

'Freedom from Fear' vs. 'Freedom from Want': Understanding Human Security in the context of rural violence in Bihar

Gaurang R. Sahay¹

Introduction

A place where people can live free from poverty and despair and with full security and dignity is still an ideal vision for most of us. Human security approach, popularized by institutions such as the UNDP or the UN, by the governments of so-called middle powers (Canada, Japan and Norway), and by the scholars like Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen, claims to detail the possibility of realizing this vision in concrete terms. Often referred to as 'people-centred security' or 'security with a human face', human security approach is generally defined in terms of supposedly two mutually inclusive conceptual phrases: 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want'. Safety is the hallmark of 'freedom from fear', while well-being is the goal of 'freedom from want'. This paper, based on facts from the 'flaming fields' of rural Bihar (an eastern state of India), argues that 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want' are not the two sides of the same coin. The group of Naxalites and associations of private caste-based armies, their movements and operations clearly reflect on the contradictions between 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want' or between human rights and human development. The group of Naxalites and their movements, known as the 'Naxalite movement', struggle hard by using violent means for the all round well-being of the larger but weaker section of society. Whereas the private caste-based armies try to protect their caste fellows, particularly the richer and powerful ones, from the violent onslaught of the Naxalites and in the process violently attack the Naxalites and their followers.

¹ Gaurang R. Sahay is an Associate Professor in the Centre for Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai – 400 088.

Central Bihar: Field of This Study

Arguments of this paper are based on the facts or experiences from rural Bihar particularly its central region. Bihar is traditionally divided into three regions: north Bihar, south Bihar or today's Jharkhand and central Bihar. Among all the three regions, it is the central region that became, first of all, the site for the emergence and consolidation of Naxalism or Naxalite movement and the private caste based armies, that is why this part of Bihar has been characterized as the 'flaming fields' (see Banerjee 1984, Mukherjee and Singh Yadav 1980). Central Bihar comprises 14 districts viz. Patna, Gaya, Nalanda, Jahanabad, Aurangabad, Nawada, Rohtas, Bhabhua, Bhojpur, Buxar, Munger, Jamui, Shaikhpura and Lakhisarai.

Central Bihar is flanked by the Ganges in the north and the Chotanagpur plateau in the south. This is largely an agricultural area as about 80% of the population are engaged in agriculture. A large part of this area is irrigated by the old but dilapidated Sone canal system. The proportion of gross irrigated area to gross cropped area is 51% in central Bihar compared to 26% in north Bihar. This region has reasonably high agricultural growth rate due to greater impact of Green Revolution. However, the rate of growth of agricultural production has remained lower than that of the population resulting in falling per capita income in the rural areas. This has led to the ongoing exploitation of the poor, most of them belong to the scheduled castes or dalit community, and violent conflict in the villages.

However, the level of urbanization in the central Bihar is only about 15 per cent, quite low against all India standard, the region is more urbanized than other regions. modernization and commercialization of agriculture has led to a decline of traditional forms of tenancy and increasing use of hired labour. Among hired labourers, proportion of *Chhutta Mazdoors* (free wage labourers) is much higher than *Lagua Mazdoors* (attached labourers). This process has severely weakened the feudal 'Patron-Client' relationship based on both economic and extra-economic ties. Modernisation of agriculture has also accelerated income disparities and added fuel to the fire in a historically strife-torn society.

Central Bihar has been historically a significant place for peasant mobilization, peasant movement and political awakening. In this area the Kisan Sabha led by Swami

Shahjanand organized successful peasant mobilization against landlordism during the colonial period particularly in the nineteen thirties. In this area, a significant proportion of the poor peasants are share-croppers.

In contrast to the soft culture of north Bihar, Central Bihar is distinguished by a touch of brashness in its culture. It is deeply associated with physical prowess and manliness. This is expressed through social behaviour and language. Even during the Moghul times, Bhojpur was one of the important centre for recruitment in the army. In East India Company large number of sepoys hailed from Bhojpur. It is no wonder that most of the private armies for defending the rights of landlords were floated in this area.

The agrarian structure in most parts of central Bihar just before the zamindari abolition was characterised by landlords from two militant upper castes - Bhumihars and Rajputs followed by occupancy *ryots* and new land holders mainly from Muslim castes and non-occupancy *ryots* from the backward castes. Dalits or the scheduled castes, whose percentage in this region is considerably higher than in other parts of the state, and poor backward castes comprised the agricultural labour class. With the abolition of Zamindari, most of the cultivating peasants were conferred ownership rights over land. This led to the emergence of middle and rich peasantry from the backward castes. The increasing assertion of backward caste tenants after zamindari abolition led to a considerable decline in '*begar*' or unpaid labour and also in the wage rate of this region. The emergence of backward caste peasantry as a dominant force and militant mass mobilization of the poor led many of the higher caste landholders to quit rural areas and settle in towns. In most of the cases, middle and rich backward caste peasants bought their lands. The mass mobilization of rich peasantry both from upper and backward castes on the one hand and poor peasants drawn from sharecroppers and farm labourers reached to a state of confrontation. On the one hand, the rural poor are fighting for the change in the existing social order. Landed gentry, on the other hand, still having strong feudal ethos at cognitive level, is trying their level best to maintain the status-quo and feudal lifestyle. These two contradictory currents have obviously resulted into rural violence perpetrated by the Naxalites and the private caste-based armies.

Naxalism or Naxalite Movement

The terms Naxalites, Naxalism and the Naxalite movement, euphemisms for the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist revolutionary struggle in India, draw their nomenclature from Naxalbari, a village in Darjeeling district of West Bengal, which became the epicentre of tribal-peasant revolt in the spring of 1967. The terms typify a particular kind of militant and violent armed struggle by the peasants, tribals and *dalits*, led by a leadership drawing doctrinal support from Marxism-Leninism and strategic inspiration from Mao Zedong. The Naxalites draw heavily upon the iniquitous land tenure system and exploitation of the poor peasants and agricultural labour by landlords in framing their ideological aims.

A section of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) particularly consisting of the cadres who opposed the participation of the party in the election and government formation, under the leadership of their ideologue, a 49-year old Communist, Charu Mazumdar, organised the peasant resistance to landlords over land-to-the-tiller issue in Naxalbari from May 25, 1967. The movement started when a tribal youth, who had a judicial order to plough his land, was attacked by goons of local landlords on March 2. The movement was launched in opposition to the official stand taken up by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) that led the United Front government in the state. Tribal peasants retaliated by attacking the local landlords and started forcefully capturing back their lands. The violence escalated but in a few months the movement was quelled by the CPI (M)-led United Front government by instituting draconian measures against the revolting peasants. In 72 days of the rebellion a police sub-inspector and nine tribals were killed. The Congress govt at the Centre supported the crackdown. The incident echoed throughout India and naxalism was born. The ideology of naxalism soon assumed larger dimension and various sections of the state units of CPI (M) throughout the country joined the struggle.

Majumdar particularly admired Mao Zedong and advocated that lower classes including poor peasants and agricultural labour in India must follow his principles and overthrow the rule of bourgeoisie or upper classes whom he held responsible for their plight. He shaped the Naxalite movement through his writings, the most famous being the 'Historic Eight Documents' which formed the basis of Naxalism or Naxalite ideology. In 1967 Naxalites organized the All India Coordination Committee of Communist

Revolutionaries (AICCCR), and then broke away from CPI (M). Uprisings were organized in several parts of the country. In 1969 AICCCR gave birth to the most notable Naxalite organisation, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) and defined the objective of the party as 'seizure of power through an agrarian revolution'. The strategy was the elimination of the feudal order in the Indian countryside to free the poor from the clutches of the oppressive landlords and replace the old order with an alternative one that would implement land reforms. The tactics to achieve it was through guerilla warfare by the peasants to eliminate the landlords and build up resistance against the state's police force which came to help the landlords, and thus gradually set up 'liberated zones' in different parts of the country that would eventually coalesce into a territorial unit under Naxalite hegemony.

In 1972 Charu Majumdar was captured and tortured to death by police forces. Soon after the death of Charu Majumdar the movement started fragmenting into several disputing factions. By 1980 it was estimated that around 30 Naxalite groups were active, with a combined membership of 30000 in almost half of the states in India. Forty years after the Naxalbari uprising, it is remarkable that Naxalism remains a potent political force. A 2004 home ministry estimate puts numbers at that time as "9,300 hardcore underground cadre... [holding] around 6,500 regular weapons beside a large number of unlicensed country-made arms". According to Judith Vidal-Hall (2006), "More recent figures put the strength of the movement at 15,000, and claim the guerrillas control an estimated one fifth of India's forests", as well as being active in around 170 of the country's 604 administrative districts in 15 states affecting about 40 per cent of the geographical area of the country and 35 per cent of its population. With the objective of establishing a 'Compact Revolutionary Zone', as typified by the Red Corridor extending from Nepal , Bihar , Jharkhand , through Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra to Andhra Pradesh, Karnatka and Tamilnadu, the Naxals aim to use the same, reportedly, for eventual seizure of state power and subsequent establishment of a Maoist-communist State. That is why the government of India considers Naxalism or the Naxalite movement as the biggest threat to national or human security since Independence.

The movement underwent much churning in the succeeding decades, organisationally and politically, but the focus on agrarian revolution has remained at the

core. The ideological underpinnings of Naxalism have not changed, the Charu Mazumdar doctrines remains plausible as ever. Recently the Naxalite organisations have started coming together, and the Communist Party of India (Maoist) was formed on September 21, 2004 through the merger of prominent naxalite outfits such as People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI).

Overall, the Naxalite movement rests upon the issues of agrarian transformation, tribal people's rights, the nationality movement and resisting imperialism and globalisation. All this adds up to what they characterise as the people's democratic revolution to change the very character of the Indian state and society. Because of the issues they pursue, the Naxalites have a social base that sustains them despite a variety of repressive measures pursued by the state. In fact, over the past decade the movement has spread to new areas such as southern districts of Orissa and West Bengal as well as parts of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Naxalism unleashed a flow of events which escalated over the years into a political movement that brought about far-reaching changes in India's socio-cultural scene. The fact is that despite the continuing use of the most repressive methods by the police to crush its cadres - and in spite of a series of splits that had fissured the movement - during the last three or four decades, Naxalism as an ideology has become a force to reckon with in India. Its continuity can be explained by the persistence and exacerbation of the basic causes that gave it birth - feudal exploitation and oppression over the rural poor (who constitute the majority of the Indian people), and the Indian state's repressive policies to silence them whenever they protest.

In the areas where the Naxalites have established their influence they impose taxes, mete out quick (often ruthlessly brutal) justice and run administrative bureaucracies, schools and health services. Having lost their mass character and because their activities are rather secretive, the agenda of the Maoists or Naxalites differs in the various states where they operate.

The Maoists draw their sustenance from existing inequities. Due to the existence of problems relating to land, in the absence of land reforms; the small farmers, landless labourers and the tribals continue to suffer. Though apparently and avowedly carrying out "people's struggle", democratic function has never been their concern. This is clearly

evidenced in the "kangaroo justice" meted out to dissenters from within, suspected police informers, and to those who refuse to accept their regime.

A status paper presented to parliament in April 2006 by Home Minister Shivraj patil reveals that the total number of people killed by Naxalite violence rose by 30 percent between 2003 and 2005. The number of policemen killed jumped to an astonishing 53% between 2004 and 2005. Naxalite strength has grown over 50% since 2001. Till 2001, 60% of the weaponry was country made. Today they have AK series, grenade launchers, mortars, carbines etc. Their command structure has also evolved and modernized. Whereas, a Federal Home Ministry study said murders of police personnel by the guerrillas jumped 53 percent to 153 percent in the year to March 31, 2006. While 516 civilians were killed, an eleven per cent increase on the previous year. Naxal problem has claimed over 6000 lives since the 1960's.

An important fact is that Naxals in India now model themselves on the Indian army, from training manuals to undercover training. The fighting forces of Naxals are divided into three categories. The primary force is of extremely well trained personnel who spearhead any attack with superior weapons. The secondary force forms the bulk of a large group with less sophisticated weapons. Finally, the people's militia comprises farmers, labourers and others. Their lethality and frequency of attacks is on increase. Naxals have over 80 training camps, each training between 200 to 300 people at any point of time. There are 84 training camps which are operating in several states such as Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Jharkhand.

Naxalism in Central Bihar

Naxalism was brought to the villages in Bihar in 1967, i.e., the year when the Naxalbari peasant revolt happened. During the last forty years, naxalism or the Naxalite movement has engulfed almost all districts in Bihar including Jharkhand. However, the region most affected by the movement is central Bihar.

Bella Bhatia divides the history of Naxalism in Bihar into two phases: the formative phase from 1967 to 1977 and the current phase from 1977 onwards. To quote her, 'Prior to the imposition of the Emergency in 1975, the movement had been able to spread in parts of two or three districts, but during the Emergency it faced heavy state

persecution and had to lie low. However, by the late 1970s, it had been able to reorganise itself and was once again on an upswing. The phase after 1977, therefore, saw the revival of the movement, significant reformulations of its political line, and the emergence of new Naxalite groups' (Bhatia 2005: 1536).

During the formative phase, Bihar witnessed a number of localized Naxalite struggles in different areas. Localised Naxalite struggles initially started in village Ekwari in the Bhojpur district and Gangapur in Muzaffarpur district and then quickly spread in other parts of Bhojpur and Patna districts in central Bihar, and in Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Singhbhum, and Dhanbad districts of south Bihar (now Jharkhand). These struggles were initiated by various members of the All-India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) or its successor, the CPI(ML), as well as by Naxalite groups outside the AICCCR fold (mainly the Maoist Communist Centre).

Many of these actions were sporadic, and were not integrally related to a sustained and planned Naxalite struggle. However, in Bhojpur district the Naxalite movement that started from village Ekwari under the leadership of Jagdish Mahato, a local teacher who had forged links with Naxalite leaders from West Bengal, developed into a protracted struggle against exploitative landlords. By 1973, Bhojpur of central Bihar became the epicenter of renewed Naxalite onslaught. Peasant-police encounter in 1973 at Chauri village of Bhojpur district, transformed the district into 'Naxalbari' of Bihar. By 1975, the long-drawn movement proliferated in four other districts of central Bihar – Gaya, Nalanda, Rohtas and Aurangabad. The intensity and magnitude of the movement took many people by surprise. Very soon, the whole of central Bihar came to be better known as 'the Flaming Fields of Bihar.

The Naxalites who came to Bhojpur belonged to the 'pro-Lin Piao group', which later developed into the present CPI (ML) Liberation, also known as 'Liberation'. The Naxalite movement in Bihar, as in other Indian states, is heavily factionalised and by the late 1990s approximately 17 Naxalite groups functioned in different parts of Bihar. Except for the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), all others were CPI(ML) groups. The most important groups were Liberation, Party Unity and MCC. These factions broadly represent the three main trends within the movement in Bihar and in the country as a whole. On the Naxalite spectrum today in Bihar, MCC is considered to be extreme left,

Liberation is drifting towards the 'parliamentary path', and Party Unity is somewhere in between.

Liberation first found a firm footing in Bhojpur in the late 1960s and early 1970s. From Bhojpur, Liberation spread to adjoining areas of central Bihar, and also to parts of south Bihar (Jharkhand) and north Bihar. Even though the Liberation group considers itself the true inheritor of the CPI(ML) legacy, its political line has changed dramatically from that of the original CPI(ML). In the early 1980s, it decided to begin open mass activities through the formation of appropriate mass organizations such as the Indian People's Front (IPF) and the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha (BPKS). Quick on the heels of the decision to initiate open mass activities was the decision taken by the party at its third congress in December 1982 to contest elections. The party has been contesting elections from 1995 onwards.

As the name indicates, Party Unity's original aim was unification. It came into existence on January 1, 1982 with a merger between two CPI(ML) groups: CPI(ML)Unity Organisation (henceforth UO) and Central Organising Committee CPI(ML) (henceforth COC). In the following years, three other CPI(ML) groups joined. Party Unity itself merged with the CPI(ML) People's War Group (PWG) in August 1998. The united group is now called the CPI(ML) People's War (PW) and considers to represent the 'third trend' by upholding the Naxalbari uprising, the positive and historical role of the original CPI(ML) and of Charu Mazumdar as the founder leader, and the basic line of the original CPI(ML). Jehanabad is a stronghold of Party Unity. Besides, PU-led peasant movements are also strong in parts of the adjoining Gaya and Patna regions and in Palamau. The most popular open front of Party Unity is Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti (MKSS), banned in 1986 and renamed Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Parishad (MKSP) in 1994.

Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) was formed on 20 October 1969 and represents the 'hardline wing' of the Naxalite movement. Completely banned, MCC leads an entirely underground existence. MCC considers other Naxalite organizations, like the CPI and CPI (M)), suffering from 'left deviationism'. MCC's emphasis has been on underground party action and its mass fronts were relatively confined. As it turns out, MCC has achieved little success in building a mass People's Army for guerrilla warfare.

MCC retaliates against massacres of its own party cadres and sympathizers by carrying out counter massacres. In fact, MCC leaders threaten to kill four 'class enemies' for every victim of a massacre. Other examples of actions that show its extreme left position include brutal punishments in people's courts (justified as 'the will of the people') and severe threats against those who participate in elections. In central Bihar, it is considered to be strongest in Gaya, followed by parts of other districts such as Jehanabad, Aurangabad, and Patna. Lately it has become active in districts that are now part of Jharkhand.

The Movement and its Participants

Naxalism in central Bihar, like other parts in India, has attracted at least two kinds of individuals. There are individuals who choose to join the movement with full knowledge of its ideology and revolutionary agenda. Leaders of the movement from the local level and upwards belong to this category of individuals. Besides these, there are individuals who have joined the Naxalite movement based on their instinctual urge to fight against injustice. Such people more often than not have witnessed the oppression perpetrated on their own families and caste fellows. Their coming across Naxalism and joining the movement is more like finding partners with the same concern. They feel that the Naxalites share their sense of injustice, are ready to live and suffer like them, and fight on their behalf on immediate issues that concern them like implementation of minimum wages, better wages, land redistribution, freedom from harassment, insult and physical and mental exploitation, etc. These individuals comprise most of the cadres, especially those at the village level, and the people who comprise the backbone of the movement. These categories are not clear-cut, people in both categories do have equal revolutionary intentions and ideological motives of some kind apply to both groups. However, the fact remains that at the village level there is little understanding of the formal ideology of Marxism-Leninism amongst the people who constitute the mass base of the movement. There are also some individuals who have joined the Naxalite faction with specific personal requests such as retribution for rape, protection in the face of threats and arbitration of property disputes. For them, joining the Naxalite movement is a matter of survival. Most of the people of these categories belong to the lower castes and

classes. In central Bihar, the CPI (ML) is the only party that gives priority to their interests and has a strong presence at the local level. Some high-caste landlords and rich peasants have also joined the movement out of fear of becoming the next targets. Sometimes individuals simply join the Naxalite movement as a shortcut to local power. Bella Bhatia writes, 'Collective identities like caste, class and gender also play a crucial role in determining who joins the movement and why. By and large, an individual follows the family, the family follows the caste, and the caste is influenced by other social groups of similar status' (Bhatia 2005: 1541).

The Naxalite Movement and its Achievements

1. Economic Achievements

The issues actively taken up by the Naxalite movement reflect the practical needs and expectations of poor and marginalized sections of society. Among the economic issues that have been taken up by the movement are mainly (1) land rights; (2) minimum wages; (3) common property resources; and (4) housing.

In Naxalite areas, one occasionally comes across a red flag resolutely planted in the middle of a field. This means that the land is contested and that the Naxalites have staked their claim over it. This land is usually 'surplus land' (above the legal ceiling), or *gairmajurwa* (common) land. In some cases, the land belongs to an absentee landlord. Usually, the landowner contests the claim, and a prolonged battle begins. If the issue cannot be resolved through peaceful means, it often results in violent clashes. If the Naxalites win, the land is subsequently distributed to the poor for agriculture or housing purposes. There have also been instances of land remaining in the hands of the party (instead of being distributed) and being leased to *sangathan* members on a sharecropping basis.

The movement has also attempted to change tenancy relations, for example by demanding the implementation of tenancy regulations and better sharecropping terms. In some areas, the movement has attempted to enforce *batai* (equal shares both in inputs and outputs for landlord and tenant), though this struggle has not been without problems and landlords sometimes react by reducing the amount of land they lease out.

Struggle for just wages is one of the most important issues taken up by the Naxalite movement in central Bihar, with considerable success. In the villages, prior to Naxalite movement, the labourers were paid not more than 2 kgs of coarse rice with some lunch and sometimes also breakfast (see Bhatia 2005: 1542), which is much less than the official minimum wage . After the movement, the wage rate has greatly improved and in many villages they are not getting less than officially determined wage if not more. There has also been an increase in the wages paid to the labourers at harvest time. Bela Bhatia writes, 'Prior to the wage strikes, the harvesters used to receive one *bojha* (headload) for every 21 *bojhas* of harvested crop; this has risen to 1 *bojha* for every 10 *bojhas*. The increased rate benefits not only the casual labourers, but also the *halwahas* or *bandhuas* (who are employed for one agricultural year) (see Bhatia 2005: 1542-43). The movement has also improved the work conditions and fixed a reasonable number of hours.

The Naxalite movement has brought about unity among the labourers of the surrounding area, and making it impossible for a landlord to hire labourers if he is not satisfying the conditions. Sometimes such a unity develops into *aarthik nakebandi* (economic embargo or blockade) against a landlord – as happened to Sankh Singh in Ekwari. Such a blockade includes a refusal of labour services to the landlord and his family. The situation often takes a volatile turn and lead to violence. Realization of the wage issue has been a difficult task for the Naxalites as stories from village after village in central Bihar reveal that struggle for basic minimum wage has at times become bloody battles between workers and landlords.

The Naxalite movement has also fought for the rights of the poor to common property resources such as *gairmajurwa* (common) land as well as full access to the village pond . In doing so, the movement has asserted the identity of the poor as equal members of a village.

Another economic issue often taken up by the Naxalite movement is housing. Owning a residential plot is very important for the poor, since it means some security. With the help of Naxalite groups, labourers are sometimes able to resettle on reclaimed *gairmajurwa* land.

2. Social Achievements

The Naxalite movement in central Bihar has fought against exploitative social relations as well. Dignity or honour to the poor and marginalized is one of the crucial social freedoms it has attempted to restore. Even though the dalits and other weaker sections of the region continue to face many deprivations, they are now more confident and autonomous and claim equal rights. Instances of rape of lower caste women have decreased dramatically. Arbitrary beatings are no longer tolerated. Labourers are free to sell their labour to whomever they please. Dalit children are able to go to school. Labourers are able to wear whatever they like, sit in front of their homes on *khatias* (string cots), amongst other gains. All this has come about because the landlords are no longer in a position to exercise illegitimate power with impunity.

Another important social right is protection of the poor from violence and Harassment perpetrated by organised criminal gangs generally led by the landlords of different castes. In 1978, when Party Unity first tried to build its base in Jehanabad district, it, first of all, tackled the dominance of organized criminal gangs in the area. The Naxalite groups were effective in targeting the most notorious gang leaders, and considerably reduced the strength of these groups.²⁸ Elimination of criminal gangs has been a concern not only of Party Unity, but also of other Naxalite groups. In this respect they have achieved substantial results.

3. Political Achievements

The poor and oppressed of Naxalite affected villages in Bihar are now a visible and powerful political force. They now think of themselves as citizens with the same political rights as the landlords, and assert this equality in practice. Also, their perception of poverty as a matter of 'fate' has changed; now they often see it as a matter of injustice. Another important political right which was denied to the poor and downtrodden in central Bihar was the right to vote. They were often kept away from the polling booths by henchmen of the powerful castes and classes who would cast the votes on their behalf in favour of their own candidate. In the Naxalite affected areas they have been able to exercise their right to vote. The participation of Liberation in the elections has further facilitated this change.

Formation and Dynamics of Senas

In the renewed phase, intensity and magnitude of the Maoist Movement effectively questioned the basis of feudal domination and challenged the hegemonic status of the landed elites. Radical assertion of the hitherto downtrodden population could not be effectively controlled by the democratic institutions. Dominant peasants made a battle cry, “the Kisan’s lives and property are in danger and the government has failed in protecting them; so the Kisans must themselves protect their lives and property”. Thus, rising tide of the movement forced the landed gentry to mobilize their fellow caste men, which resulted into the formation of various caste senas.

Krishna Singh (Brahmarshi Sena) and Anand Mohan Singh, Chief of Bihar People’s Party (Krantikari Samajwadi Sena) are the two pioneers of Sena culture in Bihar. In the second category, Dinesh Yadav’s Shoshit Dalit Samajwadi Sena, sheonandan Paswan’s Shoshit Mukti Sena and Ram Vilas Paswan’s (now an Union Minister) Dalit Sena are paper Senas, and at the most they have attained the status of political formations without acquiring any military character so far.

In contrast to the above Senas, Bhoomi Sena at Kurmis, Lorik Sena of Yadavas, Kuer Sena of Rajputs, Brahmarshi Sena, Diamond Sena, Savaran Liberation Front and more recently Ranvir Sena of Bhumihars, Sunlight Sena of Rajputs, Brahmins, Bhumihars and Pathans, Kisan Sangh of Yadavas, Kurmis, Rajputs, Brahmins and Bhumihars, etc., are politico-military formations of the landed gentry and sustained the Maoist onslaught for a longer period of time.

Senas and Caste Mobilization

Historically, caste ideology remained an integrative force and an effective means to maintain domination by the dominant castes/classes. Traditionally, force was also used by the landlords to maintain their hegemonic position in Bihar agrarian social system. To do so, landlords maintained bandits who often belonged to proletariat class. On the other side, force was also used by peasants and lower class people to assert their interests and position, i.e. another kind of bandit comprised peasant rebels who were considered to be ‘Robin Hoods’ by the masses. They robbed the rich and distributed the loot among the

poor and often helped them to assert their identity in the society. These bandits were not organized exclusively on caste line and mobilizing factor was economic benefit provided by the landed elites, especially in the case of landlords and dominant castes.

But in the current phase of the Naxalite Movement various Senas are mobilized on the caste lines, as an organized force for physical violence. This gives the impression that there is use of caste for physical oppression in non-traditional context. This phenomenon not only robs caste of its integrative ideology, but also indicates kind of changes that have taken place in the caste system. Even if these Senas are not always led by the same caste leaders and even if they do not constitute the same caste fellows, it would be sociologically significant for the analytical understanding of the caste system in the new light.

Although, at the level of appearance, it seems that these senas are formed on the caste lines, but practically it may be different due to the following factors:

- (i) Most of these Senas are mobilized by the dominant caste of the area. Generally, it is found that dominant caste has dominant class position at local level.
- (ii) None of these senas fight with each other, and their common enemy is subordinate caste, who are landless labourers and poor peasants. Further castes are mobilized at following levels:
- (iii) Horizontal caste mobilization, which is not very wide, i.e. mobilization of caste by Yadavas, Kurmis, Rajputs, Brahmins and Bhumihars.
- (iv) Vertical caste mobilization, which is not very deep, i.e., functional linkage between Yadav, Kurmi, Rajput, Bhumihar Senas.

In the light of the above argument it seems that agrarian social structure of central Bihar has undergone a change. Let us focus upon the kind of changes and their resultant impact on the formation of Senas.

Agrarian Scenario of Central Bihar

The central Bihar region is better placed in terms of socio-economic development as compared to north Bihar. Agriculture of this region has experienced greater impact of

Green Revolution, because of large scale irrigation facilities. As early as 1929-33, two-thirds of the total irrigated area of the state was confined to central Bihar districts. At present the percentage of gross cropped area irrigated in central Bihar plains is 57 as against 23 in north Bihar plains. This region has reasonably high agricultural growth rate, uses more HYV fertilizers, wage labourers, threshers and pump sets. Agriculture is more market oriented. Area under cultivation is maximum in central Bihar.

However, the central Bihar region is more urbanized than the north Bihar plains. The level of urbanization is about 15 per cent, yet quite low against all India standard. Relative modernization and market oriented agriculture led to decline of traditional forms of tenancy and increasing use of hired labour. Among hired labourers, proportion of Chhutta Mazdoors (free wage labourers) is much higher than Laguna Mazdoors (attached labourers). This process has severely weakened the 'Patron-Client' relationship, which traditionally used to be an organic link between Malik and Mazdoor. In the traditional set-up, mazdoor was linked with his malik through many economic and extra-economic ties, which was one of the strengths of feudal domination and maintenance of the system. Now, in the absence of any extra-economic obligations the mazdoors are not ready to accept their hitherto sub-ordinate position and often rebel against feudal forms of exploitation. Thus, on the one hand, the rural poor are fighting for the change in the existing social order. On the other side, landed gentry still having strong feudal ethos at cognitive level, is trying their level best to maintain the status-quo and feudal lifestyle. These two contradictory currents have obvious impact on the formation of senas.

Threat to Hegemony and Roots of the Senas

Statutory minimum wage, redistribution of surplus and gair mazarua land, Izzat (prestige) of rural poor and quest to participate in electoral process are some of the main issues of the Maoist movement in the region. Radical assertion of the toiling masses has brought forward these issues and successfully contested feudal forms of exploitation. The Maoist groups are not only enforcing fair wages and just shares in bataidari, but also social humiliation of dalits and samant vichar of maliks has been successfully challenged. Further, rising consciousness of agrarian poor has obvious impact on the political

sovereignty of the dominant castes/classes of central Bihar. Let us focus upon the kind of challenges put forward by the Maoist movement in the region.

Economic Threat

Fair wages, equitable share in bataidari and redistribution of surplus land are most important economic agenda of the Naxalite Movement. Both categories of agricultural labourers – *lagua* and *chhutta*; still work within a highly exploitative framework of production relations. In many parts of central Bihar wages are very low. For example, the normal daily wage in Rohtas is 4 kg of rice, whereas in Patna, Gaya and Jehanabad wages vary from 2 kg to 2.5 kg of rice, a *harwaha's* wages are even lower. However, variations in wages depend upon the ability of the landed gentry to arrest the rise in wages as well as to prevent migration of the agricultural labourers. This ability depends upon the organized strength of the dominant landowners and the extent to which they can exercise this power. On the other side, various Naxalite groups with their mass fronts have organized rural poor around the issues of fair wages and just shares in bataidari, and posed formidable challenge to the landed gentry of the region. The eighties have seen a considerable expansion of Maoist's influence in central Bihar. One of the possible explanations may be that, most of the mass fronts of the Naxalite groups were formed in the post-emergency period. It is also interesting to note that, almost all *senas* of landed gentry came into existence in 1980s. However, real wages for male and female both started rising by early 1970s. The rise was quite pronounced between 1970-71 to 1988-89, 55.2 per cent increase took place for male and 74.3 per cent for female labourers. The Naxalite organizations have been instrumental in raising wages through numerous strikes and struggles.

However, amount of grains, quantity of *sattu* (coarse grain or pulses which are roasted and ground) and size of *Panja* are three main issues of wage struggle in the region. Places where the struggle for higher wages has been won, size of *panja* has become a contentious issue. Due to increasing cost of production, landlords are shifting towards bataidari system of production. Now, struggles in these areas are centred around the just and equitable shares between bataidars and maliks. The bataidars demand that the landowners should provide seeds, fertilizers and bear half of the irrigation cost. At

the harvest, both should get the equal shares but the bataidar is entitled to panja. Further, the landowner's attempt to pass on the cost of the malguzari tax is resisted. In some areas, where the Maoist movement is strong, maliks find it all the more difficult to get bataidars. This has further weakened the landed gentry and sharpened the agrarian contradictions. 'Men and Barsiwan' carnage by the Savarna Liberation Front, and 'Bara' massacre by the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) were centred around wage struggle. However, the central Bihar plain is full of such bloody clashes where one group seeks change in existing social order, and other to maintain status-quo at any cost. The government, political parties, bureaucracy, electronic and print media, all have become implicated in this conflict.

However, apart from the introduction of the Green Revolution technology and marginal developments in irrigation, the government of Bihar has not taken any substantial developmental projects in the primary sector. Industrial base is quite weak. Bihar, which had achieved an average annual rate of growth of 18 per cent in industrial employment during 1951-61, slide down to 0.7 per cent during 1961-81 period. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood and 82 per cent of the working population depends on cultivation. Large landowners are rare in the region. Only 4 per cent households own little more than 10 acres, 90 per cent own less than 5 acres of land or are landless. With the impact of Green Revolution and the shift to the highly profitable cultivation of wheat, etc., more and more common and wastelands have been acquired by the dominant castes/classes of the region. On the other hand, land hungry poor peasants and landless labourers launched powerful struggles, under the guidance of Naxalite groups, to seize illegal possession of gair mazarua land hitherto held by the powerful maliks. However, for dalits, traditionally denied land ownership, acquiring land ownership rights (even uneconomical) is a symbol of social prestige apart from material benefit.

The Naxalite groups in central Bihar are actively engaged in the seizure of surplus and gain mazarua lands. In 1992, the landless dalits claimed 1000 acres of surplus land in Jalpura of Patna district. Rural poor seized 616 acres of excess land and gair mazarua land between 28 June 1993 to 5 July 1993 in Panki block of Palamau district. The MCC has seized 4500 acres in Gaya district alone. 1000 acres of land has been seized by MCC

and IPF in Nawada district. In fact, monthly publications of Liberation, Party Unity, MCC, etc., are full of such instances.

Agriculture is the major source of livelihood in central Bihar. In Bihar, land – man ratio is one of the lowest in the country. Within Bihar the lowest is in the central Bihar region. Even increasing population and lack of any viable source of employment increased the pressure on land. This led to continued division and sub-division of land. There has been phenomenal increase in the number of marginal, small and semi-medium holdings in the period between 1970-71 to 1980-81, which is 74.8, 9.8 and 3.9 per cent respectively in Bihar as a whole. In terms of area there has been a marked increase of 60 per cent in marginal category. In central Bihar plain this process is even faster. In Gaya district the number of marginal, small and semi-medium holdings have increased by 78, 53.5 and 55.5 per cent respectively, during the same period. In terms of area the increase has been 99.4, 43.5 and 48.0 per cent respectively.

However, increasing pressure on land in the stagnating economy has not only accelerated the rate of fragmentation of land, but also weakened majority of the landed gentry from within. Further, landless agricultural labourers often resort to Kam Bandh, i.e. boycott to work in the maliks land, under the guidance of the Maoist groups. This strategy is so frightening due to ensuing economic hardship that maliks have succumbed to the pressure in the number of cases. However, where the landed gentry resorted to force, their lands remained fallow for many years. “Cansara Carnaga” and aftermath is one such example. Thus, struggles for fair wages, just shares in bataidari, forcefully redistribution of surplus and gair mazarua land, and kam bandh have weakened the landed gentry and threatened the feudal basis of exploitation.

Social Challenge

The substance of oppression and the basis of polarization of rural society is not explicable only in the economic terms. The exercise of power crucially revolves around the assertion of social status – the subordination of others through a denial of self-respect and life of dignity. Caste identities condition the pattern and process of differentiation. These identities could erect contradictions within each class or forge alliances across them. What is meant is that, the propensity to exploit and oppress the rural poor is not

associated with large land holdings alone. The complex nature of the rural power relations can be viewed through the interaction pattern of the oppressors and the oppressed. Oppressors are those who trample upon the dignity of labourers, deny them access to land, force them to work for low wages and subjecting them to humiliating practices. Employers having these characteristics are locally called as Zamindars or Samants; and their mentality may be characterized as feudal mentality or samant vichar. It is this samant vichar, which led to 'Men and Barsiwan carnage' in 1992 by the Savarna Liberation Front, which finally culminated into 'Baran Massacre' by the MCC, where 36 Bhumihars were killed. However, Samant Vichar and rangdar mentality is not an isolated case at Baran. In fact, whole central Bihar region is infected with such a worldview shared by the dominant castes/classes. Caste oppression further accentuates the condition.

The stark nature of socio-economic discrimination is reflected in the very structure of the village. Harijan settlement is always on the outskirts, invariably to the south of the main settlement. Although, Harijan tolas are the centre of productive activity but are marginal to society. They jokingly say that we live in South Africa, the dark land south of the main settlement, marked for cremation.

However, dalits wearing a shirt or a watch, living in pucca house, playing a radio, sitting on a cot in front of upper caste(s), etc., are perceived as threat to the feudal domination. Abduction, rape and often sexual abuse of dalit womenfolk are legitimate ways of social interaction. Feudal norms legitimize social custom like Dola, which make obligatory to the dalit brides to spend their wedding night with the local malik. They are subjected to humiliating treatment in the working field as well.

According to Census data two-thirds of the female rural main workers in Patna, Gaya and Jehanabad work as agricultural labourers. Success of any agrarian strike depends upon the ability to mobilize female agricultural labourers. However, restoration of the dignity of these womenfold is one of the main political agenda of all the Maoist parties and groups.

Before rise and development of the Naxalite movement above forms of social humiliations and feudal subjugations of dalits were submerged within the framework of everyday relations between dalits families and their maliks. But now in the areas of the

Maoist movement, these forms of social oppression have become an explicit issue. The resistance is a political act that questions the arbitrary exercise of power by the landed gentry. Even senior members of Gaya and Jehanabad districts admitted that the left wing groups have done much to force elements among the maliks to end their sexual depredations. A number of samants have been publically humiliated and punished by the Maoist groups in their Jan Adalats. Their official monthly publications carry such reports in almost every issue.

Thus, the social humiliation of dalits, Samant Vichar and Rangdar worldview have been successfully challenged by the Maoist parties in their area of influence. Crumbling feudal privileges and weakening base of Samant worldview have obvious impact on the formation of senas by the dominant castes.

However, change in the socio-economic domain has repercussion on the political structure of central Bihar plains. Influential castes/classes dominated the political sphere of the region due to their higher socio-economic statuses. The Maoist movement has infused a new spirit of political consciousness among the hitherto marginalized masses. This has challenged the political sovereignty of the dominant castes/classes.

Threat to Political Domination

Subjugation of the Maoist is very important to ensure electoral malpractices by the dominant castes, an effective mechanism to win elections in Bihar. Entry of the Indian People's Front (IPF) in the domain of the electoral politics has not only challenged the hitherto domination of the dominant castes/classes, but also raised political consciousness of the marginalized masses. The Naxalite groups launched 'Campaign' during elections not only to minimize electoral malpractices, but also to ensure that the poor and dalits get fair chance to exercise their democratic rights. Dalits and landless labourers have been traditionally kept out of the electoral process and have been marginalized by the actual functioning of the institutions of parliamentary democracy. However, the IPF's electoral efforts resulted in the election of a Member of Parliament (MP) in 1989. In 1990 Bihar assembly elections, IPF won 7 seats, was second in 14 constituencies, and in 20 constituencies its candidates were third. However, the biggest achievement of the IPF's electoral effort was the 'Vote Itself', it was an 'empowering act'. To arrest the radical

assertion of the marginalized masses, dominant castes started bloody actions with the help of their senas. Most of the massacres, in which IPF rank-and-files have been killed, were perpetrated against the background of electioneering. 'Tiskhora' and 'Deo Sahara' massacres are few examples of the trend.

Thus, the radical assertion of the marginalized masses has not only threatened the hitherto political sovereignty of the dominant castes/classes of the central Bihar plains, but also raised political consciousness of the toiling masses, and opened the gate for participatory democracy in the region; albeit through extra-constitutional means.

However, the senas have emerged in reaction to the rising intensity and magnitude of the Maoist movement in the region. The radical assertion of the suppressed masses has threatened the hitherto unquestioned domination in the socio-economic and political realms of the dominant castes/classes. Indeed, the senas are product of a complex socio-economic-political and psychological transformations that the central Bihar plains have witnessed in four and a half odd decades.

References

1. In local parlance it is called Sena, but not army in technical sense of the term. These Senas are caste abused armed bands, counter-revolutionary and reactionary in nature.
2. Nehru, J. L., : **Speeches**, Vol. 3, Publications Division, New Delhi, 1958.
3. Desai, A. R., : **Rural India in Transition**, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1961.
4. Desai, A. R. (ed.), : **Agrarian Struggles in India After Independence**, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986, p.26.
5. Ibid., p. 22.
6. Wertheim, W. F., : "Betting on the strong", in Desai, A. R. (ed.), **Rural Sociology in India**, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1969, p.34.
7. Naxalite form Naxalbari – a police station under the Siliguri sub-division in Darjeeling district of West Bengal, from where the Maoist movement started.
8. Banerjee, S., : **India's Simmering Revolution: The Naxalite Uprising**,

Select Book Service Syndicate, New Delhi, 1984, pp. ii-iii.

9. Central Bihar region lies between North Bihar and Chotanagpur (now Jharkhand) and consists of South Bihar districts – Patna, Nalanda, Nawada, Bhojpur, Gaya, Jehanabad, Rohtas, Kaimar, Bauxar, Aurangabad, etc.
10. CPI (ML) Document, : **Report from the Flaming Fields of Bihar**, Prabodh Bhattacharya, Calcutta, 1986, p.24.
11. Ibid., p.70, emphasis added.
12. Hobsbawan, E.J., :**Bandits**, Penguin Books, London, 1972, p.17.
13. For details see, Ibid.
14. Sengupta, Nirmal, : **Tank Irrigation in Gangetic Bihar**, A. N. S. Institute of Social Studies, Patna, 1982b, Unpublished, p.20.
15. Sharma, A.N., “Backwardness Trap of Bihar Agriculture”, in Gupta, S. and Sharma, A.N. (eds.), **Bihar: Stagnation or Growth**, Spectrum Publishing House, Delhi, 1997, p.e8.
16. For detail see, P.U.D.R. Report, : **Bitter Harvest**, Harish Dhawan, Delhi, August 1992.
17. Sharma, A. N., op.cit., pp.8-9.
18. Shukadeb, N. and Jairath, V. K., : “Ceremonial Friendship, Patron-Client Relationship and Class Formation Among the Bhuiya Tribals of Orissa”, in Karna, M. N. (ed.), **Peasant and Peasant Protests in India**, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, 1989, p.78.
19. P.U.D.R. Report,: op.cit, pp.13-15.
20. Ibid., p.9
21. CPI (ML), Party Unity Report, : “Committee Against Repression on Peasantry in Bihar”, 9 July 1993 Unpublished, pp. 12-13.
22. Sharma, A. N., : op.cit., p.16.
23. For detail see, P.U.D.R. Report, :op.cit., p.16 and Sharma, A.N., : op.cit., p.51.
24. Panja is the share of labourers at the time of harvest. Normally labourers are

given one out of every twelve bundles of paddy, but it varies from place to place.

25. P.U.D.R. Report, : op.cit., p.17.
26. P.U.C.L., : “Report on Massacre in Men and Barsiwan”, P.U.C.L. Bihar State Unit, Patna, 1992.
27. P.U.D.R. Report, : op.cit., pp.24-26.
28. Sharma, A.N., :op.cit., p.22.
29. ILO and A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Sciences, Empirical Study in 1981, as quoted in EPW, Vol. XXVI, No. 33, 17 August, Bombay, 1991.
30. For detail see, Red Star, Lal Pataka, Jan Jawar, Liberation, Party Unity, etc, also The Hindustan Times, Patna, 2 August 1993.
31. Sharma, A. N., :op.cit., p23.
32. Revenue and Land Reforms Department, : “Provisional Data on Number and Area of Operational Holding”, **Agriculture Census (1980-81)**, Government of Bihar, Patna, p.2.
33. Ibid., p.17, for other Central Bihar districts, see, Ibid., pp.5, 8, 11, 14, 20 and 23.
34. Janwadi Mukti Marg, April 1994, pp. 23-24.
35. P.U.D.R. Report, : op.cit., pp.13-14, 25-26
36. Kala, M. and Maharaj, R.N., : “Peasant Unrest in Bhojpur: A Survey”, in Desai, A.R., (ed.), op.cit., pp.253 & 258.
37. Director of Census Operation, : Census of India, Bihar, 1981, Paper I, Supplementary Series 4, pp. 72-75.
38. P.U.D.R. Report, : op.cit., p.17.
39. Ahmed, Faizan, : Telegraph, Calcutta, 17 April 1991.
40. Bharti, Indu, : “Mobilization of Agricultural Labour: Jehanabad Experience”, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXV, No. 22, Bombay, 2 June 1990, p.980.
41. Ibid., p.981.
42. P.U.C.L., : “Report on the Tiskora Massacre”, P.U.C.L. Bihar State Unit, Patna, n.d., pp. 17-18.

