jobs, or save secularism, or save Bihar from Laloo.

[382] Belchi massacre of 1977 in which several dalits were killed was historic for more than more reason. It signaled the emergence of backward castes as the new dominant class in rural Bihar. Secondly, it started the trend of increasing politicization of caste war in India. Observers often trace the come back of Indira Gandhi to national political scene to her visit to Belchi and succeeded in capturing the imagination of the nation on the growing incidents of massacres of lower castes. See Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987, op. cited, 324.

[384] Bayly Susan, 1999, op. cited, 347.

[385] Pathak, 1993, op. cited, 86.

[386] Ibid.

[387] Based on observation in the field and also corroborated by many published surveys as well.

[388] A Report from the Flaming Fields, 1986, op.cited, 78.

[389] Ibid., 72. Jehanabad District was created as separate district out of Gaya district in 1986. Jehanabad is predominately rural. Most big landlords are Bhumihars and Rajputs. Yadavs and Kurmis have also become rich peasants. Jehanabad is also known for the prevalence of dacoit gangs (organized robbers). The gangs are mostly made up of impoverished upper castes and musclemen of former Zamindars from the backward castes. They are considered part of a complex web of social and economic exploitation of poor, landless and lower castes. These gangs were also patronized by the political parties especially "village notables" for capturing booths in elections. Based on observation. This is one of the reasons why lines between caste senas and gangs blur in this region. Based on observation and conversation with locals during field trip between Ghosi and Jehanabad.

[390] The Hindustan Times, Patna, July 17, 1995.

[391] Urmilesh, **Bihar Ka Sach**, (New Delhi: Prakashan Sansthan, 1991), 131.

[392] A Report from the Flaming Fields, 1986, op. cited, 74.

[393] Ibid.

[394] A.K Lal , " Nemesis", **Seminar**, (November, 1980)

[395] Pathak, 1993, op.cited, 88.

[396] Laddu Singh's desire to become leader of the community failed miserably. According to most observers, Laddu Singh was never a true community warrior. Rather he used the name of the caste to escape from the clutches of the police. One of Ladoo Singh's accomplishes Lallan Singh was another example of criminal turned community warrior. Lallan Singh fell prey to intragroup rivalry and was killed. Ladoo Singh's ambition to become a reformed social worker ended in his violent death in August 2002.

[397] Pathak 1993, op. cited, 74.

[398] Vikas Jha, 1990, op. cited, 129.

[399] Ibid., 129-130.

[400] Ibid.

[401] ibid., 130.

[402] The Flaming Fields of Bihar"1986, op. cited. 75.

[403] India Today, March 15, 1984.

[404] Pathak, 1993, op. cited, 54.

[405] Ibid.

[406] A Report from the Flaming Fields, 1986, op. cited, p.78.

[407] Based on observation of a former commander of Bhoomi Sena who occupies important position in the Samata Dal.

[408]This observation is based on conversations with social workers, politicians and professionals from the Kurmi community in Patna. A prominent local Kurmi youth leader, Ajay Kumar alias Rocket says, "the Bhoomi Sena has now been out of existence. It is hard to find old guards who ran the Sena. Most of them have been killed by Naxals. Some have joined political parties especially RJD and the Samata Dal. The Kurmis are known for dynamism and hard work. You can see that prosperity in the areas around Patna has been generated by the Kurmis. Therefore, they took the arms mainly to resist the encroachment of the Naxals on their land, prosperity and family. Once, Naxals decided to mend fences with us, the community abandoned the Sena. The Naxals especially CPI (ML) have in fact supported our caste in local assembly elections." Interview, Patna, December 27, 2002.

[409] http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/cms.dll/xml/uncomp/articleshow?art_id=19607051. 4/10/2003.

[410] Prasad, 2002, op. cited, 302.

[411] Pathak, 1997, op. cited, 56.

[413] Ibid.76. During my trip to Jaitipur, locals informed me that Baiju Yadav started his political career as one of the henchmen of Jagdish Sharma, one of the most powerful Bhumihar politicians in the region famous for booth capturing. Infact, it is believed that Baiju yadav and Jagdish Sharma still maintain good relations. Note, Goshi, the electoral constituency of Jagdish Sharma borders Jaitipur. The whole region in the early 1980s had come under the influence of Naxals movement. Therefore it is plausible that Bhumihars actively assisted in the formation of Lorik Sena, a clear example of political solidarity if not class.

[414] Urmilesh, 1991, op.cited, 133.

[415] Ibid., 77.

[416] Farzand Ahmad, "Armies of the Night", **India Today**, (Januray15, 1986).

[417] A Report from the Flaming Fields, 1986, op. cited, ibid., 77.

[418] Ibid.

[419] Ibid.

[420] Urmilesh, 1991, op. cited, 133.

[421] Interview, Patna, March 26, 2001.

[422] Ibid.

[423] Based on interview with political activists in Patna.

[424] The Hindustan Times, Patna, July 17, 1995.

[425] The Hindustan Times, Patna, July 17/1995.

[426] The Hindustan Times, Patna, August 4, 1991.

[427] The Hindustan Times, Patna, February 20, 1991.

[428] The Hindu, February 21, 1991.

[429] Urmilesh, 1991, op. cited, 132.

[430] Matthew, 1999, op. cited.

[431] According to one Congress party official, Sardar Krishna Singh at one point of time wielded so much influence that it was hard to ignore his recommendation in regard to transfers and postings of civil and police officials especially during Dubey government. The Jehanabad lobby led by King Mahendra Prasad Singh, Congress MP, fully backed him and his activists for electoral gains.

[432] The Hindustan Times, April 6, 1991. Ramjatan Sinha in his interview with me refused to accept the charge that he anyway was associated with Senas. He, however, claimed that he worked hard for the welfare for the community, a euphemism for Sena related activities in Bihar. But many Congress workers informed me that these two Congress leaders actively promoted Senas for electoral gains. The Sena workers actually worked for them as booth capturers during elections. And in peace time, Sena workers functioned as a formidable shield against armed squads of Maoist outfits such as IPF, MKKS, Party Unity, and MCC guarding the landed interest of Bhumihars. Interview, Patna, December 22, 2002.

[433] Jha Vikas, 1990, op. cited, 170-72.

[434] Urmilesh, 1991, op. cited, 134.

[435] Prasad, 2001, op. cited, 259.

[436] Urmilesh, 1991, op.cited, 179.

[437] The Hindustan Times, Patna, April 6, 1991. According to the press report, Jagdish Sharma had deposed before the court in defense of accused in Parasbigha massacre.

[438] The Hindustan Times, February 14, 1992.

[439] People's Union of Democratic Rights, **Bitter Harvest: The Roots of Massacres in Central Bihar,** Delhi, August 1992, 20. In my conversation with Bhumihars in Gaya I got the impression that though Ramadhar Singh attempted hard to emerge as community savoir, he could not sustain this image for long. Soon he got mired in controversies about usurpation of money donated for the cause of fighting Naxals. He gradually came to be perceived by many Bhumihars as one who was after power and money. Eventually, he lost his image as savior and stared being perceived as who was using massacres to get cheap popularity. In fact, one police official who claimed to have played role in his so-called surrender to the police told me on condition of anonymity that Ramadhar Singh surrendered more out of fear and to get the status of political prisoner, a privilege in the prison of Bihar.

[440] Frontline, March 13, 1992, 26.

[441] Jha Vikash, 1990, op. cited, 207-8.

[442] The Hindustan Times, Patna, February 14, 1992.

[443] The Hindustan Times, Patna, August 22, 1991.

[444] The Hindustan Times, Patna, February 4, 1992.

[445] The Hindustan Times, Patna, February 14, 1992. MCC and Janata Dal share same social soil. Bulk of the MCC cadres come from Yadavs who are the most vociferous supporters of Laloo Yadav led Janata Dal in Bihar. Though officially Janata Dal does maintain any relations with MCC a banned extremist outfit, many informed sources told me that MCC'e elections boycott strategy helped win Janata Dal many seats in Gaya, Aurnagabad etc. Therefore, Bara massacre came as an embarrassment to Laloo Yadav showing signs of chinks in unofficial ties between the Janata Dal and the MCC. Bara massacre proved the point that MCC benefited more from its uneasy alliance with the Janata Dal as it increased its strength vis-a-vis other Maoist groups and private caste armies of landed castes in Bihar. According to police sources in Patna, MCC is the most armed and efficient Maoist outfit in Bihar. The close links between MCC and the ruling Janata Dal came to fore when Laloo Yadav gave assembly ticket to Ramadhar Singh, once the chief of the MCC. Though he was inducted into the RJD by Laloo Yadav, he remained critical of Laloo's anti-poor policies. In an interview with the press, he said "(Laloo) Yadav first divided the society on caste lines and after joined hands with the big landlords and farmers". See Sunday, 27 September 27 –3 October 1992.

[446] The Hindustan Times, Patna, February 14, 1992.

[447] Ibid.

[448] Ibid.

[449] Ibid.

[450] Economic and Political Weekly, February 15, 1992.309

[451] The Pioneer, Delhi, February 14, 1991.

[452] The Illustrated Weekly, July 18-July 24 1992.

[453] During my field work in Gaya, a Bhumihar lecturer of Gaya College told me how rape of lower caste women was considered so important to maintain traditional order of dominance in many villages of Gaya district. He said "sexual exploitation of lower caste women had been routine and everyday in the region since time immemorial, however, Naxal movement had certainly attempted to put brake on this ugly social practice. Diamond incurred wrath of MCC by committing not only killing of lower caste but also by indulging in rape of women." Interview, Gaya, March 18, 2002.

[454] The Hindustan Times, Patna, December 25, 1991. Its interesting to note that a probe panel of the Congress (I) headed by dalit leader Mira Kumar after having investigated killings of 10 lower castes in Main and Barasimha gave SLF clean chit while blaming Maoist groups such as MCC, IPF and MKK for the killings of lower caste. See The Hindustan Times, Patna, December 28, 1991.

[455] The Hindustan Times, Patna, July 17, 1995.

[456] Based on conversations with many Bhumihars government officials and politicians in Gaya.

[457] Frontline, March 13, 1992.

[458] The Times of India, Patna, March 14, 2002.

[459] Jha Vikash, 1990, op. cited, 129.

[460] The Hindustan Times, Patna, May3, 1997.

[461] The Hindustan Times, Patna, July17, 1995.

[462] The Hindustan Times, February 27, 1992.

[463] People's Union for Democratic Rights, op. cited, .8.

[464] Ibid, 10.

[465] Ibid., 11.

[466] The entire districts of Gaya, Aurangabad, and hilly tracts of South Bihar were notorious for the practice of bonded labor(Kamiauti).In this inhuman system, the borrower undertook to labor for the lender as he may require until the original loan was repaid in cash which was almost impossible considering the dependent economic conditions of labor. In 1920, the Kamias as they were called, were officially estimated to be about 60, 000. The colonial government sought to ban the practice by Bihar and Orissa Kamianti Agreement in 1920. However, the practice continued through post-independence India in a variety of new forms, violating the official policy. According to various survey conducted by many Human Rights Organizations and the National Labor Institute (Delhi) , the district of Palamu recoded the highest number of boded labor in India. The government of Congress in 1976 initiated efforts to liberate bonded labor. Unofficially, bonded labor is still practiced in many parts of Bihar. This adds to the increasing conflict between landowner and labor.

[467] Based on oral information, it is a common knowledge in Bihar that local level revenue officials are hand-in glove with big landlords resulting in fudging of revenue and land records. Therefore, the official records offer no reliable guide to figure out actual possession of land in the hands of big landlords. Therefore, the researchers have to rely on oral accounts of peasants activists, human rights activists, and laborers, the actual tillers of the land.

[468] The Hindustan Times, Patna, Patna, November 20, 1995.

[469] According People's Union of Democratic Rights' Report, the Mauwar of Manatu owned more than 6000 acres of land and controlled about half of Manantu's 165 villages. In his area, forced labor was a common practice in all spheres of social and economic activities. He acquired notoriety for keeping pet tigers in his palace. As far as local legends go, he used to feed rebellious peasants of area to his pet tigers. This is how he came to be called the "Man-eater of Manatu". See People's Union for Democratic Rights, 1990, **Koel Ke Kinare**..., op. cited, 4.

[470] Ibid, 4-5

[471] The Hindustan Times, Patna, November 20, 1995.

[472] Jha Vikash, 1990, op. cited, ibid., 201-2.

[473] People's Union for Democratic Rights, 1990, **Koel Ke Kinare...**, op.cited, 13.

[474] Italian Marxist Gramsci in his "Prison Notebooks" popularized the term "Subaltern". In a minimal sense, he uses it as shorthand for a variety of subordinate classes such as industrial workers, peasants, laborers, artisans, etc. The term subaltern is here used loosely implying relations of power between dominant and dominated groups, classes, and castes in the rural India. Therefore, "less rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants, and upper-middle peasants" who could otherwise be ranked among the subalterns are here treated as dominant. In this sense, considering the specific historical circumstances in Bihar, subaltern here refers to Dalits and impoverished lower backward castes. See Vinayak Chaturvedi, ed., **Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial**, (New York: Verso, 2000). According to M.N.Srinivas a caste may be called dominant "when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, and when it also wields preponderant economic and political power. A large and powerful caste group can more easily be dominant if its position in the local caste hierarchy is not too low". See M.N. Srinivas, **The Dominant Caste and other Essays**, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4.Ibid., 14.

[475] Ibid., 10.

[476] The Hindustan Times, Patna, July, 17/1995

[477] The term Ranvir causes a bit of linguistic confusion in popular discourse. Considering the variation in local dialects in Bihar, Ranvir is pronounced as Ranbeer most of the time, and also as Ranveer some time. Interestingly, People's Union for Democratic Rights, one of India most vocal Human Rights Organizations uses the term "Ranbir Sena". See Peoples Union For Democratic Rights, "**Agrarian conflict in Bihar and the Ranbir Sena,** Delhi, October, 1997. The most common usage is however Ranvir. In this dissertation, the term Ranvir has been used.

[478] The state government banned the Ranvir Sena on July 26, 1995. This did not deter Sena from committing massacres as is clear that except Khopira massacre that took place on April 29, 1995, most of the massacres Ranvir Sena has carried out after the ban.

[479] For instance, according to pres reports, in the case of Shankarbigha massacre, on January 25, 1999 in Jehanabad district, Ranvir Sena had made a prior announcement in the local press in Patna. In Sendani massacre, on April 21, 1999, the Sena, in fact, had warned the villagers about the impending massacre a week before it actually took place. See People's Union of Democratic Rights, **Agrarian conflict in Bihar and the Ranbir Sena**, Delhi, October, 1997.

[480] Italian Marxist Gramsci in his "Prison Notebooks" popularized the term "Subaltern". In a minimal sense, he uses it as shorthand for a variety of subordinate classes such as industrial workers, peasants, laborers, artisans, etc. The term subaltern is here used loosely implying relations of power between dominant and dominated groups, classes, and castes in the rural India. Therefore, "less rural gentry, impoverished landlords, rich peasants, and upper-middle peasants" who could otherwise be ranked

among the subalterns are here treated as dominant. In this sense, considering the specific historical circumstances in Bihar, subaltern here refers to Dalits and impoverished lower backward castes. See Vinayak Chaturvedi, ed., **Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial**, (New York: Verso, 2000). According to M.N.Srinivas a caste may be called dominant "when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, and when it also wields preponderant economic and political power. A large and powerful caste group can more easily be dominant if its position in the local caste hierarchy is not too low". See M.N. Srinivas, **The Dominant Caste and other Essays**, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4. Sage-Warrior Parshuram's icon adorns the front pages of "Bramahrishi Samaj Patrika" (Bhumihar Society's magazine) published from Patna. The magazine claims that it is propagating the ideals of sage Parshuram.

[481] Kumar Suresh Singh, **India's Communities**, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 470.

[482] The term **Zamindar** derives from the Persian word Zamin meaning "land". Therefore, Zamindars stands for landlord.

[483] Pandit Parmeshwar Prasad Sharma, **Sanik Brahman**, (Varanasi: Hitchintak Press, Vikaram Sawant, 2019,), 65-91.

[484] Dumont, 1970, op. cited, 153.

[485] Mahamahopadhya Haraprasad Shastri, "Babhan," **Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal**, vol. LXXI, Part I, (1902), 61-2. Shastri writes "it appeared very probable that Babhans were originally Brahmins and their degradation from the status of Brahmin dates back to the downfall of Buddhism. Babhan was merely the Pali form of Brahman and was found in Asokan pillar inscriptions as a corruption of Brahmi in one place in connection with the Sramanas or Buddhist monks"(61)

[486] See, Bihar and Orissa District Gazetteer, Patna, 1924, 53-54; Patna District Gazetteer, 1970, 80, cited in Ramnath Sharma "Bhumihar Brahman" in the souvenir published by Brahmarshi Samaj, Dated April, 9, 1994.

[487] To understand how strongly Bhumihars react to their identity issue can be gauged from the debate triggered off by the article published by Girish Mishra and Braj Kumar Pandey in the Searchlight on April4, 1970. In their article entitled "Socio-economic Roots of Casteism in Bihar", they suggested that Bhumihars are offspring of a Brahmin mother and a Rajput father. The counter reply by P.P.Sharma, P.P.Sharma and Dashrath Tiwari, in the Searchlight, November 14, 1970 revives and renews "substantialised" construction of Bhumihars' identity in the post-independence Bihar. Interestingly, this construction looms large in the minds of most members of Bhumihar intelligentsia. Quoting colonial and ethnographic records, the authors give credit to Maharaja Ishwari Prasad Singh of Benaras for popularizing the nomenclature " Bhumihar" in the late19th –century. According to authors " (In) 1885, Maharaja Ishwari Prasad Singh of Benaras conceived the idea of founding a caste association. A committee was formed to select a suitable name for the Sabha. Tirhut people propose the name as Paschima Brahmans. While Magadh men headed by Pandit Kali Charan Singh wanted it to be "Babhan" for the name of the Sabha. But the Maharaja of Benaras Sir Prabhu Narayan Singh being the most powerful member of the community prevailed upon all to accept the name as Bhumihar and so in 1892 the Bhumihar Brahman Mahasabha was born with Babu Langat Singh of Muzaffarpur as the

ardent champion to propagate the name in Bihar... The Sabha was held every year in all most all the districts of Bihar to popularize the new name of the community brought from U.P. in place of the old Bihari name. Thus the old Bihar name Babhan was discarded to some extent and the new name Bhumihar Brahman were accepted. But in spite of these efforts by the Bhumihar Brahmans of U.P. the staunch and orthodox Babhan of Magadh did not yield easily but rather stuck to their original name 'Babhan'. Even now the word Babhan is preferred to the word Bhumihar Brahman here in Magadh". Though most Bhumihars in Bihar shun priestly functions, it has been reported that Bhumihars in some parts of Bihar perform priestly functions. For instance in Chatra subdivision of Hazaribagh district (now in Jharkhand), Bhumihars is the priests of the Kharwar Rajputs and Bandawat Rajputs, Mahuri Vaishyas and the Kayasthas of the region. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati used this evidence to exhort Bhumihars to take to priestly functions in the pre-independence era.

See also Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, "Mera Jeevan Sanghrash", Vol.II, Sri Sitaram Trust, Bihata, Patna, pp.82-84. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati's book "Bhumihar Brahman Parichay was published first time in 1916. In this book, Swamiji returned to his theme of defending Bhumihars' non-priestly functions. In response to his critics, Sahajanand also enlarged his net and included Tayagi from Western U.P. and Mohiyal from Punjab to mobilize Bhumihars horizontally as well.

[488] Based on my fieldwork observation in Bihar. Most Bhumihars I spoke with do not approve of performing priestly functions. This seems to reflect the continuing legacy of Swami Sahajanand efforts to raise the status of Bhumihar in Bihar. Swami Sahajanand Sarawaswati in Balia conference of Bhumihar Brahman Sabha in 1914 had quoted extensively from Hindu scriptures to emphasize that priestly functions alone do not define Brahmins. He defended Brahmins performing agricultural functions. He also gave his famous theorization on Brahmins in terms of begging (yachak) and non-begging (Ayachak) categories. According to him, Bhumihars are non-begging Brahmins.

[489] Francis Buchanan **Accounts of the Districts of Bihar and Patna,** Vol.I, (Patna: Government of Bihar Press, 1932), 325.

[490] J. A. Bourdillion, **Report on the Census of Bengal**, Vol.1, (Calcutta, Government of Bengal Press, 1881), 75.

[491] Yang, 1989. op. cited, 6.

[492] The term "Sanskritization" coined by M.N. Srinivas refers to emulation of Sanskritic rituals, norms and way of life by the lower castes seeking social mobility.

[493] Petty Bhumihar kings and Zamindar Bhumihars dominated most of the Bhumihar castes Sabhas. For instance, in 1920, there were four major Bhumihar Sabhas; Bhumihar Brahman Sabha, Gaya, established in 1900 in Tekari Raj had Raja Harihar Prasad Singh as its president. Most of the Bhumihar landlords of the district were members of those organizations. Bhumihar Brahman Sabha, Muzaffarpur was established in 1899 at the house of Babu Jageswar Prasad Singh of Islampur. It had 65 active members which included president of the Sabha Raja Shivraj Nandan Sinha and secretary Babu Kishun Prasad Singh. Patna Bhumihar Brahman Sabha was established in Pirbahor, Patna in 1899. It was led by Maharaja Hathua, Raja Shivhar, Raja Amamnawa, etc. Similarly, Bhumihar Brahman Sabha in Saran district was set up in 1908 and led by Maharaj Bahadur, Hathua. Note, Brahmans, Rajputs,

Bhumihars, Kayasthas, Yadavs, Kurmis and Koeris formed most of the caste Sabhas in 1920 for their social and political uplift. A few were also organized by lower castes such as Dusadh, Bind, Chamar, Teli, Kumhar, Lohars, etc. Interestingly, Kahar Sabha in Gaya in a lower caste sabha had about 5000 members. See, Bihar Special Branch, List of Political and Religious Association in Bihar and Orissa, December 1920. (Confidential).

[494] Anand .A. Yang, **Control and Conflict in an Agrarian Society: A study of Saran district, 1866-1920** , Ph.D Dissertation, University of Virginia, August 1976, 33-4.

[495] Chaudhary and Srikant, 2000, op. cited, 281-283.

[496].Lacey, W.G "Census of India" Bihar and Orissa, Part II, Vol.VI, (1931) 275.

[497] Kumar Suresh Singh, 1998, op.cited, .472.

[498] Sudhir Hindwan, "Caste War in Bihar", **Mainstream,** (November 23, 1996), 25. Based on Sudhir Hindwan's survey conducted in Bihar during November-December 1994.The information has been fine tuned using my fieldwork experience in Bihar.

[499] Courtesy Sudipto Kaviraj, the term fuzzy here indicates that prior to the colonial rule, communities/castes did not seek to construct their identity as being represented by a single reference point. In this sense, the colonial census served the purpose of inventing, if not a new caste, at least a new caste identify. From face-to face local existence, caste became a master narrative enmeshed in colonial scheme of patronage. See, Sudipto Kaviraj, "The Imaginary Institution of India" in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey, eds. **Subaltern Studies VII**, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1-39.

[500] Pundit Paremeshwar Prasad Sharma, op. cited, 22-23.

[501] http://www.geocities.com/mughalstan/cw/warpathb.htML . 4/8/2003.

[502] CP Thakur's dismissal from the Union Ministry in June 2002 by the Prime Minister led widespread protest by Bhumihars in the state. Most Bhumihars politicians saw in this an attempt to marginalize the influence of Bhumihars in state politics. Suraj Bhan Singh, a Ranvir Sena sympathizer, and independent member of Bihar assembly, said, "Thakur was representing the Bhumihar caste in the federal government. We will not tolerate this injustice," He attacked BJP government saying, "If Thakur is not included in the changed Vajpayee cabinet, the Bhumihars will launch a campaign against the BJP. "Thakur, who represents Patna, the state capital in the Lok Sabha, (the lower house of Indian Parliament) is popular among the Bhumihars and has emerged as their top leader for his fiery outbursts against Laloo Yadav's "misrule". The BJP is likely to lose its base among the Bhumihars for its decision to drop Thakur," said a Bhumihar leader in the BJP, Bihar's main opposition party. Realizing the political importance of Bhumihars in the politics of Bihar, the Central government led by BJP re-inducted CP Thakur in the central government on January 29, 2003. Though Thakur has been given a low –key department of Small Scale Industries and the Development of the North –East, this haws given a new twist to politics in Bihar. Most political observers believe that Thakur's re-entry in the cabinet has been done to scuttle the plan of Laloo Yadav to win over the support of Bhumihars. Laloo

Yadav, sensing the significance of Bhumihars and fragmentation of backward castes, has started wooing the Bhumihars and in fact went out of the way to attend meetings of Brahmarshi Samaj (Caste Association of Bhumihars) in Patna.

See, http://in.news.yahoo.com/020701/43/1r1ry.htML. 4/9/2003.

http://www.patnadaily.com/news2003/013003/thakur_reinducted.html. 4/10/2003.

It is interesting to note that before his sacking from the union cabinet, C.P. Thakur was not very popular among Bhumihars as their caste leader. The sacking, however, showed the brewing frustration in the community over its loss of political power in the state.

See also, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/cms.dll/xML/comp/articleshow?art_ID=14701474. 4/9/2003.

[503] Belaur is the birthplace of Ranvir Sena. Mukhiya ji as the locals call him, is local (gramin) of Belaur. Brahmeshwar Singh is former Mukhiya of Khopirya Panchyat in Bhojpur district. The first massacre by Ranvir Sena took place in Khopirya on April 4, 1995 in which Ranvir Sena killed three Dalits. Ironically, known as Gandhi among his followers in central Bihar and bloodthirsty (khooni)) among the dalits, Brahmeshwar Singh is the chief of the Ranvir Sena. At the age of 55, he carries a reward of Rs 5 lakh ($ 10,000) on his head. He is wanted in dozens of murder cases, including the killing of two persons at his native Khopira village in Bhojpur in 1994. The police almost caught him twice, in 1998 and 1999, but released him due to lack of proper identification. Some sources, however, say that he was released at the instruction of Laloo Yadav. People's Union of Democratic Rights, a human rights organization believes in this line of reasoning. According to one account, he post-graduated in political science from Patna University. Earlier, he had graduated in science from the H.D. Jain College in Arah, where his younger son now studies, Brahmeshwar was unanimously elected village chief (Mukhiya) of Khopira in 1971. His elder son is with the Border Security Force in Kashmir and his wife and only daughter live in Khopira, where he has about 60 acres. His extended family also lives with him. "I do not get to meet my family since I am involved in humanitarian work," he once said.

See, http://www.the-week.com/20jul02/events1.htm. 4/10/2003.

The Sena's of influence is concentrated in the Central Bihar, especially in Bhojpur, Patna, Jehanabad, Gaya, Aurangabad, and Rohtas. Belaur is located in Udwantnagar block in Bhojpur district. Sahar and Sandesh blocks in Bhojpur are called "Naxalbari" of Bihar for the increasing influence of radical communist parties or groups. Bhumihars are the dominant caste in Belaur. All the Bhumihars are not big landholders; some are small and even marginal. However, collectively as a dominant caste, they control the large part of land. Besides land, they are involved in government jobs, some of them are bus owners, and few are contractors in the city.

See http://satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/terroristoutfits/Ranvir_Sena.htm. 4/10/2003.

[504] Most of the people from Bhojpur I met in course of my fieldwork in Bihar confirmed this story. A Delhi University Bhumihar lecturer who hails from Sahar block on condition of anonymity told me

"Ranvir Baba liberated us from the oppression of Rajputs landlords in the region. So the name of Ranvir Baba symbolizes our struggle against domination. Today, Rajputs are with us, but not openly. In the past, we have not had good relations with Rajputs. If you look around in Bhojpur or old Arah district, you will find Bhumihars and Rajputs do not live together in same village." Interview. Delhi, March 22, 2002. A cursory look at village notes kept in Arah collectorate confirms this observation. In the entire region, Bhumihars and Rajputs are not found in the same village. CPI (ML) leader RamNaresh Ram has also confirmed this. Ram Naresh Ram is one of the original members of Naxalite movement in Bihar and currently he is leader of CPI (ML) party in the state assembly. Interview with Ram Naresh Ram Patna, October 13, 2001.

[505] The Outlook, December29, 1997, 10.

[506] This account is based on information, archival and oral, by CPI (ML) leaders in Patna in October 2001. For details of this incident, see, CPI (ML) Liberation document "Yeh Jung Zarrur Jeetein" (We will win this battle), 2000. Also see, B.N.Prasad, 2002, op. cited, 276-301.

[507] The Outlook, Delhi, December29, 1997, 12.

[508] Prasad, 2002, op. cited, 295.

[509] Samkalin Taapman, First Issue, 1997, Patna, 36.

[510] Pravana K. Chaudhary, "Private Armies Unleash Terror in Bihar," **Times of India,** (July28, 1995). However, not many informed people subscribe to this theory. In my fieldwork, I have not come across anyone substantiating this story. Most leaders and cadres of CPI (ML) told me that there was no question of having Ranvir Sena way back in the 1950s because Ranvir Sena has been formed to fight various Naxals organizations in the districts of Central Bihar.

[511] The term Hindutva refers to political Hinduism espoused by Bhartiya Janata Party and its affiliates Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal etc.

[512] Anonymous Ranvir Sena activist, Bhojpur district, Charpokhari Thana, Arah. Bihar. March 15, 2002. He refused to get tap-recorded for fear of police. He told me "we are accused of participating in massacre so we do not want to go on record".

[513] Ibid.

[514] The Outlook, December 15, 1997, 6-12.

[515] Ibid, 10.

[516] Ibid, 11.

[517] Ibid.,

[518] http://www.the-week.com/20jul02/events.htm

[519] Human Rights Watch, Broken **People: Caste Violence Against India's Untouchables,** (New York: Human rights Watch, 1999), 50.

[520] The People's Union for Democratic Rights, 1999, **A Time to kill...,** op. cited 14.

[521] Ibid, 14.

[522] See Liberation, the central organ of the CPI (ML), a monthly publication. http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year%202002/july%20issue/article1.htm.4/10/2003

[523] http://www.the-week.com/20jul02/events1.htm

[524] Many human rights organizations have pointed out the state's complicity in fostering the Ranvir Sena. Local level police and civil bureaucracy are notorious for providing material and moral support to Ranvir Sena activists. It is a common knowledge in Bihar that many Senas have been actively encouraged by the top police brass and their political bosses especially to fight "radical peasant politics".

[525] This observation is based on my fieldwork in Bihar. Most Bhumihars I interacted with presented a picture of the community as being in "deep crisis". Many Bhumihar officials narrated their growing irrelevance in the administrative system. In the past, the upper caste officials used to get their choice postings as they were having access to the political leadership in Patna. With Yadavs in power, this has become difficult. Many police and civil officials especially Bhumihars prefer to stay home rather going into the districts dominated by Yadav politicians especially those close to Laloo Yadav or his in-laws.

[526] Prof. Kedar Nath Singh, Secretary, Sri Sitaram Ashram, Bihta, Patna, April 19, 2002.

[527] Interview with Balkeshwar Singh in Patna, October 14, 2001.

[528] Ibid.

[529] CPI (ML) Liberation. op. cited 5-6.

[530]Interview in Patna, October 14, 2001.

[531] The Hindustan Times, Patna June 4, 2001. According to the press report, the presence of Ranvir Sena has transformed many villages in Tekari and Konch police stations. The Ranvir Sena ensured the defeat of the candidates sponsored by the MCC in the recently concluded Panchyati elections (local self-government) in 2001. Emboldened by their electoral success, the Sena has openly challenged the hegemony of MCC in Tekari Bloc. The Ranvir Sena succeeded in freeing about 50-acres of land from the economic blockade imposed by the MCC. This has gladdened the hearts of armed squads of Sena. It is no coincidence that Bhumihars in this region are facing much resistance from the armed MCC squads that their girls have been forced to grow "ganja" (marijuana) to pay the dowry for their marriage. Bhumihar are notorious for hefty dowry based wedding. Local police is aware that girls are illegally growing "ganja" but due to the fear of public wrath, especially women folk, they turn a blind eye to it. See The Hindustan Times, Patna, June 6, 2001.

[532] Interview with Dashrath Tiwari, Patna, March 16, 2002. See Dashrath Tiwari, "Kaj Hamar Tasu Hit Hoi", **Brahmarshi Samaj Patrika,** Vol.3, (April-June, Patna, 1996), 5.

[533] Ibid.

[534] The Outlook, December 27, 1997, 12.

[535] Interview, Delhi, November 16, 2001.

[536] Ibid.

[537] Samkalin Taapman, April 2000, Patna, p.43.

[538] Frontline, July7, 2000, 128.

[539] http://www.the-week.com/20jul02/events1.htm

Nawada is major area of confrontation between Bhumihars and Yadavs/ dalits backed by Naxals. Bhumihars have maintained their hold in Warisaliganj in Nawada. In 1995, Bhumihars elected Ramashray Prasad Singh to the state assembly. But they did not approve of the Congress Party's growing proximity with Laloo Yadav .So in February 2002 elections, Bhumihars elected independent candidate Aruna Devi, wife of notorious criminal Akhilesh Singh.

See, http://www.ambedkar.org/News/hl/15%20killed.htm

[540] Interview. Patna, October 10, 2001.

[541] See Liberation, the central organ of the CPI (ML), a monthly publication. http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year%202002/july%20issue/article1.htm.4/6/2003.

[542] For one of the brilliant discussions of Naxal's revolutionary strategy and organization, see, Mohanty, Monoranjan, **Revolutionary Strategy, Maoist Outlook and India's Naxalites**, Ph.D Diss..., University of California, Berkeley, 1971, 33-61.

[543] An anonymous sena activist whom Imet in Patna in December 2001.

[544] A Sena supporter whom I met in Arrah repeatedly drew my attention to the charismatic leadership of Brahmeshwar Singh, the chief of the Sena. "He is selfless, intelligent, and will never be caught by either police or the Naxalites," said the Sena supporter. Interview, Arrah, October 13, 2001.

[545] Mohanty Monoranjan, 1971, op. cited, 38.

[546] Samkalin Taapman, First Issue, 1997, 13. Interestingly, the Chief of the Ranvir Sena claims to follow Maoist doctrine of guerilla warfare, his understanding of Mao is very limited, to say the least. Immediately after his arrest in Patna in August 2002, he professed faith in Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chadra Bose. Both have no connection with Maoism whatsoever. The Ranvir Sena's adoption

of guerrilla warfare is constrained by the environmental factors. It is bound to a narrow conception of time and place and has no universal relevance.

[547] Most sena members are theoretically naïve and concentrate more on actual implementation of the plan. They refer to their actions mostly as war actions against the Naxalites. In this sense, they use expressions such as "our earlier strategy failed us", "Naxals had better strategy", "we have new plan". However, compared to earlier Senas, the Ranvir Sena activists have more clear ideological stance toward peasant unrest in the region.

[548] According to Hobsbwawm, social bandits are pre-modern and pre-political phenomenon having little or no organization. See Eric h. Hobsbwam, Primitive **Rebels**, (New York: Norton &Co., 1965), 30.

[549] Samkalin Taapman, First Issue, 1997, 14.

[550] The Times of India, Patna, April 16, 2002.

[551] Interview, Arah, March 15, 2002.

[552] Interview with Sena Activists in Patna, Arah, Gaya.

[553] Samkalin Taapman, First Issue, 1997, 15.

See also: http://satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/terroristoutfits/Ranvir_Sena.htm

[554] Prabhat Khabar, Ranchi, March 5, 1999. This is confirmed by my informants and also in meeting with several senior police officials in Patna.

[555] The Times of India, Patna, April 30, 1999.

[556] People's Union of Democratic Rights, **Agrarian Conflict in Bihar and the Ranbir Sena**, Delhi, 1999, 15.

[557] The Outlook, December 27, 1997, 14.

[558] Interview with a senior police official Police, Patna, and June 8, 2001.

[559] People's Union for Democratic Right, 199, op. cited, **Agrarian Conflict in Bihar...**, 30-31.

[560] The Outlook, December 27, 1997, 13.

[561] Human Rights Watch, 1999, op. cited, 50.

[562] Samkalin Taapman, March 1999, 15.

[563] Based on information given by Sena members in Arah.

[564] Samkalin Taapman, March 1990, 14.

[565] Based on conversation with some sena activists in Delhi and Patna.

[566] Interview, Gaya, December 19, 2001.

[567] Human Rights Watch, 199, op. cited, 53-54. The Bhumihars of Belaur, the birthplace of Ranvir Sena supported the BJP candidate in the parliamentary elections of February 1998 in India.

See, Indian Express, February 17, 1998.

[568] Arthur Max, " Private Armies," **Associated Press,** (April 22, 1996)

[569] Human Rights Watch, 1999, op. cited, p.56.

[570] See Government of Bihar, Home (Special) Department, Notification #3196, and Patna, Dated 12/27/1997.

[571] The Amir Das Commission was created under Commission of Enquiry Act, 1952. Initially, the Commission was to submit its report in just six months but considering the administrative paralysis in Bihar, the commission did not even get office space for long despite its term being repeatedly extended by the state government. For some time, this commission existed on paper without any office. This caused so much controversy that the upper chamber of Indian Parliament, Rajya Sabha (Senate) witnessed uproar over Justice Das commission. The Home Minister in the Upper Chamber admitted, "The commission is yet to be given office accommodation". See The Times of India, Februray24, 1999. On August 3, 1999, the Government of Bihar issued a fresh notification granting extension from 1st July 1999 to 30th June 2000. Since then, the government of Bihar has been extending the term of the commission as a matter of ritual. The commission officials concede that considering the scope of the inquiry, the commission will continue for sometime in the future.

Government of Bihar, Home (Special) Department, Notification # 1623, Dated March 8, 1999.

See: http://www.indianexpress.com/ie/daily/19990707/ige07091.htML.4/4/2003.

[572] Government of Bihar, Home (Special) Department, Notification# 873. Dated March 10, 2000.

[573] Interview with Ramjatan Sinha, Patna, December 20, 2001.

[574] The Outlook, December 12, 1997, 12.

[575] Based on interviews with Bhumihar politicians in Patna.

[576] Kamala Prasad, "President Rule and Bihar Politics", **Mainstream,** (March27, 1999), 9.

[577] People's Union for Democratic Rights, 1999, **Agrarian Conflict in Bihar...,** op. cited, 15.

[578] Samkalin Taapman, October, 1999, 14.

[579] http://Biharnews2k1.hypermart.net/1107_RanvirSena.htm. 4/10/2003.

[580] Ibid.

[581] Interview with Ramjatan Sinha, op. cited.

[582] He requested anonymity. Interview in Patna. April10, 2002.

[583] Raj Kamal Jha, "Officials Ignored Pleas for Protection against Ranbir Sena", Indian Express, July 22, 1996.

[584] Samkalin Taapman, Patna, October, 1999, p.42.

[585] Ibid.,

[586] The Hindustan Times, Patna, April6, 2001.

[587] Based on oral information.

[588] Samkalin Taapman, Patna, October, 1999, 44.

[589] Ibid.

[590] Prasad, 2002, op. cited, p298.

[591] Samkalin Taapman, Patna, October, 1999, 45.

[592]This description is based on various reports published in local Hindi magazine Samkalin Taapman, May 2001. Also in-depth interviews with Jetendra Rai, Advocate, Patna High Court and Sudhanshu Ranjan, Doordarshan correspondent (Federal Government Television) in Patna between June 2001and July 2002 helped construct the narrative about the growing power struggles in Ranvir Sena.

[593] Prabahat Khabar, Ranchi, July 19, 2000.

[594] Samkalin Taapman, October, 1999, 45.

[595] Interview with Ram Naresh Ram, op. cited.

[596] Frontline, September 14-27, 2002. The Sena chief was arrested from the Indian Mission Building in Central Patna by a three-member task force of the Patna police.

http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/aug/29Bihar1.htm. 4/7/2003.

[597] The Indian Express, Friday, August30, 2002.

[598] Ibid.

[599] http://in.news.yahoo.com/020829/58/1uig7.htML. 4/10/2003.

[600] Anand Mohan Sahay, "Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose My Ideals: Ranvir Sena chief".

http://rediff.com/news/2002/sep/03Bihar.htm.4/10/2003.

[601] http://www.patnadaily.com/news/090902/new_sena_chief.html.4/10/2003

http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/sep/08Bihar.htm. 4/10/2003.

[602]Sunil Singh, "Ranvir Sena Chief: Savior or Sinner? The Times of India, September3, 2002.

http:// www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow.asp.4/10/2003.

[603] Ibid.

[604] Ibid.

[605] http://www.patnadaily.com/news/083102/bjp_sees_conspiracy_in_arrest.html.4/10/2003.

[606] http://www.patnadaily.com/news/083002/police_quiz_ranvir_sena_chief.html, 4/11/2003.

[607] http://www.patnadaily.com/news2003/021303/ranvir_sena_kills_one.html. 4/10/2003.

[608] http://www.patnadaily.com/news/020602/atvists_killed.html. 4/10/2003.

[609] Juan Linz, **The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes**, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978); Alfred Stepan, **The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspective** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Atul Kohli (ed.) **The state and Development in the Third World**, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

[610] Kohli, 1990, op. cited, 204-237.

[611] Migdal, 1988, op. cited.

[612] Rudolph and Rudolph, 1987, op. cited; Kohli, 1990, op. cited; Rajni Kothari, **"State against Democracy: In Search of Human Governance"**, (Delhi: Ajnata Publications, 1988).

[613] Migdal, Joel S., Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Shue, 1994. op. cited 9.

[614] Patrick Heller, "Degrees of Democracy: Some Comparative Lessons from India", *World Politics*, 52 (July 2000), 488.

[615] Walter Hauser and Wendy Singer, "The Democratic Rite: Celebration and Participation in the India Elections," in Niraja Gopal Jayal (ed.), **Democracy in India**, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 291. Hauser and Singer describe the centrality of elections in the life of Bihar as not only as formal mechanism of democracy but also as a political festival reminiscent of grand religious ritual in the subcontinent.

[616] By "institutionalized riot system", Paul Brass refers to a "network of actors, groups and connections involving persons from different social categories whose effect...is to keep town or city in a permanent state of awareness of Hindu-Muslim relationships. The actors and groups include especially activists belonging to particular political parties, cultural groups, or religious organizations such as the BJP, the RSS and the Arya Samaj. The connections are those between such activists and persons and groups trained in the use of weapons." According to Brass, this institutionalized riot system helps explain the actions of the local and state administrative authorities. See, Paul R. Brass **Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence**", (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 284-86.

[617] Bayly, 1999, op. cited, 382.

[618] The phrase has been used by India's noted sociologist Ashis Nandy to describe the increasing political and economic influence of middle and lower caste in Indian politics. He was quoted in the New York Times, October 20, 1996. For a detailed analysis of the implications of Nandy's observation, see Walter Hauser, Changing Images of Caste and Politics, **Seminar**, No.450, February, 1997, 47-52.

http://www.lib.virginia.edu/area-studies/SouthAsia/Misc/Sss/whcastep.htm#fn14. 4/11/2003.

[619] Sunil Khilnani, **the Idea of India**, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997), 17.

[620] Granville Austin, "The Constitution, Society, and Law" in Philip Oldenburg (ed.), **India Briefing,** (Boulder: WestView and the Asia Society, 1993), 119.

[621] Guillermo O'Donnell: "On the State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Glances at Some Post-Communist Countries," World Development, Vol.21 No.8.(1993),1356.

[622]Theda Skocpol, 1979, op.cited, 115.

[623] C. Fuller, ed., 1996, **Caste Today**, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); H.A. Gould, **Politics and Caste**, (Delhi: Chanakya, 1990).

[624] . Fuller, 1996, op. cited, 23.

[625] Donald Horowitz, **Ethnic Groups in Conflict**, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 41-54.

[626] Ibid.,22.

[627] Ibid.,24.

[628] Ashutosh Varshney, 2002, op. cited, 23.

[629] Migdal, Kohli, Shue, 1994, op.cited.14.

[630] Guillermo O'Donnell, 1993, op.cited,1359.

[631] Ibid.

[632]Mauricio Romero, "Reform and Reaction: Paramilitary Groups in Contemporary Columbia", in Dianne E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, **Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in Politics and State Formation,** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 178-208.

[633] Miguel Angel Conteno, " Limited War and Limited States", in Dianne E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, 2003, ibid., 96-117.

[634] Charles Tilly, "Armed Force, Regimes and Contention in Europe since 1650," in Dianne E. Davis and Anthony W. ibid., 37-81.

[635] Dianne E. Davis , " Contemporary Challenges and Historical Reflections on the Study of Militaries, States and Politics," in Dianne E. Davis and Anthony W and Anthony W. Pereira, ibid., 4.

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Glossary

- Sena: army/ militia
- Abwab: Illegal cess
- Amla: Agent or retainer of a landlord
- Bania: term used for members of caste associated with commerce, trade or money –lending.
- Backward Castes: Unofficial figures put the count of backward castes in Bihar at 60 percent of the total voters in Bihar. It's a heterogeneous block of castes; the three major landed castes among them are Yadavs, Kurmis, and Koiris. Karpoori Thakur, a barber by caste, is considered the first major leader of the entire backward community. After him, Laloo Yadav has emerged as the most charismatic leader of the community in general and Yadavs in particular.
- Bakast or Bakashat: Land under direct control by a landlord, but over which a tenant can accrue occupancy rights.
- Bhumihar: caste title of north Indian Brahmans with traditions of landholding and soldiering
- BJP: Bhartiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party) founded in 1980; Hindu political party devoted to the goal of religious nationalism rather than secular nationalism. Currently, the party leads a coalition Federal government in India.
- Blocks: consists of a cluster of villages.
- Brahman: member of Hindu priestly caste; highest and purest order in the fourfold Varna scheme.
- Congress Party: (Indian National Congress, founded in 1885) political party that led India to independence and India's ruling political party 1947-77 and 1980-96.
- Dalit: oppressed, a term reserved for low –caste and untouchable groups. The term now is being used as an expression of subalternity recognizing the agency of low –caste in shaping the social and political outcomes.
- Dharma: duty or way or law; code of morality or conduct prescribed for a caste or community.
- District Council: the district level of local –self-government, consists of village chiefs and some nominated members.

- Dwija: twice –born; members of caste groups entitled to wear sacred thread, i.e. Hindus who claim membership of the three superior varnas.
- Gotra: Hindu term for clan or sub caste i.e. non-intermarrying segment of larger jati (caste) whose members claim common ancestry.
- Harijan: a term coined by Mahatma Gandhi for unclean or untouchable castes; usually translated "child of God".
- Hindutva: Hinduness, the term popularized since 1920s by campaigners exalting Hinduism as India's true national faith.
- Jati: birth, name or breed or order; caste in the sense of a specific named birth-group.
- Kayastha: title of predominately north Indian caste with traditions of scribal livelihoods.
- Kisan: peasant, cultivator, farmer.
- Kshatriya: persons of lordly/ kingly virtues; second highest order in the fourfold varna scheme.
- Kucherry: landlord's storehouse or office building or village outpost.
- Lathi: quarter –staff carried by peasants or retainers of landlords.
- Lok Sabha: the lower chamber of Indian parliament (congress). The Indian parliament consists of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha (senate, upper chamber)
- Maale: popular Hindi term for Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation group in Bihar.
- Mukhiya: Village Chief.
- Panchyati Raj: Local self-government unit.
- Rajput: north Indian caste title with connotations of lordliness and royal refinement.
- RSS: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (Association of National volunteers') founded in 1925
- Samata Party: a breakaway group of former Janata Dal, its influence is mainly limited to Bihar and represents backward castes such as Kurmis, Koiris and to a great extent Bhumihars as well.
- Sanskrit: ancient language of the Hindu classical texts.

- Scheduled Caste: term coined by colonial government to provide public goods to lower caste; usually used by academic and administrative reports to denote Dalits or lower castes. The most notable dalits in Bihar are Dusadh, Mushar, Chamar (Mochi), Dom, Pasi, etc. About 92 percent of the total population of these castes is confined to the village and most of them are landless laborer.

- Scheduled Tribe: indigenous tribes.

- Shudra: the lowest of the orders defined in the fourfold varna scheme.

- Swami: religious leader; title assumed by a religious mendicant

- Thana: police station

- Thikadar: lessee from a landlord of proprietary rights

- Union Government: The Federal Government located in Delhi, also known as the Central Government of India.

- Vaishya: third in the rank order of the fourfold Varna scheme; usually associated with commercial livelihoods.

- Varna: color or order or rank or class; the idealized fourfold scheme of ranked human callings as set out in ancient Hindu scriptures.

- VHP: Vishva Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council), founded in 1964; organization devoted to worldwide mobilization of Hindus.

- Yadav: north Indian caste title denoting kinship with Hindu pastoral God Krishna. Though Yadavs suffer social and ritual disabilities, they rank higher to lower caste in local caste hierarchy.