Political Economy of Caste and Underdevelopment
In
Contemporary Bihar

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled **"Political Economy of Caste and Underdevelopment in Contemporary Bihar"** submitted by **Atul Kumar Singh** in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this university, is his original work and may placed before the examiners for evaluation. This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this university or of any other university.

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TO

my Father - my idol
Shri Ram Nath Singh

my Mother- my strength
Smt. Basanti Singh

And

my Brother- my determination
Dhiraj Kumar Singh

Contents

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I am solely responsible for any kind of shortcomings of this dissertation.

ATUL KUMAR SINGH

Preface

Underdevelopment of Bihar has been a theme that has invited critical remarks from across the spectrum of intelligentia to common folk, on both social and political structure and dynamics of the state. A look at the existing literature on the subject suggests culpability of the social construct and its consequent political manifestation as responsible for the worsening economic and developmental scenario in the state. These studies point towards a correlation between caste politics and underdevelopment in the state.

The essential argument of the above line of theorizing is that the interplay of a "primordial entity" (here caste is considered one) with a modern political structure generates such distortions as underdevelopment. This line of thought, besides assuming a dichotomy between political and social structures, practically absolves the political structure of any culpability on the count of backwardness of the state. And by the same logic, it also denies the polity any potency of effecting change in the given conditions. The people, and the social construct itself is held responsible for the miseries and deprivation that bedevil the society at large, with no 'real' escape routes in proposition.

Caste identity, no doubt, has played, and is playing a major role in the political process in the state. In fact, Bihar has witnessed in the decade of nineties an unprecedented level of use of rhetoric by the political players explicitly along caste lines. This period has also seen a change in regime with clear upper backward caste dominance, with the upper caste segments for the first time in the history of state assembly having to play second fiddle. This period, coincidentally, has also seen the state sliding down from an already precarious situation on almost all the economic and social parameters of development. The evidence that most papers on the subject quote in favour of a correlation between caste politics and underdevelopment, therefore, appears to be corroborative on a first look.

While the play of caste is more than obvious in the social and political dynamics of the state, the incongruity attributed between it and development derives from the

primordial status that is ascribed to the former. And this ascription at once rules out any real time play of social structure and political and economic forces behind the caste system. True that this theorizing is to the Hegelian tradition of according ideology a primary status, it suffers from the same flaws as those of the latter.

In so far as the caste system affects the practices of the masses, the rules and norms that guide them, the language and symbols that mediate social interaction within them, it has an immediate institutional relevance in the society. And any such institution that conditions people's ability to participate in determining their actions and their ability to develop and exercise their capacities should be the subject of any study of development or a lack of it.

This dissertation takes a look at the institutional and structural conditions that have informed the very process of development in Bihar. In particular, it tries to locate economic and political dynamics behind the caste system, and in the process understands the way in which this system has lent itself to political usage and in turn has been affected by it. This is done in the chapter1 of the dissertation- 'Caste System and the structures of Domination".

Chapter 2 "Changes in the Agrarian Structure" of the dissertation takes a look at the economic structuring (keeping the social profile of the population in the highlight) of the rural-agrarian Bihar and changes that have occurred in it over the decade of nineties. Besides tracing the structural features of the agrarian economy (agrarian economy because not only is it the political lifeline of the new regime but also the lifeline of entire economy), it traces the changes in the economic status of different caste and class groups in the state over the decade of nineties. This could possibly help give us an economic perspective to the political behaviour of the masses as well as electoral outcomes over this period which also saw the unseating of the regime of nineties by a fresh build-up of alliances of different caste groups in 2005.
Development and Democracy have been organic to the project of building of the modern Indian state. In a society where deprivations of the majority in essence define underdevelopment, the poltical process in the welfare democratic state should have seen an alleviation of the miseries of these masses, and in the process some substantive development. This dissertation also takes a look at the construct of the

political system and its underlying values and norms so as to understand the way the process of development has run its course in the state under the guidance of a democratically elected government. Chapter 3 of the dissertation titled 'Political Construct and Development' traces the construction of the polity and the possibilities that this construction has for the emancipation of the miseries of the masses and hence development. The chapter traces the changes that have occurred in the polity of the state in the last few decades and tries to read the empowerment that these changes meant for the impoverished masses.

The dissertation also takes a look at the nature of state intervention in the economy via public expenditure and tries to trace any perceptible changes in the expenditure pattern corresponding to the changes in the nature of regime (referring mainly to the clientele/voter base of the regime) that came to power in 1990. This is done in the final chapter (chapter 4) of the dissertation titled "State Expenditure Pattern".

INTRODUCTION

"The state authority feeds on the people. The state is the eater and people are the food: the state, the deer, and people are the barley."

Satapatha Brahmana

Bihar has for long been accorded the status of a sick state, and the vital stats of the state have been sporting enough so as not to cause any damage to this status. In particular, last 15 years have seen a marked divergence of the state from all India average on almost all indicators of development. In a state which is third most populous in the country, housing about one - seventh of its poor (World Bank report which goes by Deaton and Drezes's method of estimation), the rate of decline in poverty in the 1990s has itself declined, being much lower than the all India average. While the overall production in the state has remained stagnant over this period, agriculture has registered a decline in per-capita terms, only to pick up in the late nineties (table 1). And this in an economy which has around 80% of its workforce employed in agriculture, and where poverty is predominantly rural, is certainly not a healthy situation. Some informed opinions (like an editor of one of the leading Mumbai dailies) are so serious in the belief of terminal character of this sickness that they even recommend abolition of the state. Even in the not so well informed popular opinion, which is but a reflection of the ideology of the hegemonic forces, Bihar is looked down upon with contempt- the identity of 'Bihari' is addressed almost as an abuse. Bihar is in a bad state and its residents face deprivations of extremes, to say the least, but surely, widespread deprivation of its masses cannot be the sole reason that makes it so annoying and a subject of contempt for the dominant ideology.

Underdevelopment is not the monopoly of Bihar, but the vice that is attributed to the state is certainly unparalleled, and may well be a pointer to certain characterstics of the state, besides its state of underdevelopment, that the popular opinion (a language that it is of the hegemonic ideology) fails to take note of, or is made to escape by design. Underdevelopment, the structuralists have argued, is product of the very process of development. Though development, understood in its true essence, is not a zero sum game, the structuralist argument makes sense when development is conceived in overtly distributional and

consumerist terms. Which sections and which sectors of the society and economy are deemed worthy of being primary beneficiaries of the process of development, and which others are destined to wait indefinitely for their share of salvation to trickle down, is certainly a matter of ideology. And ideology, as Ricoeur notes, is what preserves order and whose most radical function is legitimatizing a system of authority. Any frustration in this design would naturally invite the wrath of the hegemonic ideology, and Bihar being a prime recipient of this wrath, is most likely to be an abode of quite a few of these frustating forces that defy the logic of the dominant ideological force. But is this defiance, in itself, a cause of underdevelopment, of mass deprivation or rather a protest against it?

The decade of nineties has seen clear domination of the state's polity by the political elites belonging to the backward castes (the upper backward castes to be exact). This phase has been also characterized by the analysts and the popular media alike, with the protagonists of the poltical play chipping in with their rhetorical contributions, as the period of intense castiesation of politics. Underdevelopment in the state has then been attributed to this play of a supposedly 'Primordial' institution of caste with the modern institutions of democratic polity and an industrial economy. Before we probe any further on this line, a survey of the socio-economic conditions of the state would keep us alive of content of underdevelopment in the state.

Bihar is the third most populous state of the country, with a population of about 83 million. Agriculture is the bedrock of the state's economy employing 80% of workforce and generating nearly 40% of the state's gross domestic product. Prof. Sharma divides the state into three agro-ecological sub-zones. These are: north-west Gangetic plains (Zone I), north-east Gangetic plains (Zone II) and the south Bihar plains (Zone III), accounting for 35, 21 and 44 percent of total geographical area of the state, respectively. The average precipitation is adequate but aberrations like floods and droughts are frequent. Bihar's agriculture is predominated by small farms. 84 percent of the farmers have less than one ha of operational holding. Foodgrain crops cover 87 percent of the gross cropped area (GCA) in the state. Subsistence concerns obviously overwhelm Bihar farmers. Rice is the dominant crop of the kharif season and it occupies 44 percent of the cropped area. Rice and wheat together claim nearly 70 percent of the cropped area. The cropping pattern, true to its subsistence character, has shown continued dominance of food crops. There is some variation across agro-

ecological zones, but the above trend dominates all over. Livestock generates nearly 21 percent of agricultural output in the state and is an important source of income and employment for millions of landless and small landholders in the state.

On the other hand, the industrial sector contributes only 12% to the GSDP , and employs fewer than 10% of the workforce. Tertiary sector is the largest, generating nearly 49% of GSDP and that too mainly in trade and transport services, finance, real estate and government sector.

Growth performance:

State experienced 0 per-cent growth rate in the first half of the 1990s, and since 1994-95 annual growth rates have averaged around 3.8%, or about 1% per annum in per-capita terms. As a result, income growth and consumption levels have lagged seriously, thereby widening the gap between Bihar and the rest of India. Underlying the result has been exceptionally weak performance in agriculture. Agriculture has declined in early 1990s by 2%per-annum and grown by less than 1% p.a since 1994-95(hence falling in per-capita terms).

Table 1: Growth Performance: 1981 - 82 to 2001- 02

	Former Bihar (1981- 82 to 1990 - 91)	**Former Bihar** (1991 - 92 to 1995 - 96)	**New Bihar** (1994 - 95 to 2001 - 02)
GDP	4.9	0	3.8
Agriculture	4.6	-2.0	0.8
Industry	5.2	0.5	10.5
Services	5.6	2.2	6.4
India			
GDP	5.6	5.4	6.1
Agriculture	3.6	2.3	3.0
Industry	7.1	6.3	6.4
Services	6.5	7.0	8.0

Source: World Bank Report; Bihar - Towards a Development Strategy,

Population growth:

Unlike India as a whole where population growth has decelerated during the period 1991-2001, in Bihar it has accelerated, the rate being 28.4% during the same period- and this when the population growth in Bihar in the eighties was lower than the all India average. As a consequence there has been much larger addition of labour force than anticipated and also a

change in the age profile of the population. While India grows older, Bihar would be much younger with around 56% of its population being less than 25 years of age.

Employment status and Productivity:

Most of the labour in the state, although not openly unemployed, participates in the labour markets under highly distress conditions. Although, between 1993-94 and 1999-2000 the compound annual growth rate of employment in Bihar has been 2.8 per cent as against 1.02 per cent at the All India level, this higher growth of employment in the state, however, does not represent a positive trend as most of the addition to the workforce in the state during the nineties has largely been absorbed by already saturated agricultural sector. This is a clear reflection of *distress led higher labour participation in agriculture* in the absence of other employment avenues. As a result, Agriculture sector employing more than three-fourth of workforce has shown a net fall in the labour productivity per worker. There has been a negative rate of change during 1994-00 in the primary sector productivity per-worker (- 0.77% p.a) vis-à-vis +3.67% at the country level(table 2).

Table 2 : Productivity Change in Bihar (% age points) and India, 1994-2000

Sector	Absolute Productivity Change (Rs. per Worker)		Productivity Growth Rate (%) CAGR	
	Bihar	All-India	Bihar	All-India
PRIMARY	-283	+2518	-0.77	+3.59
SECONDARY	+1371	+8049	+1.44	+3.67
Manufacturing	-2780	+10548	-4.46	+5.22
TERTIARY	+14713	+17605	+4.36	+5.82
OVERALL	+1254	+7987	+1.99	+5.55

Source: IHD report , 'A Development Vision of Bihar' -Table 1

Productivity per-worker in Bihar was 40% of the average for the country in 1999-2000.The maximum gap was in the secondary sector reflecting major dependence on the unorganized informal sector rather than the organized (registered) manufacturing sector activity. This

sector, however, has shown higher employment absorption rate during the nineties. During the latter half of the 1990s, the growth rate of female workers in the manufacturing sector has been doubled from approximately 4 per cent in 1993-94 to 8 per cent in 1999-2000. Accordingly, the employment growth of male workers in the manufacturing sector also shows somewhat positive trend. However, in view of the absence of any major industry in the organized sector, most of these workers are absorbed in unorganized and informal sector. Moreover, *most of the employment growth in the manufacturing sector has been largely in the agro.-based sectors dominated by own account self-employed workers.* Though productivity per-worker across all sectors in Bihar is much lower than the all India average, it was 40% of the average for the country in 1999-2000; the maximum gap was in the secondary sector reflecting *major dependence on the unorganized informal sector activity.* The rate of productivity growth during 1994-2000 was 4.36% p.a. vis-à-vis 5.82% p.a. at the all India level.

Education and employment:

A look at the profile of educational attainments and occupation in rural Bihar is a telling story of how crucial is education in placement of individual in the production process. In the early nineties, around 54 per cent of illiterates were agricultural labourers, and around 32 per cent of them were cultivators (table 3).. Thus, while illiterates are seen to be placed right at the bottom of the exploitative chain the agricultural production process, nevertheless their dependence on the sector is critical. A look at the social profile of illiterates illustrates that an overwhelming majority of SC/STs are likely to be illiterates. While there is little change in the overall trends of educational profile across occupational and social groups, it is noteworthy that there is a decreased dependence of the illiterates on agriculture for their livelihoods over the decade of nineties (and as expected so is the case with SC/STs), as they are seen to be moving out of agricultural production process, into casual non-farm and non-farm self employment.

Another area of concern is the high level of open unemployment in urban areas particularly among higher educated and technically skilled youth. Unlike All-India where unemployment rate is substantially lower in 25-29 age groups in comparison to that in picture 15-19 age group, in Bihar the difference is very little. This represents higher rate of long-term/chronic unemployment among the youths of the state. The urban educated unemployment rate among

youth is phenomenal—as many as one-third of them are unemployed compared to less than one-fifth at all-India level. Similar phenomenon can also be observed in regard to technically educated youths. As high as 50 per cent of all technically educated youths in Bihar in 1993-94 were unemployed compared to one-fourth in all India. This higher level of unemployment among educated youth clearly is a pointer towards the potentially dangerous unemployment situation, with serious social and political consequences. A look at the crime profile of the state confirms the participation of these youth in abduction, extortion and other petty crimes in the state.

Table 3:Educational attainments of household heads and occupations

Education of head	Agricultural labour	Cultivation	Regular non-farm	Casual non-farm	Self non-farm	Other	total
50th round (1993-94)							
Illiterate	54.3	31.9	1.5	3.2	8.8	0.2	100
Below primary	29.3	48.8	3.6	2.2	15.9	0.2	100
Primary	29.8	48.1	3.4	2.6	16.2	0.0	100
Middle	16.4	57.7	7.2	1.3	17.1	0.3	100
Secondary	9.0	59.4	15.7	1.4	14.4	0.2	100
Higher	7.6	51.3	31.0	1.0	9.1	0.0	100
All	41.9	39.9	4.1	2.7	11.4	0.2	100
55th round (1999-00)							
Illiterate	52.8	30.2	1.1	5.1	10.7	0.1	100
Below primary	26.2	46.0	3.4	5.1	19.2	0.0	100
Primary	22.1	53.5	4.3	4.9	14.9	0.4	100
Middle	17.9	57.7	5.6	3.1	15.0	0.7	100
Secondary	14.1	53.5	12.9	2.8	15.6	1.1	100
Higher	3.0	58.2	26.6	0.3	12.0	0.0	100
Total	40.4	38.5	3.5	4.6	12.8	0.3	100

Source: the 50th and 55th round NSSO round surveys

Poverty:

Bihar is among those states where poverty is most widespread and acute. Changes in the questionnaire pertaining to the recall periods, and their sequencing, in the 55th NSS round, and use of different price indices by different estimators, has made poverty estimation a subject of normative judgement. Deaton and Dreze (2002) estimate the poverty in the state to have fallen by 6.9% points between 1993-1994 and 1999-2000, and by 7.5% points for rural

Bihar.They estimate rural poverty to be 41% , and urban poverty at 24.7% against all India average of 26.3% and 12.3%. G.O.I estimates put the fall at 14% between 50th and 55th round. Kijima and Lanjouw estimate the fall in rural poverty at 0.3%.

There are two issues, as mentioned earlier, involved here: 1. of price adjustments and 2. of non-comparability.

1. **Price indices** - price indices traditionally used to update poverty line are based on fixed and frequently outdated commodity weights.

   Deaton - Dreze and Kijima- Lanjouw try to get around this problem by updating the poverty line using price indices computed with NSSO surveys, which are known to accurately reflect the current consumption pattern.

2. **Non-Comparability** - this problem arises because of change in methodology with regard to recall periods for some consumption items.

   Deaton-Dreze and Kijima-Lanjouw use the fact that a subset of components in the 55th round (e.g. intermediate consumption goods such as fuel and all household characterstics) were collected in the same way as those in the 50th round. They predict poverty in the 55th round assuming relationship between these comparably surveyed components and poverty is stable over time. Difference in their methods arise from the fact that, while Deaton and Dreze assume that the relationship between poverty and expenditure on comparably surveyed consumption goods (mainly intermediate such as fuel and light) is stable between 50th and the 55th round, Kijima and Lanjouw assume the relationship between poverty and household characterctics such as education, landholding, and SC-ST status is stable overtime. While stagnating social indicators in rural Bihar appear to support Kijima and Lanjouw, Deaton and Drezes's assumptions if accepted, could be led to argue that while there was a sizeable decline in consumption poverty in Bihar during the second half of 1990s, this was not accompanied by similar improvements in other social indicators. In fact, if direct estimates, following the tradition of Prof. Utsa Patnaik and Rohini Aiyer, are made, they are likely to take winds out of any claims of poverty (consumption poverty) reduction at all in this period.

Poverty Profile:

Social and Caste charactersics are strongly associated with lack of opportunities and create a discernible pattern among the rural poor within the state. For example, a member of SC or ST community, landless or near landless households inevitably faces significantly higher than average risk of poverty.

Poverty and Occupational status:

One of the major and long-standing problems in Bihar's economy has been lack of economic diversification: more than 80% of the rural population is engaged in agricultural sector. The NSSO data show that wage employment in agricultural labour accounted for nearly 40% of the rural workforce in Bihar in 1999-2000, compared to 42% in 1993-94, but still constituted the dominant occupation in the rural areas of the state. Agricultural labour and cultivation together account for 80% of occupations in 1999-2000. There is very limited occupational opportunity outside the agricultural sector in rural Bihar.

There is a sharp occupational contrast between poor and non-poor in the rural areas. The poor are far more likely to be agricultural wage workers or casual non-farm labourers, rather than cultivators or employed in regular non-farm jobs. Overtime, the share of agricultural labour in the poorest quintile has declined while casual non-farm labour and self-employed non-farm occupations have increased (table 17). And casual non-farm labour is a last resort that households choose only when other options have been exhausted. Self-employment activities include a wide variety of occupations that could be as vulnerable as casual labour, especially for the poor. Casual labour offers one of the lowest wages among all occupations and terms of employment are usually short and unstable. The recent occupational shift from agricultural labour to non-agricultural labour represents a move to higher daily nominal wages; however, this is not beneficial for poor households since such occupational shifts also worsen their vulnerability to adverse economic shocks.

In the urban areas, more than 40% of households are self-employed and around 30% have regular employment in 1999-2000.While casual wage labour represents only 10% of occupations among all urban household heads, it accounts for more than half the household

heads in the poorest quintile. The share of household heads working as casual wage labour actually increased from 50% to 54% between 1993-1994 and 1999-2000.

Migration :

Underemployments rate in Bihar is much higher than the national average, which is indicative of the fact that work seekers in rural Bihar face difficulties in finding stable positions that provide a secure livelihood over time within the state. Low labour productivity coupled with higher unemployment and under-employment rates in the state, creates such vulnerability of casual labour that generates large out-migration to other states, as a last measure resort to escape poverty and eke out an existence. **Outmigration is a crucial survival strategy for the rural poor in Bihar**. In fact, both the census and NSSO sruvseys report that Bihar **has the highest rate of gross inter-state outmigration** in India. Some important facts emerge on out-migration from the 1998 UP- Bihar living Conditions Survey : first, as much as 95% of out-migrants were male ; second, **out-migration is highest in the poorest and the richest quintiles** ; third, the duration of **out-migration from the poorest quintile tends to be shorter**, as compared to the richest group. In the last two decades, migration from rural Bihar has taken alarming proportions. Members of the lower backward castes and SC/ST population are seen to be migrating in large numbers. A CSDS study on the issue estimates that the rate of out-migration (migrating population/ total population) has almost doubled over the period from 7.49% in 1982-83 to 13.42% in 1999-2000.

There has been a considerable change in nature and cause of migration, with proportionately more migration taking place among labour force in search for livelihood which is mainly for relatively longer period. There is a change in destination of the migrant population from Bihar. In the days of green revolution, increased demand for cheap labour saw the migration directed towards Punjab, other green revolution belts. But in the nineties, flow has diverted to new areas of Delhi and other industrial centres reflecting non-agricultural bent of the migrating workforce.

Poverty and access to physical and human assets:

Land ownership.

In the rural areas, land ownership is closely associated with poverty not just because land provides the main source of income, but also because land ownership improves access to

economic and social opportunities. Data clearly indicates that the poor typically own less land than the non-poor in Bihar. In fact, **75% of the rural poor were 'landless' or 'near landless' in 1999-2000, an increase of 8% since 1993-1994**. A high correlation between landholding and occupations is observed in the NSSO data of 1999-2000: marginal landowners are much more likely to be engaged in agricultural labour, casual non-farm labour and self-employment activities than large landholders; large landowners are more likely to be engaged in cultivation and regular non-farm labour than marginal landowners (table 15).

Land ownership and tenancy arrangements.

In 1998, nearly 25% of cultivated land in rural Bihar was leased-in (Srivastava 2003). For small landholders(0.5-1 acres), leased-in land was as much as half the size of their average cultivable land; for SC/ST households around 80% of cultivated land was leased-in. Because of high incidence of leasing-in of land among the small and marginal farmers and backward social groups, tenurial arrangements are likely to have a significant impact on the livelihoods of the poor. The sham that the land reforms in the state have been, not surprisingly the status of tenants has continued to be vulnerable in terms of rents and security of tenure. A majority of tenants pay more than half of their gross output to landowners as rent, much in excess of the statutory provision of 25%. In fact, a series of ceiling acts and tenancy reform acts have led to the system of tenancy becoming almost concealed and informal, which in turn has adversely affected the security of tenure, thereby compromising the tenants' bargaining position and their ability to enforce contract terms.

Table 4 : Distribution of population by consumption quitiles and education level of household head.

Rural	50th (1993-94)						55th round (1999-00)					
	illiterate	Below primary	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher	illiterate	Below primary	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher
Bottom	78.2	10.4	4.4	4.4	2.4	0.2	71.3	12.9	3.6	6.9	4.5	0.8
Quintile2	67.0	11.4	6.9	8.0	5.2	1.4	64.6	13.7	6.5	7.3	6.3	1.6
Quintile3	61.6	13.2	6.1	11.0	7.1	1.1	59.9	14.8	6.2	8.7	8.3	2.2
Quintile4	50.5	13.7	8.3	13.3	11.4	2.8	50.3	15.5	8.2	12.0	12.1	1.9
Top	37.9	14.7	7.8	14.9	18.1	6.6	41.0	12.8	6.7	14.9	18.0	6.7
Overall	58.9	12.7	6.7	10.3	8.9	2.4	57.4	13.9	6.2	10.0	9.9	2.6
Mean pc exp	196	229	235	251	278	330	354	380	401	425	470	572
urban	illiterate	Below primary	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher	illiterate	Below primary	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher
Bottom	52.8	16.4	6.8	13.3	8.6	2.2	57.5	16.2	9.1	7.0	7.4	2.8
Quintile2	32.9	17.8	7.9	24.2	15.1	2.1	36.5	18.9	10.7	18.2	12.0	3.7
Quintile3	23.5	12.1	13.4	23.1	20.2	7.8	25.9	16.8	9.4	12.8	24.6	10.5
Quintile4	14.2	8.5	5.4	17.2	33.6	21.1	16.2	11.2	6.2	15.4	29.7	21.3
Top	6.1	3.5	5.1	11.6	35.0	38.8	4.9	3.3	3.5	4.7	36.8	46.8
Overall	25.9	11.7	7.7	17.9	22.5	14.4	28.2	13.3	7.8	11.6	22.1	17.0
Mean pc exp	240	267	301	310	431	581	397	458	473	507	725	1013

Source: the 50th and 55th round NSSO round surveys

Poverty and education

According to the NSSO data, there is a strong relationship between consumption poverty and educational attainment of the household head.(table 4). In both those urban and rural areas, average consumption levels of households whose heads had completed secondary education or higher education are significantly higher than of households whose heads were illiterate. Nearly 80% of household heads in the bottom quintile in the rural areas were seen in 1993-94 as having had no education, as compared to half in the urban areas.This pattern remained unchanged between the two surveys. Further, when the household head is illiterate, the household members are nearly eight times likely to be engaged in agricultural labour than if he or she had attained secondary level education or higher education. This clearly suggests that with an illiterate household head, the opportunities of household members tend to be restricted to low-wage employment.

Table 5 : Educational attainments by social groups in rural Bihar

	Illiterate	Below primary	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher	Total
50th round (1993-94)							
Majority	52	15	8	12	11	3	100
SC/ST	76	8	5	7	4	1	100
Overall	59	13	7	10	9	2	100
55th round (1999-00)							
Majority	52	15	7	11	12	3	100
SC/ST	72	10	4	7	5	1	100
Overall	57	14	6	10	10	3	100

Source: the 50th and 55th round NSSO round surveys

Poverty and social identity

Social and caste characterstics are associated with constraints and lack of opportunities that cut across multiple dimensions. Caste identity is a strong indicator of the poor, Illiterate, low-paid, low status agricultural labour or those living in poorly constructed housing with limited access to basic services. In Bihar, the SC/STs are likely to be around three times poorer than the upper-castes, and appreciably poorer than other backward castes and Muslims. Consistent with this, per -capita household expenditure and land ownership of SC/STs is significantly lower than that from the non-SC/ST castes in both urban and rural areas in 1999-2000, and the gap has remained unchanged since 1993-94(table9). SC/ST households are almost three times more likely to be landless than others.

More than 70% of household heads of SC/STs were illiterate in 1999-2000, as compared to about half of the household heads from other social groups(table 5). Second, the job opportunity tends to be restricted to the low paid jobs: around 60% of SC/STs were engaged in agricultural labour compared to only 30% in the case of other households.A sizeable occupational shift to casual non-farm labour is seen for SC/STs between 1993-1994 and 1999-2000.

Apart from widespread poverty, the rural areas of the state have lowest access to almost all the major social and physical infrastructural facilities--education, health, power supply, etc., compared to the other states of India.

Social Sector Outcomes in Bihar:

Low social indicators in Bihar reflect significant constraints in the poors' ability to extricate themselves from long-run poverty. The social gaps in Bihar - seen in the lack of education, health, sanitation and other indicators - are acute and have persisted over the decade.

Education outcomes

The 2001 census shows Bihar's literacy level as India's lowest (48% and 65% for bihar and India respectively); the net primary enrollment rate for Bihar in 1999-2000 was 52%, compared to 77% nationally. In fact, Bihar has the distinction of being the only state in India where the primary enrollements have fallen in the nineties. Between 1993-94 and 1999-2000, the fall was 2 %(down 4% for boys and 1% for girls). Indicators for women are considerably worse than for men, with an enrollment gap of 14% (58% for men versus 44% for women) and a literacy gap of 26% (60% for men and 34% for women).

Enrollment rates in Bihar, disaggregated by the urban and rural regions for different age categories reveal two distinct patterns: first, the rural-urban gap is significant for all age groups. Second, the enrollment rates peak in both rural and urban areas for the age-group 11-13 years, indicating late entry into school, as well as high dropout rates for higher age categoris. For children aged 12 years, only 37% in the rural areas and 57% in the urban areas completed primary school in 1995-1996(NSS data). A large rural-urban gap is also observed for primary school completion rate.

Low completion rates result from a combination of low rates of entry, late entry into school, and dropout rates. This is reflected in the 'transition' through the educational system which is extremely weak : in 2000-2001, 24% of primary school students transited to the upper primary level; 12% from the upper primary level to the secondary level and 10% from secondary level to the higher secondary level.transition rates are even lower for girls and SC/STs. Low education attainment among the youth is also evident, and the rural-urban divide is apparent in the distribution of education attainment by level: while around 59% of 20-24 year olds in urban areas had high school or higher secondary education, this was true for only 38% of those in rural areas.

Differences across gender, economic and social group in education

Stark differences are observedalong a number of economic and social dimensions.First, gender differences are large. The male-female gap in enrollments is substantially larger in rural areas than in urban areas, and tends to be larger for higher age groups. Gender gaps also characterize the primary completion rates of 12 - year olds. The overall patterns indicate that fewer girls, as a percentage of the cohort, start school than boys, and girls also drop out of school at a faster rate and / or at an earlier age than boys.

Enrollments are also lower for SC/STs than for the rest of the population. The differences become larger for higher age categories, suggesting that as with the gender gap, the initial gap in school entry is exacerbated by lower school retention rates among SC/STs.

Similar differences are observed across economic groups. In rural and urban areas alike, enrollments are higher for all age groups in the case of the higher consumption quintiles. While better enrollments are clearly associated with wealthier households, enrollment is far from universal for even the best-off in the rural areas. This is explained by a combination of factors, such as relatively late entry into schools, lack of schooling opportunities, bad state of educational infrastructure of whatever exists (e.g. the PTR for Bihar is 122:1 as compared to 40:1 nationally) and lower return to education in rural areas. This pattern suggests that while economic status does play a part, there are other factors that play equally important role in restricting education, particularly in rural Bihar where education is limited even among the higher economic groups.

Health outcomes in Bihar

Health outcomes in Bihar, with some exceptions, are below the national average. MMR in Bihar is 707 per 100,000 women of reproductive age, compared to the national average of 404. Antenatal care reaches only around 10% of women in Bihar compared to 32% for India. The percentage of deliveries attended to by skilled health staff was only 23% for Bihar as against 42% for the country in 1998-99.

In comparison with the rest of the Indian states, Bihar does better than the country average only for access to safe drinking water. Although child mortality rate has fallen during the 1990s, it is still above the level in a majority of states. In terms of nutritional status of

children, despite some progress, the proportion of underweight children is still among the highest in the country. Full immunisatiion, which has direct impact on child health, covers only a small fraction of children, and is declining during recent years. Some attribute this adverse trend to the shift in attention to the pulse polio immunization program at the expense of other routine immunisation.

The disease profile of the state is characterized by high incidence of infectious and contagious diseases.The profile of diseases in the state indicates that most of them are caused because of poor access to sanitation, safe drinking water and awareness of personal hygiene. A large proportion of illnesses particularly among the poor and women go untreated. The *coverage of preventive services is rather poor in Bihar and is perhaps the lowest in India.*

The health care infrastructure organized on the principles of referral system is virtually non-existent in the state. There is a serious shortfall of health sub-centres and primary health clinics compared to the existing national norms. More importantly, existing centres and clinics are beset by the endemic problems relating to quality standards: poor maintenance of facilities, idle equipment, and chronic short supply of medicines and vaccines, particularly in the rural areas. As a result, there is significant reliance by the households on the private health providers for critical health services. Private doctors and quacks contribute nearly 74% of all medical consultations, with government doctors being consulted in only 15%of cases. More than half of women rely on provision of pre-natal care by the private providers, compared to just one-fifth on government providers.

In Bihar, *the ratio of private spending on health care, relative to public spending is the second highest in India*, and is a major source of indebtedness and perpetual impoverishment of the rural folks. Public spending on health has declined from 8% of total expenditure in mid-1980s to 4% in 2000.In 1995-96, Bihar recorded the *lowest public health spending per-capita among the major states-Rs15 compared to Rs 84 for the country as a whole.* Out of this limited spending, the poorest 40% received only around 20% of total public health spending. Of the subsidies on health, *only 6%of rural subsidies and 6% of urban subsidies go to respcetive bottom quintiles*, the topmost quintiles received 42% and 31% subsidies respectively. The high cost of treatment in such a scenario is a significant strain on the already impoverished population of Bihar

Physical Infrastructure:

Roadways:

The infrastructural poverty of Bihar pervades all sectors and probably is the most severe. *Road density per lakh of population is the lowest in Bihar* (90.1 kms), compared to the national average (256.7 kms). For every 100 sq. km the state has only 77 km of road length as against 169 km in Orissa, 118 in Tamilnadu and 97 km in UP.This disparity becomes even wider, when one takes into account the share of surfaced roads in total road length — 37.4 per cent in Bihar and 56.5 per cent in India as a whole. During the nineties, the disparity between Bihar and India has widened vis-à-vis annual growth of road lengths. For India as a whole, this growth rate was 3.5 per cent, for Bihar it was a meagre 0.6 per cent.

Railways:

As regards the spread of railway network, measured in terms of route length per lakh of population, it is extremely low. To make things worse, this density has decreased in Bihar during the nineties, compared to a small increase for India as a whole.

Electricity:

During early nineties, the per capita consumption level of electricity in Bihar was 110 kWh, less than half of the national average of 253 kWh. By the end of the decade, the disparity was even wider — 460 kwh for India and only 143 kwh for Bihar.Today, only 10% of rural households use electricity as a source of lighting. By the end of nineties, per-capita consumption of electricity in Bihar was only 16.4% of the All- Indla level.

Telecom:

the state has lowest telephone density, 0.93 telephones per 100 persons, four times lower than the national average.Only 2.2% of all households have telephones, as againsr 9% nationally, and only 40% of villages have public telephone access

Thus not only is Bihar home to a vast expanse of destitution and deprivation, the possibilities of negotiating this expanse seem rather bleak, in the background of a debilitated and further worsening social and physical infrastructure, and retreat of the state from its responsibility of arresting this decline. Miseries of the masses, particularly the weakest sections which are

hardly seen to have made any progress towards an improved life conditions in the contemporary period, are piling up by each day. And this is the condition in a polity and in an era where the democratic institutions are supposed to have empowered the backward, the weakest of the masses politically. Contemporary Bihar has seen an increased participation of the weakest of the society in the electoral process of the state, with a clear trend of loosening of the grip of the upper caste ruling elite on the polity of the state. In a democratic political setup, government of the day depends on the support of the masses for its continuance in the office. Generation of goodwill among the electorate, therefore, logic dictates, should receive top priority by any regime in power. And what better way to generate goodwill than alleviate the miseries of the masses. But as Bismarck and later Winston Churchill had reaffirmed that 'politics is the art of possibilities', there could always be a less better but a more effective and lucrative way of garnering people's support, afterall, "charity plus 5 percent profit" is always welcome in the philosophical origins of the political structure that we have imported.

The literature

There is a series of literature on political economy that has explored the causal relation between the nature of state intervention and the social and political structure. These works have looked for reasons as to why some states or particular ethnic groups within a state have perfomed better than others.The role of state analysed here, however, has been limited to provisioning of public goods and its expenditure in social sector.Two broad approaches, thus situated in the distributive paradigm, appear in the recent political economy models trying to explain the impact of social and political structures on provisioning of public goods and services, and its social sector expenditure.

First, the dominance by an elite, which does not support human capital investment in the masses is a theme in several theoretical models including Bourguignon and Verdier (1999), Acemoglu and Robinson (1998), Galor and Moav (2000). In particular, Bourguignon and Verdier (1999) argue that the oligarchy will oppose widespread education because educated people are more likely to demand political power, i.e., democracy, which may undermine the dominance of the elite. This may result in a lower human capital outcome than otherwise.

The second type of political economy approach stresses the link between ethnic fractionalisation and the poor delivery of public services. In this tradition, Alesina, Baqir and

Easterly (1999) find that more ethnically diverse US cities and counties devote less resources to education and other public goods than more ethnically homogeneous cities and counties. In a similar vein, Goldin and Katz (1999) find lower public support for higher education in states with more religious/ethnic heterogeneity. The idea is that higher competition among rival factions for political power may mean that the electoral base of the ruling government is smaller than otherwise. This may result in lower public services, as the ruling government would cater to certain factions of the population, disregarding others.

Besley and Burgess (2001) identify the importance of government accountability to the electorates and find that states with more local language newspapers, greater political competition and voter turnout enjoy greater public food distribution and calamity relief expenditure in the event of droughts. Foster and Rosenzweig (2001) argue that while landowners would favour expenditure on irrigation, budget allocation would shift more towards labour-intensive road construction projects, as landless gain more participation with increasing decentralisation. Khemani in a series of papers (2002, 2004) highlights the effects of federal politics on earnings and spending of the states. While Khemani (2002) suggests that intergovernmental transfers in the Indian states is sensitive to underlying political incentives (involving alliance with the centre), Khemani (2004) finds a pattern of election-year targeting of special interest groups possibly in return for campaign support as opposed to populist spending sprees to sway the mass of voters.

Chhibber and Nooruddin (2004) however highlight the role of different party systems and argue that in a two-party system political parties may draw support from many social groups and may therefore respond to their needs by increasing the share of social development spending in an attempt to provide more public goods. In a multi party system however parties focus on mobilizing smaller segments of the population, which in turn may result in lower spending on social development.

In an another study aimed at explaining the pattern of inter and intra-state disparities in Indian social development, Ghosh and Pal focus on the political economy of 'elite dominance' and 'ethnic heterogeneity' and consider its effects on public spending on education and health. Using 1960-92 state-level Indian data from sixteen major states, they find that (a) greater dominance of the upper-class elite lowers spending on education (but not

on health) while greater degree of ethnic heterogeneity lowers spending on both education and health. (b) State spending on education and health is significantly lower in states with a higher proportion of scheduled tribe population while the proportion of scheduled caste or female population remains insignificant here. (c) Predominance of the Indian National Congress (INC) regime is higher in states with greater dominance of elite upper class and ethnic heterogeneity. Concluding from this, they see a close correspondence between social and political structures (highlighting the role of gender and caste in their sample) on the one hand and state-level spending on the other. While Ghosh and Pal consider the effect of ethnic heterogeneity on public spending on education and health, Banerjee and Somanathan (2001) study the issue of Issue of elite dominance; it's effect in the provision of public goods and suggest that more heterogeneous communities tend to be politically weaker and therefore are less likely to get the goods they want and more likely to get some of the inferior substitutes.

There is another theme that considers mass participation in politics itself as responsible for the poor health of the economy. Freedom of dissent and participation are apprehended to likely release centrifugal forces and undermine authority, thereby threatening the very stability and unity of the system and authority, and thus fetters the release of the forces of development. This thesis in effect is the legitimizing ideology of the proliferation of a de-politicised civil society under the aegis and patronage of the World Bank and international finance capital.

All these themes reflect a part of reality in their depiction of facts. So long as the elites are identified with the upper castes, which are what these studies do, there is a perceptible dominance of elites in almost all the regimes of Bihar, in the pre-ninety decades (But has it been or can it be different in case of any other regime?). And going by the literacy rates, which is a basic standard of the educational attainments of the society, evidence is corroborative. But then, it would be naïve to identify elitism with caste status. One should be mindful of the internal differentiation of each and every caste group, and the fact that each caste is layered by many classes. All the more, the new regime that the decade of nineties has thrown up clearly reflects dominance by the new rural elite belonging to the backward castes, and why not because dominance and elitism are two faces of the same coin.

It is also a fact that the social structure of India, Bihar being no exception, is heterogenous, enconscing multitudes of identities- caste, class,community, religion, language to name a few. Hindu society, to come to a narrower but numerically wider segment, is in particular marked by heterogeneity of caste system, with multitudes of castes. In a 'first past the pole' competitive political system, to use the terminology used in the literature (can't see though how a centralized democratic polity can be anything but competitive), these groups form the natural blocks for number mobilization. But no one caste group is numerically so preponderant as to ensure victory of a political formation on its own. Here alliances become mandatory. But then, if the mobilization is taking place primarily on the basis of a primordial identity, then as Dipankar Gupta has argued, the logic of that very identity defies any such alliance. The alliance should have a common point of address for it to come into existence, which, if not the primordial identity, has to be a secular agenda. This holds modern political construct, rather than the social construct (not to say polity and economics havse no role to play in the social construct) as responsible for failing to deliver on its very own and much venerated territory.

This brings us to the new definition by the Bretton Woods Institutions, custom made for the developing world, of what constitutes an effective and correct form of democratic polity. Though the paradigms of justice and development- economic and political- in a democratic welfare state are by and large distributional in character, thereby severely limiting the possibility of a just and developed society itself, even these distributional issues are sought to be taken out of political arena in the new models being put forth by these institutions. The motive is very explicit: privatization of the public-whatever there is of it, and creation of a client-consumer relation between the citizens and the state. And today this happens to be an explicit ideology, the sacred cow of the secular, of the powers that be in the polity. Suddenly, what was hidden, subtle in the political structure in the pre-ninety period, has become explicit and vocal in the post-reform era. This explicitness and vocality of the whispers of yesteryears could be made use of in deciphering underdevelopment of the state.

Broadly, culpability of the caste politics, a theme that emerges from these studies. Attention is called to very vocal rhetorics along caste lines by the major players in the polity, and an increased assertion of caste identity for political mobilization over the nineties. This period has also seen increased participation of the weaker sections led by the creamy layer of the

backward castes in the electoral process, and worsening of the scenario on the economic front. A survey by the CSDS points out, these groups actually have increased faith in the efficacy of the political system and they vigorously participate in larger numbers in the electoral process. In the National Election Study carried out by the Centre, the percentage of respondents who answered ' you think your vote has effect on how things are run in this country?', went up between 1971 and 1996 from 48.4 per cent to 58.7 per cent for the total population, from 45.7 per cent to 57.6 per cent for 'backward caste' groups (designated as OBC in India), from 42.2 per cent to 60.3 per cent for the lowest castes (designated as scheduled castes), and 49.9 per cent to 60.3 per cent for Muslims. Remarkable stability of Laloo Yadav's regime for three consecutive terms, in the face of ever-loudening outcry in the media and informed sections against lack of development in the state, is taken to confirm that people were voting purely on their caste affinities unmindful of their worsening economic scenario. And this was taken to be a manifestation of such a castiesation of politics, where the numerically preponderant but hitherto subjugated caste groups pull themselves around their caste identities to capture power, and retain it even at the cost of their economic well being.

This period was seeing an increased participation in the political process (to be exact, electoral process) and increased representation in the legislature and the parliament of the weaker sections(the better-off among them in particular), but these gains did not translate into economic(visible) gains for the faithful, and it is not as if the latter mind it very much. In Bihar, politicians have seldom been penalised by the electorate for endemic poverty. Whereas, a perceived slight in the speech of a political leader felt by a particular ethnic group usually causes much more of an uproar than if the same leader's policy neglect keeps thousands of children severely malnourished in the same ethnic group. The same issue comes up in the case of reservation of public sector jobs for backward groups which fervently catches the public imagination of such groups, even though, objectively the overwhelming majority of the people in these groups have little chance of ever landing those jobs, as they and their children drop out of school in large numbers by the fifth grade. But one should be careful about the very 'construction' of the popular imagination and 'public uproar' before reaching out to conclusions.

While these studies tell a story of underdevelopment, or rather lack of development, being result of a heterogenous society making its demand on "competitive Politics", the implicit distributive paradigm (which ,not coincidentally, is also the moot paradigm of our modern socio-economic and political setup) of these studies should not be lost on us. This distributive focus ignores and tends to obscure the institutional context within which these distributions take place, and which is often at least partly the cause of patterns of distribution. Frequently, specific structural and institutional background conditions are pre-supposed (and whose justice is never brought under evaluation), where an understanding of these background conditions can reveal how they affect distribution, what is there to distribute, how it gets distributed, who distributes and what the distributive outcome is. The institutional context here include structures or practices, the rules and norms that guide them, and the language and symbols that mediate social interactions within them, in institutions of state, family, and civil society, as well as the workplace.

This paper intends to take a look at these institutional and structural conditions that have informed the very processes of development, or rather, underdevelopment in Bihar. Caste system has been one such institution that has had a prominent mark on the social and political being of the masses in the state. Chapter one of the dissertation, 'Caste System and Structures of Domination' is an attempt to trace the structuring of power relations - be it political or economic- that give the system its essential character. The chapter traces the history of caste system to locate the corresponding modes of exploitation and subjugation that were codified in the system since its very origin, and thus brings forth the more secular economic and political relations of power that inform this supposedly "primordial system".

Second chapter of the dissertation is an attempt to understand the agrarian structure of the society, as it is here that an overwhelming majority of the workforce finds its livelihood, and is exposed to the most fundamental of life experiences vis a vis the society at large. Agriculture has been bedrock of the state's economy, and in the post-bifurcation period its importance has increased significantly as almost entire modern - industrial base has been lost to the new state of Jharkhand. With little private investment coming to the state, and the State in its mode of retreat in the post-reform period, there are hardly any avenues for employment of the growing population outside agriculture in the state (outmigration being a last resort of

survival for the poor). The social and political interests and conflict in the rural - agrarian setting, therefore, has been largely "landesque" in character. The chapter besides tracing the changes in production conditions of agriculture takes note of changes in the pattern of landownership among various social as well as economic groups in the contemporary period. The chapter also takes note of the changing employment profile of the rural population - among various social and economic groups. This decodes the relations of dominance and subjugation that operate on the masses thereby affecting changes in their social and political behaviour.

Chapter three of dissertation,' Political Construct and Development' takes a look at the structural and institutional setup of the polity and their concomitant ideologies. The chapter notes that the agency of creating a modern state in the post-independence period had largely meant the strategy of imitatively traversing a path that of a capitalist welfare state, rehearsed and charted elsewhere. As development had meant, besides having a modern democratic political setup, transformation of an agrarian society into an industrial economy, mass production became an article of faith with state being its active promoter. The issues of organization of production and its ends, by very creation of these institutions, were kept out of the public. This in effect meant a privatization of what should have been at the core of the public. The argument that our socio-economic and political system, by its very construct, is essentially a depoliticized system holds serious grounds. The chapter also takes a look at the changing political profile of the state. In particular , it takes note of changes that have beset the polity in the post-ninety era and charts out a social profile of the new dominant players of the period. This is seen to correspond with the social profile of ascendant groups in the agrarian structure. The changes in the agrarian structure go to a great length in explaining the changes in the political scenario in the state in the post - ninety era, and also highlight the possibilities of empowerment of the weak and the poor that our political process and its institutions ensconce.

Welfare state has also meant the state taking responsibility to fulfill the basic needs of the masses that would be left in the cold by the market system. Here we see a very subtle operation of a vicious chain, wherein the system creates the conditions for deprivation or continuation of the deprivation of the masses and then uses that deprivation / hunger itself for deriving its legitimacy for the perpetration of that hunger. Distribution of benenfits is made

the bone of contention between those who can afford to contest, and then a patronage from the top generates a clientele base at the bottom. This clientele base essentially consists of local elites - defined in their essence by the reach and capacity to manipulate the regulatory as well as distributory systems of the state. They inturn replicate this relationship with their local kith and kin, and it is at these last two levels that politics finds material as well as language in the most immediate form, for execution and articulation of its ends.

Chapter four takes a look at the pattern of state expenditure to locate, if any, signs of targeted spending by the regimes to with an objective of benefiting the *entire* mass of their voting segment, keeping their occupational profile and livelihood issues in mind. To the disappointment of a large work of literature on the subject, there are no clear signs of public spending targeting particular segement of voters.

CHAPTER 1

CASTE SYSTEM AND STRUCTURES OF DOMINATION

There can be no denying the fact that caste system has played, and is playing a major role in the politics of the state. And this play by the caste system in the political process is largely seen as corruption of the secular character of the political structure by primordial identities and relations. The fact that one of the major criterions on which political parties decide candidature of various aspirants is their caste keeping in mind the caste composition of their respective constituencies, and often doling out promises to the sections targeted for political mobilization, is taken by many as a corroborative evidence to reach the above conclusion. The electorates, too, are seen to be voting for the candidate from their own caste, and this is taken to be another confirmation of castiesation, and play of primordial identities in the politics of the state. But certain more subtle facts crop up on a closer observation. On careful observation, "winnability" emerges as an equally important criterion on which candidature is decided upon by the political parties. And this 'winnability' constitutes of more 'secular' factors such as economic and social standing, not to mention possession of brute power. Similarly, while caste consideration may explain the voting pattern of those segments who have the privilege to take a pick of one of their own caste men in the fray, it says nothing about the factors determining voting decisions of the segments who don't have a representation in the list of candidates. A careful view of the pattern of candidature may reveal a more secular pattern behind seemingly primordial structuring of the political process.

Whether or not, or to what extent caste system lends itself to political mobilization is not to contest its play in the political and economic structuring of the state, or for that matter country. Not withstanding the Hegelian tradition, as we shall see later, caste system is a socio-economic and political construct, and if politics has to have a social base, it must also have an intercourse with the former. And if this is so, then an understanding of the construction of the caste system, locating the factors ordering the structure as well as the forces of dynamism in the system, is called for to understand its political and economic determinants as well as its political and economic consequences.

Caste system: a system of stratification

Caste has been a system of social stratification in India. Of the most common kind of Utopias is a society based on complete equality. But in reality, nearly everywhere in the real world there is a stratification of one kind or the other. Even the tribal hunting and gathering societies were/are not innocent of stratification, though these societies may not have had such deep notches in their stratificatory systems as the more developed agricultural or industrial societies, but stratification exists there as well. There are ranked orders separating cadets, young adults, mature married people and elders. It is often argued that in such hunting and gathering societies it is not so much inequality as difference that is being exhibited. Although there is unanimity on this theme, this alerts us to the fact that hierarchy and difference ought to be considered together but as two separate concepts, in studies of social stratification.

Most contemporary societies, whether developed or developing, give evidence of a high order of stratification at various levels and of various kinds. There are various criteria on the basis of which people are stratified. The natural difference criterion for stratification, manifesting itself in racism, is well known, though natural differences do not naturally make for categories of social stratification. If some natural differences, such as colour, are highlighted, it is also true that in the same society there are many other natural differences that are not. The reasons then for emphasizing colour as a potent category of stratification do not lie in nature as much as they do in the specific character of that society that considers colour to be significant.

Very often, though there are no discernable natural differences in any tangible fashion, yet members of a society may believe that such differences in fact do exist. The caste system in India is one such example. Though there is no way by which those in a caste society can actually distinguish unfailing natural markers of difference, yet they justify caste stratification on the ground that different castes are built of different natural substances.

We have therefore, two diametrically opposite ways by which nature is forced by culture to act on its behest. In the case of race, a specific physical difference is picked on to substantiate, justify and perpetuate economic and social inequalities among people. But in caste societies where no natural differences can be discerned by the naked eye, it is imagined

that such differences exist and elaborate care is taken so that the substances that constitute each caste do not co-mingle. Hence the elaborate rules prohibiting inter-caste dining, or inter caste marriage.

Stratification does not depend solely on real or putative natural differences. Class, status, and power are some of the other axes on which stratification takes place. These are purely social categories as they are substantiated on markers that have nothing to do with either nature or with natural differences. But even these differences tend to be naturalized at the popular level.

Stratificatication: hierarchy and difference

Any understanding of a system of social stratification , as Dipankar Gupta has argued, cannot be limited to ranked gradations whether they be of power or wealth, status, purity, pollution, or colour, because such ranks tell us only about the order and very little regarding the potentialities for social mobility and changes within and of that order. In order to factor this element into the studies of social change, the importance of differences need to be asserted as well.

Differences can be said to exist when it is difficult to rank diversities. Wealth, income, status, and even power can be ranked in terms of there being more or less of a single variable. But there are other forms of strata differentiation that cannot be hierarchised or ranked in this fashion. For instance, if an attempt were made to rank different languages or religions or aesthetic preferences in hierarchical terms then it would not only be incorrect but also very offensive to many. Differences of this kind are incommensurable and are not amenable to ranking in terms of possessing more or less of a particular attribute.

Social stratification thus includes both hierarchy and difference. The first principle of distinction in the caste system is a qualitative one which is then sought to be hierarchised. Here one must note that this system of stratification is premised on differences first which are hierarchised later. Very often, ranked orders are imposed on what is inherently incapable of being ranked. The reality, as Dipankar Gupta has argued, is that "*differences posit logically equal categories whose intrinsic relationship is horizontal in character, and to then force them into a vertical hierarchy requires an extraneous agency - which is usually that of*

political power..." Blacks can be characterized as occupying a lower position not because black is inherently inferior colour, but because in a racist society the white population control power and use of colour as an ideological weapon of subjugation. Likewise, in the caste system, there is nothing inherently superior in belonging to one caste or the other. Logically these castes are separate and equal, but it is political power that decides which castes will be superior to which other, and which castes shall have precedence over other castes. Here *the hierarchy does not have the complicity of all those who are deemed to be within it.*

There is, however, a divergence of opinion regarding the direction of causality between the socio-economic conditions and caste system. The early missionaries and the orientalists believed that religion was the primary basis of social organization in the subcontinent, a stereotype that was later officially recognized and legitimated by the colonial empirical inquiry of the late nineteenth - early twentieth centuries. This colonial sociology rather simplistically argued that Indian society was primarily divided into two religious categories, the Hindus and the Muslims, while the former were further subdivided into mutually exclusive castes. Thus as far as the hindus were concerned, the early sociological generalization shared by a wide range of observers from Alfred Lyall to Max Weber, would have us believe that it was essentially religion which strung all kindred groups into the great circle of castes, thus providing a discontinuity berween the social and political systems and preventing the institutionalizing of an egalitarian ethic essential to a market economy.This generalization thus tended to introduce first a discourse of backwardness, and then what Bernard Cohn has called a ' discourse of differentiation'.

Recent academic debates on caste have revolved round this stereotypical image of Indian society, and as Sekhar Bandopadhyay has aptly remarked, this colonial knowledge has survived the process of decolonization. Modern structuralist sociologists such as Louis Dumont have argued that the structure of Indian society was constructed around a single true principle expressed through religious idioms. To him, it was the idea of 'hierarchy' based on the binary opposition of purity and pollution that determined the relative rank of castes and also controlled the relationship between them. The 'encompassing of the contrary' was the central idea of Indian social structure, in which the secular domain was encompassed and subordinated by the religious. For the more recent supporters of Dumont, T.N. Madan for example, any 'search for secular elements' in Indian cultural traditions , is a futile exercise,

because in this culture the power of the king is supposedly subordinated to the authority of the priests. At the core of this line of argument is the belief that ideology is the primary level of reality, and that all practices and social action must conform to it.

Ideology - a primary reality?

The culturalogical approach for long has claimed that the ideology is the primary level of reality and that all practices and social action must conform to it. According to this perspective castes constitute the primary reality of Indian society. All other identities and categories must therefore be subservient to caste. This view was also articulated by Weber and Hegel. Dumont amplifies the generic characterstic of this approach that the caste system conditions material reality in its own image and is, therefore, an irreducible and immutable given. The suggestion then is that as the caste system is independent of material conditions and political power, it can only be overcome by a willful conscious abnegation of the principle of hierarchy beginning with a radical devaluation of the status of the Brahman, i.e., by 'caste action'.

The views of Dumont who believes that "caste is a state of mind , a state of mind which is expressed by the emergence, in various situations, of groups of various orders generally called 'castes'" ,the direct outcome of this approcach is the belief that the Hindu mind is guided solely by a caste perspective and is perpetually bound by it. The peculiarities of Hindu mind are thus placed in the forefront, relegating the role of economic exploitation, classes and power in Indian society, at best, to a secondary position. Caste is then the key factor which explains not only our present backwardness but also holds up our future progress. Such a position, however, denies that traditional elements are malleable and often amenable to modernization, and also camouflages the role of hegemonic ideology in legitimizing the system of domination.

Sociological approach on the other hand seeks to unearth the material and historical roots of the caste system, and in particular searches for those peculiar features of India's material history which were responsible for the genesis of the caste system and which contributed to its development. Marxist approach of material existence determining consciousness, with its notions of base and superstructure, or infrastructure, positions the sociological approach quite centrally.

However, certain conclusions that are associated with Marxism have not gone uncontested. Here Dipankar Gupta posits a difference. He agrees that the caste system is certainly no myth, but that the caste system rests on the basis of the myth of natural superiority which each caste would like to express in its own way, and to its advantage. While this position is not contrary to the basic Marxist approach which seeks to locate ideological articulations and political expressions in relation to concrete social practices and struggles for dominance, the difference comes when Marxists look at historical progression in terms of the tensions between determinate economic classes, and also condition contemporary analyses by framing them within the context of class struggle.

Here he argues that while Brahmans have indeed played an important role in the codification of the caste system, it is not as if they were the sole motivators. Further, subscription to the notions of purity and impurity go much deeper and are not confined to the upper castes alone. Secondly, while upper castes strain to justify economic exploitation on caste grounds it is not as if this is blindly accepted by lower castes. If that had been the case then there would not have been caste dynamism, mobility and transformation in any form or degree in Indian history. The fact is that dominant castes exercise their power by forcing subaltern groups to accept their vision of caste hierarchy as the working principle in everyday life and conduct. That most castes abide by such norms does not mean that they intrinsically believe in them as well. It is the threat of force, and the actual use of force by the superior propertied castes that keep the lower castes in line. Yet because the belief in hierarchy and purity and pollution runs right through the caste system, no matter who comes to power next, a new hierarchy is sought to be enforced in place of the earlier one.

Caste Rules and Ideologies:

Rules are, most nakedly, instruments of power hierarchy. Ideology, on the other hand, tries to mask this nakedness, and may on occasions, even, at times, succeed in it. The caste rule in this sense, which holds that subaltern castes must serve the privileged ones, is an expression of power. And caste ideology attempts to cloak it. But what caste ideology also does is that it separates castes from one another on an enduring basis. Naturally this principle is active in the case of other castes as well so that ultimately there is no single caste ideology, but multiple ideologies sharing some principles in common but articulated at variance with, and even in opposition to one another. In effect, therefore, the rule of caste is only obeyed when it

is accompanied by the rule of power. Therefore, contrary to what Dumont claims, it is the hierarchy of power and economics where hierarchy is naked. Ideology, on the other hand, introduces hierarchy 'shamefacedly' but only after effecting the separation between discrete categories of castes.

The Rule of power - The King and the priest in Ancient India

The claim of ideology as being the primary reality draws support from the assumed supremacy of the priest in the caste structure. But historically this assumption stands on a weak ground. For example while in Vedic India, the distinction between a priest and a king, or a Brahman and a Kshatriya never fully developed, in the later periods the superior role and status of the king, even in the upkeep of the norms and ideology of the caste system, can hardly be contested. Ronald Inden in his article points to 'the central role played by the king in maintaining proper order' in a caste society, where performance of the appropriate codes of conducts or jatidharma determined the rank of each group. Where deviations took place and new castes emerged through improper mixing of bodily substance, it was only the king, acting on the advices of the Brahmans, who could legitimize such a disorderly situation by accommodating the new groups into the hierarchy.

To the orientalist scholars, on the other hand, caste was a system that provided for stability and order in the indigenous society. From the ancient Indian scriptures they tried to retrieve and reconstruct a picture of an ideal Hindu society that was governed by religion and ordered by caste. This was a society, which had its own code of law that was dominated by the Brahmans, whose power depended on a monopoly of scriptural knowledge. It was divided into endogamous sub-castes or jatis, which had distinctive rituals, separate social rights and varied disabilities. Yet, they were tied together by the power of religion and the dominance of the Brahman. These scriptural stereotypes of the orientalist period were often confusing the real and the ideal and sometimes consciously trying to impose their preconceived models on the field level data in pursuance of an imperialist agenda

The origins of caste system, the early form of it being the Varna system, can be traced to the Rig Vedic period. But, the Rig Veda rarely mentions the Brahmans, and the Purusukta legend of the Varna origin from the primeval being is a much later addition. In fact, in this primitive

era of a primarily pastoral agriculture, the Brahman-Kshatriya combine worked in tandem, and both Brahmans and Kshatriya were engaged in clearing jungles, making land arable, etc. Even in this period, Apte referring to the Shukla Yajur Veda, or the white Yajur Veda, argues that the status of the Kshatriyas in general, and the king in particular had gone up in relation to the Brahmans(Apte, 1951: 431). In the **Satapatha Brahman** we find that the priest is made to serve the king and legitimize his supremacy, "The priest makes the nobility superior to the people. And hence people here serve the Kshatriya, placed above them."(Chattopadhyaya,1977;231) Moreover, as late as in the Upanishadic period, we find in the Chandayoga Upanishad that King Pravahana instructed Brahman Gautam in the new doctrine of transmigration, revealing that the distinction between the warrior and priest had not yet developed. Afterall the Chandrayoga Upanishad had declared that ' *a performance accompanied by knowledge produces a better result than a performance without knowledge.*' According to the ancient law-giver, Gautama, both the king and the Brahman are jointly responsible for upholding the social order. Marglin also notes that after studying the Dharmashastra, that there is nothing in it to suggest that 'priesthood does not share in the power of royalty.' This amply demonstrates that the distinction between power and ritual was not absolute during the Vedic period, and the king was not always deprived, as Dumont says, of sacerdotal function.

Moreover, when Dumont asserted that the caste system was perfected eight centuries before Christ, he probably overlooked the Upanishads, which belongs to that period. The Upanishads, strictly speaking is not the work of Brahmans but of Kshatriyas. In the Upanishads, as Jawaharlal Nehru (1960) has recorded, '....the Vedas are referred to with respect but also in a spirit of gentle irony. The Vedic gods no longer satisfy and the ritual of the priests is made fun of.' The Upanishadic period is one of the Kshatriya ascendance and the 'secret knowledge' (literally Upanishad) that these texts propounded triumphantly proclaimed that 'this knowledge has never yet come to Brahmans, and, therefore in all the worlds has the belonged to the Kshatriya only.'(Chandrayoga Upanishad V.36, quoted in Chattopadhyaya, 1978: 101) therefore the perfection of the caste system, with the Brahman on the top, some eight centuries before Christ, is rather doubtable.

The ideological construct of the caste system further comes under cloud, when one takes note of the fact that, even in this period there was significant opposition to Brahmanism and to the

Vedas themselves. The most noteworthy opponent of Brahmanism was the school of Brahaspati, variously known as Vitanda or Vada depending on whether or not one accepted the ideas propogated by this school. This school denied the supremacy of the Vedas and declared itself against the mere mouthing of Vedic hymns. This tendency of opposition to the Vedas and to the pretensions of the Brahmins cannot be dismissed as the views of a group on the fringe. In the Arthashastra, the Lokayata School which most fully articulated anti - Vedism was regarded rather highly as a science of logic. Moreover, the spread of the later Lokyata schools, from which Buddhism borrowed extensively, was significant enough for the Brahmans to launch a concerted attack on them through the six Vedangas. *The political aspect of caste ideology is so evident at every step in the development of the caste system that it cannot be thought of as making its presence felt only 'surreptitiously'.* The protracted political and military struggle between Brahmanism and Buddhism, the rise of the Lokyata, of Tantricism and the Nastikas are a few other illuminations along the same lines.

Thus, caste in pre-colonial India was never just a religious concept based on notions of purity and pollution. The king was not subordinate to the priest, and the crown was never hollow. On the contrary, caste ranking was measured by distance from the crown, legitimated by royal authority and associated notions of honour. Caste system has always been political, shaped in fundamental ways by political struggles and processes and was consolidated through an alliance of Brahmanism and state power. Colonial rule used this caste structure, transformed it and to a large extent strengthened it to its own benefits. Dipankar Gupta brings this discussion to the contemporary periods with an emphatic assertion that '*secular power is the final arbiter of caste*'.

The role of power, thus, in development of caste system cannot be underestimated, nor can it be said that the distinctions between power and ritual was complete from the very beginning. There is plenty of evidence to argue that the cultural notions of ritual rank tended to go with the distributive pattern of wealth and power in the society. 'The Brahman came into his own in the post-Gupta period, when Buddhism began to decline and the Brahman's religious authority was backed by both an economic base and by his indispensability for the legitimization of power.'(Thapar, 1975: 32). The large number of land grants made to Brahmans during the Gupta period, coupled with the delegation of juridical authority over those lands to the Brahmans contributes to their ascendance. Around this time it was

important for a usurper of state power as well as for petty oligarchs to claim noble descent which necessitated the manufacturing of false genealogies. The Brahmans were thus playing the role of status legitimisers to their political overlords, and were therefore intimately tied with politics and power without which their own status was threatened.

Not all Brahmins qua Brahmans were granted superior status. In the earlier Jatakas, the Brahman's status was inferior to that of nobility, and they were generally considered to be of inferior status 'until they became priests to some of the kings of North India (Thapar, 1975: 30-31.) This clearly indicates that proclaimed high ritual status had to be backed by political and economic power to be socially realized.

Economic power and caste

The pre-eminent status attained by the Brahmans and the debasement of the untouchables cannot be considered as pre-given outcomes of the Hindu state of mind but, rather, resulted from a long historical process. The most salient feature of this historical process was the constant rivalry between various communities for political and economic power which was reflected in their varying and conflicting perception of Brahminism and of the Vedas.

This also explains the great mobility of groups in Indian history and also the manufacturing of fictitious genealogies for those who claimed higher status (Thapar, 1973: 353; Kosambi, 1975: 33). It also explains as to why, after the growth of feudalism, landed property was the most tangible basis of social and political status. From this perspective there is also little cause for disbelieving, as Dumont does, the empirical reality, recorded by McKim Marriot, that, it is to the landlord and not to the Brahman that maximum services are rendered in village in India. Further, powerful monarchs and land-owning communities in ancient and medieval India were not always of Kshatriya origin. Several powerful warrior kings from Chandregupta Maurya to Shivaji as well as 'those who became landholders by force of royal pleasure could hide their low origins by paying enough priestly Brahmans to support their claim' (Kosambi 1975:33)

Moreover, superior ritual status did not always entail superior economic and political power. Only in the Vedic age can it be said that the two coincided as the warrior-priest ruling class amalgam working in tandem to clear virgin land and to subjugate tribes which were a threat

to the Vedic Aryans who were quite primitive themselves. The amalgam came apart in the years to follow. The growth of large empires, the emergence of a developed state structure, with a standing army and large royal bureaucracy, necessiated greater preoccupation with administrative and political control. The list of duties of the king as prescribed in the **Arthashastra**; along with the multifarious activities for the officials of the bureaucracy detailed therein testify to this. This explicitly conpartmentalised and segregated the activities of the warrior/king from the poet/ priest. Operative political and social control was exerted exclusively by the non-priestly warrior class. But Brahmans continued to exercise their influence through clever manipulation of religion and rituals, and were also generously endowed with land, such as with the Brahmadaya lands. Those Brahmans who did not own land, or were impoverished, were not dominant in terms of the operative exercise of political ritual and power. Yadav draws our attention to Kathokosa Prakarama of Jinesvara Suri to show that landed property in his age emerged as the most 'tangible basis of social and political status.'(Yadav 1976: 45) We find here that 'ruling landed aristocracy composed of two strata - paramount rulers and the different grades of the feudal elite, who actually enjoyed higher status in society and emerged as a chief socio-economic class.'

The priests, however, were given superior ritual status, as in all other pre-capitalist societies because they were the ideological fountainhead on which the myth of 'natural superiority' endeavoured to legitimize exploitation. But this ritual superiority does not necessarily subsume actual dominance in secular affairs. Similarly, *social and political power emanated not from wealth alone but also from the role of the individual and of his community in the system of production.* Niharranjan Ray's study had conclusively shown that since the Gupta period, as a settled agricultural economy expanded in Bengal, the linkages between caste and class became more visible, with those providing physical labour losing status to those who refrained from it, but controlled land. Similarly, Hiteshranjan Sanyal in 'Social mobility in Bengal' shows how as a result of occupational specialisation, and not just ritual differentiation, sub-castes were emerging in pre-colonial Bengal through a constant process of fusion and fission. This was a society that permitted occupational mobility in keeping with the changes in the opportunity structure. Sanyal has argued that although such subcastes were knit together in a system of co-operation and interdependence, the high ritual rank of the upper castes was related to the material power and prosperity they represented. While the positive correlation between ritual rank and material power can be hardly doubted, the above

argument about co-operation and interdependence however falis to note this 'co-operation and interdependence' as acts of subordination and compulsion, not of volition, and therefore products of specific relations of power.

Caste and Class:

The concept of class relates to a person's social position defined through their occupation, relation to the means of production, and economic security. The different class groups are assumed to have different interests with relation to socio-economic development, and these differences will have political consequences. The occupational and material basis of the class concept is assumed to result in certain aspects of common behaviour amongst members of the class categories.

The nature of the relationship between class and caste has often led commentators to draw the two concepts together. K.L.Sharma has argued that 'caste and class represent to a large extent though from different angles the same social reality'. In a similar vein, Goldthorpe , in his study of social mobility, quotes John Stuart Mill's comment on the demarcation between classes of labourers being 'almost equivalent to an hereditary distinction of caste; each employment being chiefly recruited from the children of those already employed in it, or in the employments of the same rank with it in social estimation.' Both caste and class relations are often discussed in terms of exploitation and oppression, but there are also the attempts to keep the two concepts separate, in order to distinguish between material and caste interests.While caste does have a material aspect, but it is mediated through kinship and ideological factor.

Historically, caste has had important functional significance as each caste was associated with a hereditary traditional occupation indicative of a social division of labour. It is here that caste could perhaps be compared with class, which can be best defined in terms of the forces and relations of production and ownership of property. But the major problem about this assumption of a caste - class continuum arises from the supposed differences in the nature of inter-group relationship in the two systems of social organization .While in the case of the caste system, the hierarchy is seen to be never dissolving, based on the conception of inter-group relationship as one of functional specialization and economic dependence resting on the bonds co-operation, the complexities in the class structure are ultimately expected to be

reduced to a binary opposition between the two classes, the haves and the have-nots based as the relationship between the classes which is one of competition, or in the Marxian sense, of 'hostile opposition.' F.G. Bailey has therefore distinguished between the two systems of stratification by the describing the former as a 'closed organic stratification' and the latter as 'segmentary stratification', co-operation and competition being the two principles determining inter-group relationship in the two systems. Dipankar Gupta on the other hand distinguishes between 'Open' system and 'Closed' systems of stratification, with the pattern of mobility being the differentiating criteria between the two types of systems. In an open system of stratification, mobility within is an accepted property of the system. On the other hand, in a closed system of stratification, mobility is strongly discouraged.

Open and closed systems of stratification:

An open stratificatory system is, as defined by Gupta, a system that may have fixed and firm hierarchy, but individuals can go up, or even down the hierarchy. For example, in a modern bureaucratic establishment a person can rise from being a clerk to a manager, a manager to an executive director, and so on. Biographically, there are no reasons why a person cannot aspire to the highest position if the stated qualifications required to fill a position in a hierarchy are satisfied. In a closed system of stratification, however, a person may be strong and brave and yet, because of the accident of birth, not considered as a rightful member of the warrior class.

Caste - a closed system of stratification

Debarring mobility within a system of stratification is possible mainly when ascriptive criteria (for eg. Caste, colour, religion etc) are employed as the basis for ranking. This being the case it is quite clear that the issue of whether a system of stratification is open or closed also tells us whether this system is one that draws sustenance from quantitative hierarchies or from qualitative differences. In a closed system of stratification, first principle of distinction is a qualitative one which is then sought to be hierarchised. It is extremely important to note here that closed systems of stratification are premised on differences first which are hierarchised later. Very often, ranked orders are imposed on what is inherently incapable of being ranked. The reality is that differences posit logically equal categories

whose intrinsic relationship is horizontal in character. To then force them into a vertical hierarchy requires an extraneous agency- which is usually that of political power. Blacks can be characterized as occupying a lower position not because black is inherently inferior colour, but because in a racist society the white population control power and use of colour as an ideological weapon of subjugation. Likewise, in the caste system, there is nothing inherently superior in belonging to one caste or the other. Logically these castes are separate and equal, but it is political power that decides which castes will be superior to which other castes shall have precedence over other castes. Here the hierarchy does not have the complicity of all those who are deemed to be within it.

Class - an open system of stratification

In an open system of stratification, as the basis for the hierarchy is quantitative, one's inclusion at whichever level is above dispute. It is impossible to argue that a person with a lower income belongs to a more affluent class than the person whose income is much higher. To make claim of being rich or powerful without actually occupying these positions would only be self-delusionary. The only way to dispute a quantitative hierarchy is to reject it entirely and oppose it in the language of difference.

Caste and Class (Open and closed systems) - a case of disjoint sets?

Open and closed systems of stratification are not always discrete historical stages but can be closely interwined at the empirical level. This is because in every system of stratification there is a point beyond which mobility is made extremely difficult. As this is in open defiance of the system, so obviously, at this point, elements of difference have entered the picture. It is often believed that closed systems of stratification give way to open ones as we move on from feudalism to modern industrial capitalist economies. There is no doubt that modern industrial societies are what they are because of the tremendous dynamism and social mobility they allow. Yet as there are always imperfections in every system, as there are always attempts to protect one's bailiwick from competition, and as there is always the search for security in an insecure world, attempts are constantly made to ensure a closure in what is legally and formally an open system.

By the same token, closed systems of stratification have also witnessed tremendous upheavals and dynamism, but these have largely gone unnoticed because of the glacial pace of change. In contemporary times, however, this change can no longer be concealed largely because of the dominating force s of modernization and industrialization. Modernization has not only brought machines but, more crucially, changed relations between people. The mos t important effect has been the opening up of the village economy and the concomitant freedom of the lower order from economic bondage to rural oligarchs, or to members of ancient regime.

That modernization and the breakdown of the natural economy have enabled communities,classes and castes to move out of earlier categories does not mean that these earlier strata have lost their ideological force or sentimental power. Caste identities are still very strong even as castes are no longer locally confined. Legal justifications for upward caste mobility may be drawn from the liberal language of political democracy, but the emotional charge behind such drives is derived from strong caste loyalities. The fact however remains that caste mobility is now much more of a routine affair than it was ever in the past.

Mobility: caste and class

Mobility within the caste system

Though the caste system is a prime example of an ascription-based system of stratification, in which, any mobility is faced with strong headwinds of ideology, it is not as if mobility did not ever occur in Indian history. But every time this mobility happened, it aroused great deal of opposition and resentment from the entrenched powerful castes. The Rajputs and the Gujar Pratiharas between the eighth and the tenth centuries, and the Marathas and the Jats between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries, fought their way to the top by conducting a series of wars. Warfare was a routine to upward movement in the caste system. Protest movements also gave impetus to and facilitated claims to a higher position in the caste hierarchy.

It is impossible to deny that occupational mobility had been present in the Indian caste system in every period of its history. Colonial rule is believed to have further facilitated this

dispersal of wealth and power across caste lines. Niharranjan Ray's study had conclusively shown that since the Gupta period, as a settled agricultural economy expanded in Bengal, the linkages between caste and class became more visible, with those providing physical labour losing status to those who refrained from it, but controlled land. The caste system, in other words, was never a static or rigid system of stratification to be distinguished from the class system, which is supposed to be fluid. As a socio-political construct, it tended to continually change to reflect the actual relations of power in Indian society.

Mobility within class

In the open system of stratification by classes, mobility is an accepted charactersic of the system. In an open system of stratification a single variable must be held in common by all those included in the hierarchy. For example, if we take landownership, then the amount of land owned from zero acres upwards is placed in a hierarchy and in such cases this hierarchy is a continuous one. As a continuous hierarchy in an open system demands and depends upon an agreement over a base-line similarity in that a certain attribute is possessed by all in the hierarchy except that some have more of it than others, there is no room for prejudice in the making of the ranked order. And here, mobility is found to be justified when individuals acquire a higher quantum of a stated attribute. As the attribute itself is not being changed but is being graded, any instance of social mobility does not damage the position of others in the hierarchy. The movement up and down, and even horizontally, does not challenge the ideological basis of the hierarchy through there may be some resistance to particular individuals making it to a higher grade. Here, when mobility is an accepted feature of the hierarchy, then it is individuals who move up or down or horizontally within the system. When mobility is not an usual feature in the hierarchy, then it is groups, or categories that generally move in unision

If the open class system is to be challenged at the core then there is no alternative but to step outside the one-dimensional and flat variations of the graded hierarchy and call in a multitude of differences to fuel an ideology of change. The worker is not just somebody who occupies a certain position in the power hierarchy and in the economic hierarchy, but is an occupant of a social position that has many aspects to it than can be subsumed by a continuous hierarchy. While on the continuous hierarchical scale they acquiesced to a lower ranking, once elements

outside the hierarchy are brought in to flesh out and substantiate the fullness of their being, dissension is built into the continuous hierarchy. Perhaps the distinctions Marxists draw between *a class in itself* and *a class for itself* can be understood in this light. When a class functions within the ideological framework of the continuous hierarchy then it may be said to function as a class in itself. When this same class steps out of the quantitative hierarchy and attempts to delegitimise it, it must necessarily ballast itself by a substantiation of differences.

The social and material making of Varna scheme of stratification:

Varna system and its later variant of the Jati system are reflective of a material order. And based as they were on the concrete material structuring of social and economic power, they underwent changes with the changes in the latter. There have been drastic epochal changes, so drastic that the Varna scheme which corresponded to an earlier epoch might have been completely out of step in a later epoch.

The four-fold Varna scheme does not readily operate on the ground and because of this it is often dismissed as a fiction. But the reality, however, is that there are thousands of jatis, and not just four varnas. It is at the level of jatis that caste injunctions on marriage, occupation and social relations are conducted. There is no such jati as Brahman or Vaishya, but a large number of jatis claim to belong to different sections of the varna system. Though Varna categories may not operate with the kind of practical import as jatis do, notions of hierarchy and ascriptive status are clearly spelt out in this four-fold schema. Jatis draw their ideological rationale of purity-pollution, endogamy, commensality, and so forth, from the Varna model.

To view varna as fiction has the dangerous consequence of positing that the jatis existed in their current form from the very start. This would then conform to the 'state of mind' theory while the reality is that Varna and the jati system have close correspondence to different modes of production viz., the Asiatic and the Feudal.

The Asiatic mode of production

According to Marx, the Asiatic mode of production represented a system of explotation which he characterized as 'General Slavery'. This was distinct in essence from Graeco-Latin slavery as it did not exclude the personal liberty of the individual, and was not a relationship

of dependence vis-à-vis one another, rather achieved by the direct exploitation of one community by another. In other words, general *exploitation of the people directly by the superior community, or the state, is the crucial feature of the Asiatic mode of production.* This direct and general exploitation of one community by another precludes any relationship of dependence at the lower levels.

The Asiatic mode of production is not necessarily tied to a powerful state, as Marx himself had shown(Marx 1965: 70), nor to a hydraulic society, as Habib has also argued. Marx's characterization of the Asiatic mode of production does not in any way assume that the exploited community in these societies is an undifferentiated peasant mass. Stratification and differentiation among the exploited, Gupta argues, in no way militates against the concept of the Asiatic mode of production, nor does it contradict the principles of general exploitation.

The era of Asiatic mode of production: the emerging Varna order

The first sacred book of the Aryans the Rig Veda, was composed around'1500-1400 BC in the region between Kabul and Ganges. It is from the perusal of this and the three later Vedas that historians have been able to reconstruct the socio-economic conditions of that society until approximately 500BC, when the Vedic age is said to have ended. The Varna system came into being only after the Aryans settled in the vast Indo-Gangetic plains.the expansion of the Aryans and the early Vedic period did not occur by conquest alone. Some adventurous Brahmans and Kshatriyas from different Aryan kingdoms helped to clear jungles and made the land arable.

The primitive economy of the early Vedic period did not allow the Aryans to maintain a profound distance from the indigenous and subjugated communities in day-to-day activities. Even the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas worked on land and did other manual jobs essential in this phase of Aryan expansion. Therefore, for the conquering Aryans, the religious conversion of the non-Aryans into the Vedic folds was the most effective guarantee of their superiority. The esoteric sacred Vedic texts and religious rites were emphasized to bring about a peaceful acquiescence of non-Aryans to Aryan supremacy.

Varna system and generalized exploitation

The four strata of the Varna scheme did not emerge full blown from the very inception of the Aryan settlement in India. It is true that in the Rig Veda the main division is between the Arya and the Dasa varnas. But the Aryans themselves were not an undifferentiated community. They were divided into elites and commoners. The latter were called 'Vis' in the Rig Veda. This category later largely constituted the Vaishya community, the third stratum of the fully developed varna scheme. The Vaishyas were the common peasants engaged primarily in agricultural practice.

Members of several weak or unfriendly tribes who were unable to withstand the Aryan onslaught were enslaved by the Aryans or became a servile class in the Vedic economic structure. They were called the Dasas. The Dasa thus later came to mean, according to Kosambi, a helot of some sort. He had not the right to initiation, nor to bear weapons: he was property of the Aryan tribe as a whole, much in the same way as cattle.' The evidence that Kosambi and other historians have cited to show the absorption of Dasas in the Aryans fold leads one to believe that Shudras arose out of this servile population ' augmented also by such Aryans as were subjugated and enslaved in internecine warfare (Habib 1965: 23.)

From the ancient texts it appears that the basic unit of Aryan social life was the patriarchal family. The Aryans were also pastoral people who had domesticated the horse and, their indices of wealth were associated with cows, horses and other animals. They also sought to combine pastoralism with agriculture and are said to have used the wooden plough to cultivate barley and other cereals. There were, however, no towns at this stage and the Aryans were in fact rather proud of the great destroyer Indra who had allegedly demolished the earlier pre-Aryan towns (Habib 1965:23.)

The Aryans in this stage had a simple social structure. They were divided among tribes which they called Jana and lived in villages. 'Bali' was the recognized payment to the Brahman- Kshatriya combine and was more in the nature of an offering than a tax. There does not seem to exist any overlordship of land, but cattle and horses were owned by Brahmans and Kshatriyas. Most of the land was divided into fields cultivated by individual peasants who were regarded as kshetrapati or holders of the land. Lands as Kosambi said,

'... were allotted to groups in rotation, and within the group by rank.... Agriculture was so crude in any case that ploughed land had to be changed every year.'(Kosambi 1975:111) According to Habib, as the Aryans lived in semi-nomaidic conditions, the conception of permanent occupation, let alone ownership of particular fields could not have possibly developed.

In contrast to the earlier nomadic Rig Veda stage, the later Vedic phase denoted a phase of great Aryan expansion. Beginning more specifically from the Yajurvedic stage, according to Kosambi, Aryans had developed settled agriculture, some trade and strong class structure within the tribe. Also unlike in the Rig Vedic period, the Aryans now produced wheat, several kinds of pulses, rice and even sugarcane. Society was not pastoral as in the Rig Vedic age. The peasant now produced surplus to maintain priests, princes and their retinues, though the wooden plough was still in use. The peasants, Vaishyas, became increasingly subject to exactions of the superior class. While the grain tithe of the Vaishyas served to maintain Brahmans and Kshatriyas, the shudras performed essentially menial tasks and were a domestic adjunct, small in number at this stage.

In spite of such sharp differentiations, manarchy did not develop. Tribes took the form of oligarchies, where the undifferentiated superior community was maintained by the efforts of the Vaishya commoners and Shudra menials, or helots (Habib, 1965:66). The distinction between artisans and peasants had not developed. They belonged to the undifferentiated Vaishya category of the Varna scheme. This was probably due to the low level of productive forces of that period. Some iron weapons were made by smiths for the nobility, but they were few and of an inferior quality. This suggests that these artisans probably also had an additional stable means of livelihood, namely agriculture. The utilization of wooden implements produced limited surplus, and this did not favour greater class differentiation either.

The differentiation of the varna scheme into four broad categories thus was a reflection of the socio-economic formation of that period, namely, small peasant predominated villages which used pre-iron agricultural equipment and gave up the surplus to the Brahman-Kshatriya combine. The latter directly collected the surplus from the peasantry and took advantage of the artisans' rudimentary skills. As the **Satapatha Brahmana** states:"The state

authority feeds on the people. The state is the eater and people are the food: the states, the deer, and people are the barley."(Sharma 1975:6) Likewise, the principal aim in the later Vedas is to sanction this exploitation. It is made clear that man is born with certain 'rinas'(debts) and that he can overcome these rinas by following the injunctions laid down in the Vedic scriptures, by paying homage to the gods and the Brahman rishis, and by swearing allegiance solely to the lawmakers and the law-enforcers(Apte 1951:445).

The entrenchment of the varna scheme may in no small measure be attributed to the fact that until the first half of the first millennium BC, the settled phase of Aryan society was prolonged on account of the persistence of pre-iron agriculture. India saw the advent of iron four centuries after Greece did and two centuries after Iran. 'Hence on account of low agricultural productivity, ritualism and ritualistic class grew far more rapidly in India' (Sharma 1975:13), rigidifying the ritual basics of the varna order as well. As Emmanuel Terray states: ' it is not articles made, but how they are made, or by what instruments, that enables us to distinguish different economic epochs. Instruments of labour not only supply a standard of the degree of development to which human labour has attained, but they are also indicators of the social conditions under which labour is carried on.'

The varna scheme was rooted in a deeper reality, namely the relations of production, or the character of exploitation, which remained largely unaltered from the later Vedic to the Mauryan period. There is nothing inherently contradictory between the existence of extensive differentiation and division of labour and a simple four-tiered stratification system, such as the varna system.The two can be reconciled, Gupta argues, as they were in the Mauryan period. The second phase of iron which began approximately around 550BC made greater surplus expropriation possible by intensifying the prevailing structure of exploitative relations. The release of productive forces with the more intense utilization of iron crystallized the formation of the state and its apparatuses such as the royal bureaucracy and a standing army.

For the appropriate utilization of this technological breakthrough, the state grouped different categories of artisans in separate guilds and directed their energies solely towards the production of superior agricultural tools and weapons. While the former augmented the

agricultural surplus, the latter enhanced the instruments of coercion at the hands of Mauryans.

Exploitation still continued to be general. Evidence suggests that certain artisans, such as smiths and carpenters, settled in villages composed only of members of their caste, and where they also had to, quite naturally, cultivate land for themselves (Habib 1965:29). Such manufacturers' villages were a peculiarity of this period, indicating that strict occupational specialization resulting in exchange at the local level did not exist to a significant degree.

As each community was largely self-sufficient, because agriculture was still open to all, and as exploitation was general, hardly any economic interaction among different groups and communities existed at the local level. This rendered further elaboration of the four-tiered varna scheme unnecessary, and the four-fold varna scheme remained the dominant model of status and economic differentiation. Other groups, tribes and srenis(composed of certain communities and tribes outside the empire who had been subjugated by the state) found their place in one of the four categories, more often at the bottom , but sometimes in the Kshatriya category, through various occupations prevalent in that period. The ramifications of caste rankings among artisans, peasants and traders had not yet developed, nor had notions of superiority and inferiority bordering on competition amongst the erstwhile constituents of the Vaishya and Shudra communities. This was because they were all exploited by the state and had few, if any, rights and obligations towards each other.

From the Vedic age to the Mauryan period we find the gradual development of a monolithic, centralized authority. Though productive forces increased in this period with the second phase of iron, they did not bring about a qualitative change in the relations of production. Authority and ownership still lay with the state, and with the growth of powerful empires, exploitation became more general and more intensive. The Vedic rationale of superiority on an ascriptive criterion continued to serve in this period as well. Its dominance was an outcome of a stagnant economy with low rates of production in the pre-iron Vedic age.

The phase beginning from the Yajurvedic age to the fall of the Mauryan empire, is in essence similar to Marx's Asiatic mmode of production. Ownership and authority over land were vested with the state, which led to the general exploitation of the peasantry and artisans

by the state via the royal bureaucracy, or directly by the oligarchs of the Vedic era. It was this system of generalized exploitation that brought about the Varna order of differentiation wherein the various distinctions between the artisans and peasants had yet to develop. This was for two reasons. First, each community was largely self-sufficient, as agriculture was open to all. Secondly, exploitation was general. The subordinate communities wereall exploited by the superior communities, or the state. Together these did not demand further elaboration of obligations and duties beyond the four-fold varna scheme, which adequately defined the status and privileges of numerous communities and groups which accreted over a period of time to the Vedic and Mauryan societies.

Transition to feudalism and localised exploitation

There were contradictions and forces of change within the Asiatic mode of production, in the specifics of its Indian variant, which led to its gradual dissolution, albeit over centuries, resulting in far-reaching changes in the forms of stratification and property rights.The period ending approximately with the Mauryan Empire was characterized by substantial trade and mercantile activity.Between the peasant mass and the monarchs were the pauri janapadas who were leaders of erstwhile tribal formations.According to **Arthashastra**, they were paid salaries.

Mauryan society did, however contain within itself the seeds of its own destruction. The disintegerating forces of the period were, firstly, the contradiction between private property and the property of t e state. The early stirrings of landlordism emergedh in the Mauryan period s thajanapadas were able to convert surplus to private property, though during the reign of Mauryas this contradictionwas not allowed to develop. Secondly, the population of craftsmen increased and certain skills like smelting became widely known under the impetus of the growth of commerce and the centralized administration of the Mauryas. This meant that individual artisans could begin moving to villages (Habib).thirdly, the forcible settlement of Shudras as cultivators, advocated by Kautilya, transformed a large number of Shudras from pure menials and servants of the nobility, to peasants and rural labourers. This transformation also helped the subsequent growth of a village-based economy around 200 AD. These peasant villages were subordinated to local chiefs who had begun to assert their local authority and whose links with the emperor were tenuous and much weaker than in earlier times. This development is often characterized as feudalism which took on a more

pronounced form during the Gupta (400-500 AD) and the Harsha periods (700 AD), and continued down through the medieval age under different local economic formations.

Thus because of the practice of land grants, accompanied by the administrative rights to the grantees (Brahmans were the prime beneficiaries, and the officials of the empire (in Mauryan period, were paid in cash), who in the Harsha's period were paid a percentage of revenues, individual ownership of land was quite prevalent. From the seventh to the twelfth century AD these features crystallized. The distribution of land among royal kinsmen and officers was a widespread phenomenon of this period. This period is also characterized by the breakdown of large-scale commerce and trade.

The jati system and localized exploitation

The ruralisation of the ruling class was accompanied by the ruralisation of the artisans and handicraft workers. Never before had the peasants and craftsmen been subject to such direct control by local chiefs, their intermediaries and clansmen. Moreover, in the feudal structure of exploitation, the subordinate communities were generally not linked directly to the state, but to the various local intermediaries and to the feudal lords. Now, the intermediaries and clansmen of the overlords were paid not so much in cash by way of salaries, as in land grants. This led to a hierarchy of direct exploiters in feudal societies as the noblemen held differential sizes of land, depending on their rank and closeness to the overlord, and on their right to differential shares of the produce of the peasants, which they extracted through extra economic coercion in their respective demesnes.

In feudal societies all land generally did not belong to the overlords or to his intermediaried and clansmen. Some land was distributed to particular groups in return for their services during military campaigns. The rest was given over for peasant (ryot) cultivation. The landlord's own land was either cultivated by serfs, or by ryots who, in addition to giving up part of the surplus on their own allotments, were forced by the lords to render service.

This localization of exploitation had several consequences. First, there was the decline of trade. Second, the exactions by the overlords and the nobility from the serfs, peasants and artisans increased. This was possible as the former held juridical rights over their area. Third, as land became the index of wealth and power it was highly prized and cultivation emerged

in this period as the only viable occupation for the people. Those peasants who had enough land to make a living out of agriculture were, as a consequence, held in greater esteem, than those who had to supplement agriculture by crafts and artisanry. Fourth, not only did stratification increase and deepen among the ruling class, but it also in turn differentiated the subordinate community who served them. The peasants were split into grades depending on the type of allotment, differing amounts of payment, whether state peasant, or tied and taxed by the feudal lord.

A peasant's status also depended on the status of his feudal overlord.artisans were ranked depending on the rank of their patrons or of their customers. The other side of this tendency towards greater stratification in feudal societies was the greater integeration and interdepence in the local village between communities and occupational specialists. No longer were the villages belonging to any one artisan community: each village now had not only its lords and nobles, its ryots and officials, but also its complement of goldsmiths, weavers, iron-smith, potters, etc.

It was the progressive development of this economic structure of localized exploitation within the village nexus which bought about the elaboration of the jati, or what is popularly known as the Indian caste system. The dependence of the lower exploited classes on each other and on their masters in a closed society necessitated greater elaboration of the rules of exchange and intercourse. The rationale of 'natural superiority' which served the varna scheme so well was not abandoned. It worked effectively in a more differentiated fashion to underpin the regime of jatis. The general exploitation of the Asiatic mode of production of the previous epoch, whereby the obligations and duties of the artisans and peasants vis-à-vis each other had not been elaborated, now gave way to more clearly specified patterns of interaction due to the exigencies of localized feudal exploitation. Also the notion of 'untouchability' originated around 200 AD, especially in association with the Chandalas. The institution took an extreme form by the twelfth century AD as revealed in the Parasamriti.

It is not merely the proliferation of numerous occupational groups that distinguishes jati and varna. It wasn't as if the Vedic age had only four orders of Varna schema. There were various occupational groups and communities which did not fit into Varna schema very successfully. This, however, did not create any problems of controlling social relations of the

period because exploitation was general and the exploited classes served the superior community with little economic intercourse among themselves. The status of numerous occupational groups of peasants, artisans, menials, etc., corresponded generally to that of either the Vaishya or the Shudra varnas. Further delineation of status and position among them was not necessary. The evolution to jatis was on account of the social transition to a closed village economy.

With the levels of productive forces remaining stagnant, any rise in population was accommodated in the feudal structure of medieval India at the cost of greater rigidification and further stratification of the jatis. Population pressure did not expand the frontiers of land utilization, but led instead to greater differentiation within the confines of the feudal economy. This resulted in a plentiful supply of skilled labour which was intensively utilized for the expropriation of use values and also for commodity producton, which in turn inhibited productivity. To quote Irfan Habib : "While it is true that extensive development in technology can only occur when metal, particularly iron, replaces other materials, this change can be delayed ina particular situation for no other reason than that a tool of lower efficiency can be used to manufacture the same commodity by employment of cheap skilled labour." Besides the abundance of skilled labour in a labour-intensive economy, the number of jatis was also enhanced by the continuing absorption of tribals, whose lands were avvexed by the might of the nobility the village nexus. They were forced to render certain services to meet local needs, and were likewise placed in the hierarchy, usually at the bottom.

When trade resumed on a large scale in eleventh century AD; it did not disturb this village structure. Indeed, the needs of the trade very often brought about new occupational groups. Similarly, during the Muslim period, the regeneration of powerful royal bureaucracies did not dismantle this feudal set-up.

Thus the Varna and Jati systems did not just descend full blown but gradually evolved over time. The values and ideologies pertaining to Varna and Jati have roots in material history and in actual relations among people.

CHAPTER 2

CHANGES IN THE AGRARIAN STRUCTURE

With hardly 10 per cent urbanization rate, Bihar in stark reflection of Mahatma's quote, lives in her villages. Any attempt, therefore, to trace its life pattern would have to pass through its rural setting. And in this rural setting, importance of agriculture which provides livelihood to an overwhelming majority of its population can hardly be exaggerated. It remains the most important sector, especially so for the rural Bihar, both, in terms of employment as well as overall growth trends, especially after bifurcation of the state. As the primary sector (as of 2004-05), agriculture contributes more than 42% of Bihar's SDP, and provides employment to almost 80% of its workforce. The service sector contributes 49% and industry a mere 9%. Most of Bihar's former mineral wealth and industry are now located in Jharkhand. With a very small industrial base and hardly any new investments in the offing, future growth in Bihar depends largely on the performance of agriculture.

As agriculture is the lifeline of the state's economy, any attempt to understand the structure and the dynamics behind underdevelopment of the state, therefore, has to take a close look at this rural-agrarian set-up and the dynamics operative here. This chapter traces the changes that this rural-agrarian structure of has undergone particularly in the post ninety era.

This chapter takes a look at the natural resource position of rural Bihar, which at once presents the possibilities and constraints acting on the existence of the rural population and agricultural sector's productive potential. Given this resource base, a look at how the agricultural sector has fared in contributing towards the overall production in the economy would give us an idea of its role in the play of the state's socio-economic dynamics and structure.

Then we move on see as to how different sections of population, according to their resource position, and their positioning in the production process, have fared in this sector in the post ninety era. Because the production process and the conflict in the life experiences of the rural masses is mainly 'landesque' in character, we take a historical perspective on the nature of conflict and how land reforms in the state addressed this conflict. This could explain

evolution of not only economic relations among various groups but also their social relations and the choices that they make as individuals/ citizens of the society.

The resource base of agriculture:

Bihar is rich in its soil quality with abundance of water resource, but there is only a meager presence of forests and an almost absence of mineral resources. The average precipitation is adequate but aberrations like floods and droughts are frequent. Agriculture has been bedrock of Bihar's economy.The dominance of agriculture in Bihar's economy has become more apparent as a result of bifurcation of the state in 2000. After separation of Jharkhand, it has lost two of its major resources, namely mineral and forest resources. Nevertheless, its water resources and the intrinsic soil quality are among the best in the country, but they continue to remain mostly as "potentials" begging to be explored with nearly 40 per cent of the cultilvated area being raifed. The unchanellised water resources of the state have another side to it as 41 per cent of the state's area is flood prone and nearly 51 per cent of the flood affected people live in Bihar. Also the high quality of the soil of the gangetic plains is marred by the water logging problems.

The land resource:

The 83 million strong state in the post-bifurcation period also has an adverse land - man ratio; the share of population which Bihar has now to support is over two and a half times of its share of land resources. The state has 173.80 lakh hectare of land of which only 71 lakh hectares (i.e 40.86% of total area) is under cultivation. The state has one of the highest population densities in the country, having a density of 880 per sq. km as against average of 324 per sq. km. for the country. The land holdings in the state are mostly small farms, and land holdings have shown a tendency of high degree of fragmentation. As a result of this fragmentation, average size of holdings is declining, having fallen to around 0.6 hectares, and over four-fifth of the agricultural holdings are marginal (less than 1 hectare), in which average size is merely 0.31 hectare.

The water resources:

Bihar is very favourably endowed with water resources, both surface as well as ground. The ultimate irrigation potential of the state has been assessed at 106 lakh hectares which far exceeds its total sown area of 80 lakh hectares and net sown area of 56 lakh hectares. Even if the cropping intensity in the state rises in future and goes up to 200 per cent (Punjab level being 190%), its ultimate irrigation potential will be sufficient to cover nearly its entire sown area and no cropped area should go rainfed because of the constraint of its water resources.

While the percentage of gross irrigated to gross sown area has increased over the years from 23.5% in 1950 - 1951 to 57.1% in 2001, the fact remains that more than 40% of agriculture is rainfed resulting in its drought-prone nature, which is compounded by its highly flood-prone terrain(which is 41% of the area) . The low growth rate of agriculture to which attention was drawn in the previous section, and marked fluctuation in the year to year yield is contributed to in a significant way by these two serious problems. This has got compounded on account of a significant decline of public investment during the nineties.

Tubewells account for more than 50% of total irrigated area of Bihar. The fact that almost 93% of the tubewells are diesel pumpsets rule these out as the possible source of irrigation of small and marginal farmers because of its cost structure. Thus irrigated land is most likely to be the privilege of the rich and powerful in the agrarian economy . However, tubewells per thousand hectares of net sown area (103) is well below that in Punjab (228). Moreover, irrigated area per tubewell is only 3.21 hectares as against 6.38 hectares in Punjab. The main reason for this low level of efficiency of tubewell use is their almost entire dependence (about 93% vis-à-vis 37% in Punjab) on the much less efficient diesel pumpsets rather than the electric ones.

The human resource: population, employment and productivity

The population scenario has worsened in Bihar in the nineties with serious implications for the the economy - in particular the labour market. Unlike India as a whole where population growth has decelerated during the period 1991-2001, in Bihar it has accelerated. As a consequence there has been much larger addition of labour force than anticipated. Most of the additional labour, although not openly unemployed (unemployment is a luxury that the poor and the destitute can hardly afford) are those

whose participation in the labour markets exists under highly distressful conditions because there hardly has been any growth in the economy.

Table 6: Structural Change in Bihar and India (% age points)

Sector	Structural Change in Income (1994-2001)		Structural Change in Employment (1994-2000)	
	Bihar	All-India	Bihar	All-India
PRIMARY	-8.81	-6.95	-0.01	-5.06
SECONDARY	+1.94	+1.29	+1.72	+2.02
Regd. Man.	-0.13	*+0.71*		
Unregd. Man.	+0.01	*+0.41*		
Construction	+1.49	*+0.06*		
TERTIARY	+6.87	+5.65	-0.13	+2.24

Source: IHD report , 'A Development Vision of Bihar'-table 2

Between 1993-94 and 1999-2000 the compound annual growth rate of employment in Bihar has been 2.8 per cent as against 1.02 per cent at the All India level. The higher growth of employment in the state in comparison to All India, however, does not represent a positive trend as most of the addition to the workforce in the state during the nineties has largely been absorbed by already saturated agricultural sector. This is a clear reflection of *distress led higher labour participation in agriculture* in the absence of other employment avenues. As a result, agriculture sector employing more than three-fourth of workforce shows a net fall in the labour productivity per worker. There has been a negative rate of change during 1994-00 in the primary sector productivity per-worker (- 0.77% p.a.) vis-à-vis +3.67% at the country level(table 2)

Wages in agriculture:

But flying in the face of the productivity theory of wages, agricultural/rural wages in Bihar have been rising all through the nineties (though rate of growth has varied in this period) while the productivity in the sector has been on decline. This is an indication of the fact that productivity is not the driving force behind the wages; rather it is the land to man ration, and supply of labour that drives the wages. Increase in wages in the state in the period has to be seen largely in the context of increasing rate of out-migration from the state.

Table 7 : comparative Account of Average Wage of Farm Workers, Statutory Minimum Wage and ACGR in Real Wages across States during 80s and 90s

	Nominal Wage in Rs.		Statutory Min. Wage		Trend growth in real wages in %			Point-wise growth in real wages in %		
STATES	1991-92	2002-03	1991	2002	1983-94	1994-00	1996-03	1983-94	1994-00	1996-03
Andhra Pradesh	21.14	59.59	17.1	53.25	2.02	2.36	6.16	2.65	3.29	4.17
Assam	27.19	65.56	32.6	42	2.07	1.07	3.13	2.04	0.71	4.43
Bihar	**22.2**	**55.27**	**16.5**	**45.18**	**2.51**	**1.44**	**5.00**	**3.25**	**1.69**	**5.61**
Gujarat	22.64	66.68	15	50	-0.70	3.83	-0.52	-0.08	1.62	4.32
Haryana	41.75	83.2	NA	74.6	3.42	2.41	-0.02	3.42	2.15	-1.62
Karnatka	16.84	58.41	14.8	51.63	2.70	4.48	8.76	4.33	2.05	11.67
Kerala	39.61	247.14	28	35.1	3.73	9.83	7.92	4.50	8.49	14.16
Madhya Pradesh	20.13	49.72	18.43	51.88	3.55	4.88	3.64	3.91	6.65	2.19
Maharashtra	22.86	60.11	16	45	3.60	1.85	4.00	5.82	1.77	3.92
Orissa	17.37	58.63	25	52.5	4.14	1.17	8.53	4.65	1.32	9.47
Punjab	43.18	NA	37.5	77	3.56	-1.89	-1.52	3.69	-1.80	-1.99
Rajasthan	31.1	86.11	22	60	1.05	2.52	3.18	-1.08	1.36	5.83
Tamil Nadu	17.58	118.83	14	54	3.32	1.99	1.58	4.46	-0.92	15.50
Uttar Pradesh	25.15	56.38	18	58	2.42	4.04	1.92	2.34	3.05	0.56
West Bengal	28.16	80.25	60.5	22.88	6.63	1.66	4.79	7.67	0.69	5.59

Source: Computed from NSSO wage/salary data.

Note: Nominal wage and the SMW for farm workers in a state vary across regions; the mid-value of these wages are presented in the above table. Real wage is obtained by dividing average wage with the consumer price index of agriculture labour with 1986-87 as base.

Production:

Before bifurcation of the state, agriculture together with fisheries and forestry accounted for 33% of the GSDP in 1998-99. In the post bifurcation Bihar, importance of agriculture has increased tremendously as most of its industrial and mineral resources have been lost to the new state of Jharkhand. In fact, in 2001 agriculture contributed nearly 40 % of GSDP, and

agricultural labour and cultivation together accounted for 80% of the employment of the work force. Importance of agriculture can also be gauged from the fact that according to the nss report 2003, 60.6% of rural households are farmer households. On a comparative note, industrial sector contributes only 12%to the GSDP, and employs fewer than 10 % of the workforce. Tertiary sector is the largest, generating nearly 49 % of GSDP and that too mainly in trade and transport services, finance and real estate and govt. sector.

Growth performance:

State experienced 0 per-cent growth rate in the first half of the 1990s, having fallen from the avg. of 4.9 % in the eighties. And since 1994-95, annual growth rate has averaged around 3.8%, or about 1% per annum in per-capita terms(table 1). As a result, income growth and consumption levels have lagged seriously, thereby widening gap between Bihar and the rest of India. Underlying the result has been exceptionally weak performance in agriculture.

In the 1980s, agricultural growth in Bihar was 4.6%, above the national average (at 3.6%) and causing some hopeful observers to speculate that Bihar's economic takeoff had begun. However, in the early 1990s (1991- 92 to 1995-96) the agriculture sector actually shrank, with growth plummeting to -2.0%. Overall agricultural growth rates in Bihar have been more positive in recent years, recovering since the late 1990s, and averaging 7.9% annually between 1995-96 and 2004-05. This recent performance, which occurred despite a general breakdown of governance and very low levels of investment in rural development, suggests the potential for future growth.

Agricultural growth in Bihar, however, is characterized by large swings, with annual growth ranging from 30% to -20%. Such volatility illustrates the sector's dependence on rain for irrigation, and the effects of seasonal flooding. During the 1980s, the steady growth of industry and the service sector served to offset agricultural volatility. In the 1990s, the service sector continued to grow, but industry lost its momentum. Data for both divided and undivided Bihar indicate industrial stagnation in the early 1990s, a recovery of growth in the late 1990s, and a subsequent slowing down for divided Bihar. This has increased the importance of agricultural growth, resulting in more volatile overall growth rates, and adversely affecting income security as well as investment climate. While Bihar has fertile soil that allows for double, and sometimes triple, cropping, as well as an abundance of

groundwater for irrigation, agricultural productivity remains low. This also means, however, that increased investment could significantly increase agricultural productivity, suggesting that the agrarian masses could have a better future if state decided to intervene on its side, the side of development.

Investment in agriculture:

As a World Bank report puts it, "**India's poorest state is a net exporter of capital**. While the state has practically washed its hands of its developmental responsibilities, private enterprise turns out to practically the sole winner of investment for the agricultural sector. A significant measure of investment activity here becomes the credit/deposit ratios. Banking reforms that facilitated the entry of foreign banks and greater competition between publicly owned banks have put pressure on bank managers to increase returns, in turn increasing the likelihood of regional disparities in credit availability. Here again, Bihar has suffered the most severe decline of any major state. Bihar's credit/deposit ratio fell from 40% in 1991 to 21% for divided Bihar in 2002. While this ratio declined for every state except Maharashtra, and partially reflects heavier bank investment in government debt, such a steep decline in Bihar is noteworthy. This means that for every rupee deposited in Bihar, now only 21% is extended as credit in Bihar, implying a significant movement of capital out of the state, despite relatively high savings rates.

Not only has Bihar's credit/deposit ratio worsened, but the proportion of credit extended to agriculture and industry has also decreased; the largest increases are in personal loans. By contrast, in many other states private companies are accessing an increasing proportion of credit. On the positive side, however, such capital flight indicates a potential state capital pool which could be mobilized internally were Bihar's investment climate to significantly improve.

With such a crippling dependency on a sector which stands out in its total lacking of any significant and effective system of infrastructure and where more than three-fourth of the farmers are marginal and small farmers, subsistence concerns naturally overwhelm agriculture in Bihar. Foodgrain crops cover 87 percent of the gross cropped area (GCA) in the state. Rice and wheat together claim nearly 70 percent of the cropped area, and cropping pattern shows rigidity overtime. Income from agriculture is crucially supplemented by animal

wealth, as livestock generates nearly 21 percent of agricultural output in the state and is an important source of income and employment for millions of landless and small landholders in the state.

With a subsistence agriculture supporting such a huge proportion of population, the fact that **90 % of the poor live in the rural areas comes as no surprise**. Rural poverty incidence, 41% by the estimates of Deaton and Dreze, is substantially higher than the urban level (24.7%) and with a low urbanization rate, poverty is no doubt predominantly rural. Interestingly, these rural areas, soiled in the toil of agricultural labour fetching mere subsistence, are also grounds of mass political mobilization. But the profile of the rural population and the poor therein is not homogenous. The poor are differently placed both in the social and production relations.

There is a social and economic heterogeneity among the rural population and the rural poor, which could frustrate any attempt towards the generating closure of ranks among differently placed groups. Nevertheless political process, particularly in the nineties, saw consolidation of a huge mass of the rural population, in particular the weaker (led by the not so weak) sections of the society on one particular poltical platform. Interestingly, mutual hostility (hostility has solid social and economic reasons to play on) is a common observation among the groups which consolidated successfully for the first time to negate the higher castes' dominance of the regimes of the state. But within next ten years, we see a breaking down of that consolidation with the self anointed 'social justice' regime finally loosing the seat of power so firmly held for the last fifteen years to an alternative political combination which contested elections on the agenda of development (but a very subtle and calculative caste arithmetic was at work behind the agenda of development). A closer look at the social and economic heterogeneity of the rural population, and change in that structure might lead us to some clue about this political consolidation of diverse and often mutually hostile groups on one political platform and a final breakdown of this consolidation and re-emergence of a new coalition of forces with a strikingly different social character.

Agrarian structure:

Nearly 90% of Bihar's population lives in rural areas. With extremely limited rural non-agricultural employment, almost 80% of Bihar's population remains dependent on agriculture for their main source of income, and 41.1% of the rural population lives below the poverty line. Economic inequality in rural India hinges on land ownership, with distinct histories in different parts of India. After independence, Bihar was one of the first states to pass legislation abolishing the *zamindari* system of land tenure, although this was not implemented for another decade, and laws on landholding ceilings have been disregarded in many parts of the state. While landholding patterns have changed significantly since the mid-1980s, with marginal and small holdings increasing and large and medium holdings decreasing, land ownership remains extremely unequal .Upper caste landholders continue to own a significant percentage of agricultural land.

The available data for landholdings demonstrate the extent of inequality in the agrarian structure. For example, while 80% of operational holdings in Bihar are marginal (below one hectare), these holdings account for only 36% of total operational land area. At the other end, medium and large operational holdings of more than four hectares comprise less than 2.5% of all holdings, but constitute over 20% of operational land area. NSSO surveys give a picture of land possession and cultivation by different caste groups, but as these surveys prior to 1999 did not use the OBC category, so no comparison can be made using these surveys over time to gauge how these patterns may be changing. It is clear, however, that OBC households own less land than households in the "Other" category, and that Scheduled Caste households fare much worse. OBC households own more marginal holdings (less than 0.4 hectares) compared to "Other" category households, but as the size of the land holdings increase, OBC ownership decreases (table 9). Only 9% of Scheduled Caste households cultivate land somewhat larger than marginal holdings and 66% do not cultivate, representing the high number of Scheduled Caste households dependant on income from agricultural labor(table 10). The average size of cultivated land holdings has decreased significantly, and land being leased out to others has increased. Leasing negatively impacts production because cultivators who rent land (often referred to as "leasing-in") are unlikely to make long-term investments: rent cuts into profits, leaving less capital for investment and also that investment is not fully realizable . While leased-in land constituted less than 5% of cultivated land in 1992, this

increased to nearly 25% by 1998(though a visit to the villages suggest that these figures are likely to be gross underestimates). Households with marginal and small operational holdings cultivate the largest percentage of leasedin land. Backward caste, Scheduled Caste and, to a lesser extent, Muslim cultivators are leasing-in a significant portion of their operational holdings, while the percentage of leased-in land is marginal for upper caste cultivators. In sum, despite the political empowerment of OBCs in Bihar, land ownership patterns display old patterns of dominance. An increasing percentage of land is being leased-out by mostly upper caste landowners to mostly lower-caste marginal and small cultivators, reflectint their increasing disassociation with agriculture.

Profile of Landownership:

Landownership and poverty -

In Bihar incidence of landlessness has increased in the decade of nineties from 9% to 10% of the rural households. Similarly, proportion of households in the marginal and small farmer segment has increased significantly in the same time period. While 67% of the rural population had land sizes of less than 1 hec.in the early nineties, the proportion in this category of small landholders went up to 73% in 1999-2000. In fact there is a trend of fragmentation of landholdings of all sizes as percentage of population holding land in all size groups has fallen. Earlier 43% of rural population had ownership over the land size of 0 - 0.4 hec. Now it is 53%. Land ownership is also closely associated with poverty The poor typically own less land than the non-poor in Bihar. In fact, ***75%of the rural poor were 'landless' or "near-landless" in 1999-2000. This has expanded by 8% since 1993-94.*** Here one also must observe that while incidence of poverty has declined for all land-owning classes, but the ***incidence of poverty has increased for the landless from 51% to 56% during the nineties***, also the share of poor of this group has increased from 12% to 14%. The marginal land holding group's share of the total poor has also witnessed an increase from 55% in the early nineties to 61% by the 1999-2000. Thus *the condition of landless and near landless has unambiguously worsened in the nineties to say the least.*

Table 8: Rural poverty Incidence and Shares by land Ownership

	50th round			55th round		
Land owned(ha)	%of rural population	Poverty incidence%	% share of the poor	% of rural population	Poverty incidence	%share of the poor
No land	9	51	12	10	56	14
0<*<=o.4ha	43	51	55	53	46	61
0.4<*<=1ha	24	34	20	20	29	15
1<*<=2ha	15	28	10	10	30	7
2<*<=4ha	7	18	3	4	16	2
>4ha	3	6	0	2	18	1
overall	100	40	100	100	40	100

Land ownership by social groups -

If one takes a look at the rural landownership by social groups, then going by the NSSO data, ***landlessness has increased in the SC/STs in the decade of nineties*****(NSSO 50th and 55th round)**. While the overall landlessness has increased too from 8.9 % to 10.1% in the same period, but the SC/ST groups stand out as clear loosers in this period with the incidence of landlessness increasing in them from 14% to 18.6% in the period 1993-94 to 1999-2000. Also, while 17% of SC/ST households had land ownership of greater than marginal size (greater than 1 hectare) by 1999-2000 it had fallen to around 9%. There is also a clear concentration of all the social groups in the marginal land-holding class, and fall is also witnessed in the percentage of households holding lands of higher than the marginal sizes.

Table9: Land possessed (0.00 hectares) by social groups in Bihar

Social group	0.0	0.01- 0.40	0.41 - 1.00	1.01 - 2.00	2.01 - 4.00	4.01+
0thers	6.0%	49.2%	23.0%	12.6%	6.1%	3.1%
OBC	8.8%	58.0%	19.5%	9.5%	3.5%	0.7%
SC	23.8%	67.1%	6.4%	2.1%	0.6%	0.0%

Source : 55th round NSS (1999-2000) ,report no. 469

Table 10 : Land cultivated (0.00 hectares) by social groups in Bihar

Social group	0.00	0.01-0.40	0.41-1.00	1.01-2.00	2.01-4.00	4.01+
Other	33.2%	24.6%	22.6%	11.9%	5.0%	2.6%
OBC	37.8%	32.2%	18.4%	8.6%	2.4%	0.7%
SC	66.1%	26.3%	5.3%	1.8%	0.4%	0.0%

Source: 55th round (1999-2000), report no. 469

Table 11 : Rural land ownership by classes

	50th round(1993-94)			55th round(1999-2000)		
Land owned(ha)	Majority	SC/ST	Overall	Majority	SC/ST	Overall
No land	6.8	14.0	8.9	6.8	18.6	10.1
0<*<=0.4	38.1	53.3	42.8	51.6	57.6	53.3
0.4<*<=1	27.4	15.7	23.9	23.2	13.5	20.5
1<*<=2	16.9	9.6	14.7	11.3	6.7	10
2<*<=4	7.6	5.3	6.9	5.1	2.5	4.4
>4	3.2	2.1	2.8	2.2	1	1.9

Source : NSSO surveys

This story of fragmentation is further confirmed by a survey done by IHD(Sharma, 2005), which reports a fall in the average size of owned land for all caste groups and also across the classes between 1981-82 and 1999-2000. The fall is most significant for the uppercaste groups, which stand out as the major loosers in this period. While this report suggests a fall in the average size of the land owned by the upper-castes by almost 50%, the fall is significantly lower, around 20%, for the dominant castes among the OBCs. Except for the yadavs, the kurmis and the koeris, percentage fall in the average area for the OBC 2 is 61.03%, clearly pointing out that the castes falling in the grouping of the other backward classes are not a homogenous group at least in terms of economic standing and opportunities. The average size of land holding for the Backward 1 too is seen to become further precarious in this period having fallen from 1.31 acres to 0.75 acres, and worse is the fate of SCs whose land holdings' average size fell by 50.38% , from already precarious 0.63 acres to 0.31 acres. Thus the ***SCs and Backward 1 are seen to be pushed to the brink of landlessness*** in this period while the uppercaste groups are also seen to be loosing land significantly.

Table 12: Average size of owned land in 1999-2000 and 1981-82 and % fall in average land holding across Caste and Class

	Average size of owned Land (Acres)		% fall in average Area
	1999-2000	1981-1982	
Caste			
Brahmin+Kayastha	3.45	6.25	44.86
Bhumihar+Rajput	2.78	5.43	48.85
Kurmi	3.45	4.26	19.48
Koeri	1.11	1.41	21.69
Yadav	1.17	1.60	26.71
Other backward 11	1.25	3.20	61.03
Backward 1	0.75	1.31	42.73
Scheduled Castes	0.31	0.63	50.38
Muslims	1.14	2.19	44.86
Class			
Agricultural labour	0.45	1.08	58.02
Poor middle peasants	0.83	0.73	-13.66
Middle peasants	1.02	1.48	31.56
Big peasants	2.99	4.78	37.42
Landlords	2.93	6.13	52.31
Non-agriculturalists	0.31	1.40	77.86
Total	1.80	3.42	47.52

Source: A.N. Sharma – Agrarian relations and socio-economic change in Bihar, EPW march 5, 2005

Similarly if one takes a landholding pattern by classes(table 12), while agricultural labour is seen to be loosing nearly 60% of its land holding, similar is the fate of all other classes except for the class defined as " poor middle peasant" whose average land size grew in this period by almost 14%. As for the other classes, the fall is comparatively milder for the middle and big peasants, their land sizes falling by 32% and 37% respectively. But the fall is huge for the non-agriculturalists whose average land size fell by almost 78% from 1.40 acres to 0.31 acres. Similarly landlords too loose their share of fat by around 52% with their average size of landholding falling from 6.13 acres to 2.93 acres.

Table 13 : Percentage of households and average size of selling and buying of land, 1999-2000

	%of households selling land	Average land Sold(acres)	% of households purchasing land	Average land purchased(acres)
Caste				
Brahmin+Kayastha	26.51	1.22	7.83	1.34
Bhumihar+Rajput	30.68	0.93	9.09	0.85
Kurmi	17.86	0.24	17.86	0.76
Koeri	10.00	0.40	3.33	0.62
Yadav	9.62	0.33	13.46	0.95
Other backward 11	9.72	0.73	11.11	0.62
Backward 1	5.16	0.53	10.97	0.64
Scheduled Castes	1.99	0.20	4.48	0.52
Muslims	13.33	0.92	9.09	1.09
Class				
Agricultural labour	3.50	0.69	4.04	0.23
Poor middle peasants	15.38	0.38	15.38	0.41
Middle peasants	17.54	0.27	17.54	0.98
Big peasants	24.52	1.00	13.55	1.13
Landlords	29.73	1.03	12.84	1.17
Non-agriculturalists	5.22	0.72	5.97	0.29
Total	13.02	0.90	8.64	0.85

Source: A.N. Sharma – Agrarian relations and socio-economic change in Bihar, EPW march 5, 2005

A look at the pattern of land changing hands can also give us an insight into the dynamics of the agrarian setup we are set upon examining. *A substantial percentage of uppercaste households are found to be selling land and with few buying*, with the average size of land sold being less than the size of land bought. In fact, in this period upper castes have been the biggest loosers of land, and the gainer have been the backward casts, specially kurmi and yadav. *The Yadav households seem to be most bullish in the land market with only 9.62% household selling land of average size 0.33 acres, but 13.46% of households buying land of average size 0.95 acres*. For scheduled castes too, the percentage of households buying land (4.48%) is more than households selling land (1.99%). For all caste groups, size of land bought is more than the size of land sold, except for the OBC 2 group, where though the percentage of households purchasing land(11.11%) is more than the percentage of households(9.72%) selling land, but the average size of land sold is 0.73 acres while the average size of land bought is 0.62 acres. This could well be a case of erstwhile cultivators moving out of cultivation in distress and the poorer households of the group investing in land with whatever little resources the remittances from their migrant household male members provide them. The fact that very little of the remitted income goes into consumption of the SC/ST households(around 4%of total consumption) and given high level of indebtedness of

these sections, the remittances are most likely to be consumed by the debt obligations ,or as common observation also reveals, by investment in land.

Land ownership and tenancy arrangements:

Proportion of households leasing in land has considerably declined from about 36 per cent in1981-82 to about 23 per cent in 1999-2000, but the proportion of leased in area to total cultivated area has marginally increased from 24.5 per cent in 1981 - 82 to 25.5 per cent in 1999-2000. This has resulted in an increase in the average size of leased in land in general. The extent of tenancy across different land sezes and classes shows that the fall in the proportion of leasing in households has been largely contributed by a substantial fall in the proportion of leasing in households from lower to marginal landsize and landless households.

The decade of nineties has seen the landless and the marginal farmers moving out of tenancy arrangements, but significantly enough **big landed segments of the population moving into the land renting market**. While in 1982-83, 34.53% of landless were leasing in land, in 1999-00 only 22.63% were leasing in. Similarly, for marginal landholders (owning land of size less than 0-1.0 acres) while 53.5% of these households were leasing in land in 1982-83, in 1999-2000 only 36.09 were leasing in. The share of leased in area in total cultivated area of this segment also saw a fall from 62.65% of area cultivated to 58.15% in the same period.

Similarly a fall in leasing in is observed across all groups *below* the groups having land size of 10acres and more. For households owning 10 - 20 acres, percentage of households leasing in land increased from 3.85 to 11.11, and percentage of leased in area increased from 1.97 to 5.04. For the households owning land of size more than 20 acres, percentage of households leasing in registered an increase (that of 1.17%) and now 1.98% of cultivated area was leased in. Thus there is clearly a trend of reverse tenancy in the last two and a half decades pointing towards a growth of capitalist farming in rural Bihar.

If we look at this distribution by the land size category, the marginal farmers with less than 0.5 acres of cultivable holding lease in nearly 400 % of their land holding. However, it falls to nearly 50% for the land size category 0.5-1.25 acres. While percentage of area leased in total area cultivated has fallen across the groups, the fall tempers down as one move up the

land size. For land size above 10 acres, the percentage of area leased-in in total cultivated area has registered an increase. This is a pointer towards capitalist mode of production gaining strength in the rural- agrarian setup, with big landed segment entering into 'reverse tenancy' arrangements.

Social groups in tenancy arrangements:

The importance of leased-in land is found to be significantly high for the weaker sections of the population. For SC/ST households around 80% of cultivated land was leased-in. While OBC farmer households lease in nearly 50% of their cultivable land, the proportion for backward castes is near 35%, for Muslims 30% and for upper/middle caste farmers it is only around 8%. If one takes a look at the change in the status of various social groups in the tenancy relations, one finds an across the board decrease in percentage of households leasing in land for all caste groups. Here on outstanding feature to be noted is that while 71% of Yadav households were leasing in land in the 1980s, the percentage has fallen since but still remains at 58%. While there isn't much change in households leasing-in land in the OBC 2 group, the percentage of households leasing-in land in the BC1 and SCs has almost halved to around 27% and 24% respectively. Here again, while the percentage of households leasing-in land in the uppercaste categories has declined but percentage of area leased in total cultivated area has increased for these groups.This point to the phenomena of small numbers of households leasing in huge tracts of land, the phenonmena of reverse tenancy, indicating capitalist farming. One of dominant caste in the OBC group, the Kurmis have witnessed an increase in the area leased in total cultivated area, this despite percentage of household leasing in land falling. This again could be a pointer to the emergence of capitalist production in agriculture wherein the better placed in the cultivating castes producing for the market and seeking land in tenancy arrangements. Similarly, for the Yadavs, though percentage of leased in land in total cultivated area has fallen but still accounts for around 51% of cultivated land. The OBC 2 group too, though witnessing a fall in percentage of households leasing in land has seen an increase in the share of leased in area in total cultivated area.

It is important to note that taking land on lease is neither positively nor negatively correlated with the ownership of land. The biggest landholding caste is not the number one lessee. Moreover, the castes which own more percentage of land than the percentage of households they represent in the villages are not the major shareholders in the total land taken on lease in

percentage terms. This does not mean that castes which are landless or which own small plots of land are the main lessees. There are many landless households in the villages which do not take land on lease. In fact, there is an observed decrease in the percentage of landless and marginal households leasing-in land. The cases which own less percentage of land than the percentage of households they represent are not necessarily major lessees. It is observed that generally the households which take land on lease are those which are involved in cultivation and which are capable of making investments in cultivation to begin with and are able to pay rent even after low agricultural production. Thus, those who sell labour power are not the main lessees.

Table 14: percentage of households leasing-in, and percentage of leased-in area by land size and caste, 1981-82 and 1999-2000

	Percentage of households leasing in		Percentage of area leased in total area cultivated	
	1982-1983	1999-2000	1981-1982	1999-2000
Land size(Acres)				
Landless	34.53	22.63	100.00	100.00
0 – 1.0	53.57	36.09	62.63	58.15
1.0 – 2.5	36.99	28.57	37.52	27.62
2.5 – 5.0	34.48	5.19	18.87	3.88
5.0 – 10.0	10.00	0.00	4.21	0.00
10.0 – 20.0	3.85	11.11	1.97	5.04
20+	0.00	1.17	0.00	1.98
Caste				
Brahmin + kayastha	13.58	11.45	3.49	6.21
Bhumihar + Rajput	23.33	13.64	5.74	11.88
Kurmi	25.00	21.43	4.90	16.64
Yadav	70.97	57.69	61.67	50.91
Koeri	59.26	13.33	33.84	27.27
OBC 11	25.93	23.61	31.75	46.00
BC 1	42.42	27.10	55.66	52.04
SCs	42.19	23.88	73.85	58.17
Muslims	42.37	24.24	55.65	42.03
Total	36.23	22.67	24.59	25.47

Source: A.N. Sharma – Agrarian relations and socio-economic change in Bihar, EPW march 5, 2005

The employment profile:

The consumption quintiles and employment profile-

The nsso data shows that wage employment in agricultural labour accounted for nearly 40 % of the rural workforce in Bihar in 1999-00 compared to 42%in 1993-94, but still constituted the dominant occupation in rural areas of the state. There is sharp contrast in occupational distribution between the poor and non-poor in rural areas. The poor are far more likely to be agricultural workers or casual non-farm labourers, rather than cultivators or employed in a regular non-farm job (table 17). Over time the share of agricultural labour in the poorest quintile has declined, while casual non-farm labour and self-employed non-farm occupations have increased (and this has had significant manifestations for the political economy of the state, as the control of the better-of sections/landed segments over this class of population has accordingly weakened). Such an occupational shift does not necessarily mean an improvement in occupational status of the rural poor. Casual non-farm labour is a last resort that households choose only when other options have been exhausted. Casual labour offers one of the lowest wages among all occupations and the terms of employment are usually short and unstable. The recent occupational shift from agricultural labour to non-agricultural labour represents a move to higher daily nominal wages, irrespective of location and gender. However this occupational shift while improving poor households' wages and income levels worsens their vulnerability to adverse economic shocks.

What is interesting is that the share of agricultural labour in quintile 4 and top quintile has increased in the nineties. This is to be seen in conjuction with the increased loss of land among the uppercaste segments in this period. The share of casual non-farm labour too in the top two quintiles has increased, while that of regular non-farm labour has fallen. The share of cultivators in the top quintile too has increased which in turn could be related to the phenomena of reverse tenancy.

Land ownership and employment scenario -

Employment profile in the rural areas is also closely related to the pattern of land ownership. While overwhelming majority of landless are agricultural labours, their resort to this profession has increased in the decade of nineties. In 1993-94, while 70.3% of landless were agricultural labour, in 1999-2000 this proportion went up to around 77 %(table 15). Seen in the light of a decreasing participation overall in agricultural labour, this segment's increased

participation in the same seems to be more of an outcome of an act of compulsion rather than an act of volition. The point to be taken note of is that the landless are also the most wretched and deprived, right at the bottom of the social ladder, and facing worst kinds of deprivations. The unfreedom of choice under these circumstances for this segment comes as no surprise, and their condition seems to have worsened in the period. This period has also seen increased involvement of landless in casual non-farm labour and cultivation. While marginal landholders are also seen to be moving out of agricultural labour into cultivation and casual non-farm labour, their regular non-farm employment scenario too has registered a marginal increase in the nineties.

Table 15 : Land Ownership and Occupations

Land owned(ha)	Agricultural labour	cultivation	Regular non-farm labour	Casual nonnon-farm	Self employed	other	total
50th round							
No land	**70.3**	1.6	6.9	5.7	15.2	0.3	100
0<*<=0.4ha	67.2	11.4	3.1	2.8	15.4	0.2	100
0.4<*<=1ha	17.7	66.8	3.8	3.1	8.4	0.2	100
1<*<=2ha	7	81.7	4.4	1.4	5.5	0.1	100
2<*<=4ha	1.9	88.1	5.9	0.0	4.0	0.0	100
4ha	2.3	87.7	7.1	0.0	3.0	0.1	100
overall	41.9	39.9	4.1	2.7	11.4	0.2	100
55th round(1999-00)							
No land	**76.6**	2.6	2.1	6.2	12.3	0.2	100
0<*<=0.4ha	57.1	16.3	3.5	6.2	16.6	0.3	100
0.4<*<=1ha	9.5	75.1	4.0	2.8	8.4	0.3	100
1<*<=2ha	2.1	87.6	3.2	0.7	6.1	0.4	100
2<*<=4ha	0.6	87.6	5.0	1.1	5.7	0.0	100
>4ha	1.7	86.4	5.7	0.5	5.4	0.3	100
overall	40.4	38.5	3.5	4.6	12.7	0.3	100

Source: nsso surveys

Employment profile of the social groups -

If one takes a look at the employment profile of various social groups, one finds that a majority of SC/ST working age population lands up working as agricultural labour, although in the nineties their proportion in agricultural labour has fallen from 65% in 1993-94 to 58.2% in 1999-2000. However a larger proportion of this group's working age population has landed up in cultivation in the nineties, up from 22.2% to 24.6%. This period has also seen a greater casualisation of this workforce. For the working age population of remaining

population, there has been an increased participation in the labour process as agricultural labour, which has also seen a fall in regular non-farm employment, as also in cultivation. Here one also must observe that 61.1% of farmer households, according to the NSS report of 2003, belong to the OBC group, while STs account for only 2.5%, SCs for 14.4% and others for 21.6% of total farmer households.

Table 16 : Distribution of Rural Working Age Population in Bihar by Social Group and Principle Economic activity

	Agricultural labour	Cultivation	Regular non-farm	Casual non-farm	Self non-farm	other	Total
50th round (1993-94)							
SC/ST	65.1	22.2	3.3	3.3	5.8	0.3	100
Majority	29.1	49.5	4.5	2.4	14.4	0.1	100
Overall	41.9	39.9	4.1	2.7	11.4	0.2	100
55th round(1999-200)2.4							
SC/ST	58.2	24.6	2.4	6.1	8.6	0.1	100
Majority	31.3	45.6	4.1	3.9	14.8	0.3	100
Overall	40.4	38.5	3.5	4.6	12.7	0.3	100

Source : NSSO surveys

Table 17 : Distribution of rural working age population of Bihar by per capita consumption quintile and principal economic activity

	Agr. Labour	Cultivation	Regular non-farm	Casual non-farm	Self employed	Other	total
50th round							
Bottom	65.6	21.8	1.1	3.9	7.4	0.2	100
Quintile2	53.0	30.9	2.6	3.3	10.0	0.2	100
Quintile3	43.0	40.3	2.6	2.5	11.3	0.2	100
Quintile4	32.3	48.4	4.2	1.9	13.0	0.1	100
Top	17.5	56.3	9.5	1.9	14.7	0.1	100
overall	41.9	39.9	4.1	2.7	11.4	0.2	100
55th round							
Bottom	54.5	25.2	1.1	6.9	12.1	0.2	100
Quintile2	51.6	29.5	1.6	5.3	11.7	0.3	100
Quintile3	41.9	38.1	2.4	4.0	13.5	0.1	100
Quintile4	33.5	46.1	3.2	4.5	12.8	0.1	100
Top	23.5	51.9	8.7	2.8	13.3	0.5	100
overall	40.4	38.5	3.5	4.6	12.7	0.3	100

Source: nsso, 50th and 55th round

Migration:

Bihar has the highest out-migration rate of any state in India, with the numbers increasing over time. In 2001, there was over 200% more migration from Bihar than in the year 1991, while the average increase for Indian states was just 21.5%.Limited employment opportunities in the weakened agricultural and industrial sectors drives Biharis to leave. Data from the 2001 census of India indicate a substantial increase in the percentage of migrants citing work or employment as the primary reason for their departure (versus other reasons such as marriage, education, and business).

Table 18: changes in magnitude and nature of migration of workers by caste, class, and land size (in percentage)

	1981 - 1982			1999 - 2000		
	Migrant Workers to Total Rural Workers	Distribution of Migrant Workers		Migrant Workers to Total Workers	Distribution of Migrant Workers	
		Seasonal	long-term		Seasonal	long-term
Caste						
Upper castes	**12.40**	68.75	31.25	**28.97**	47.95	52.05
Backward Caste 11	**10.18**	75.86	24.14	**16.93**	60.81	39.19
Backward Caste 1	**8.02**	84.21	15.79	**14.74**	58.11	41.89
Scheduled Castes	**6.07**	90.00	10.00	**14.01**	58.02	41.98
Muslims	**13.68**	100.00	0.00	**24.78**	46.43	53.57
Class						
Agricultural labour	**7.07**	90.24	9.76	**11.14**	71.77	28.23
Poor Middle Peasants	**9.47**	100.00	0.00	**20.59**	64.29	35.71
Middle Peasants	**4.17**	33.33	66.67	**12.29**	36.36	63.64
Big Peasants	**12.25**	67.74	32.26	**19.19**	57.75	42.25
Landlords	**16.81**	75.00	25.00	**39.64**	38.53	61.47
Non-Agriculturists	**16.07**	88.89	11.11	**37.60**	46.15	53.85
Size of Owned land(acres)						
Landless	**7.63**	91.89	8.11	**16.70**	64.42	35.56
Upto 1	**9.15**	85.19	14.81	**22.15**	45.21	54.79
1 to 2.5	**16.33**	70.83	29.17	**23.59**	43.28	56.72
2.5 to 5	**14.56**	80.00	20.00	**18.46**	55.56	44.44
5 to 10	**7.58**	80.00	20.00	**14.42**	46.67	53.33
10+	**7.35**	20.00	80.00	**13.79**	100.00	0.00

Source : A. N. Sharma, EPW march 5, 2005 (based on the ILO and A.N.Sinha Institute of Social Sciences, Patna survey of 1981-82 and IHDs survey of 1999-00)

A look at the social profile of the migrant population in the state corroborates the patterns in employment and landholding that have emerged in the nineties. The weakest of the caste groups which also not accidentally are also en-mass landless shifting their base out of agriculture. The percent of migrant workers in total rural workers among the scheduled castes has more than doubled, from 6.07% n 1981-82 to 14.01% in 1999-2000. The shift becomes

more significant when one takes a look at the nature of migration. While in the early 80s, 90% of this segment was migrating seasonally thereby indicating its commitment to agricultural employment back home when warranted by the cropping pattern, now there are almost equal number of long term and seasonal migrants. Among the migrant population, the seasonal migrant account for 58.02% while long-term migrants account for 41.98%. Similarly, the upper castes too have seen their migrant workers (as percentage of total rural workers) more than double in this period. While in early 80s, 12.40 % of its total rural workforce was migrating, by the end of nineties this has gone up to almost 30%. And here too, we see an increase in the proportion of long-term migration as compared to seasonal migration. While there is an increase in the migration across all social groups, the backward castes, in particular the Upper Backward Castes (the yadavs, the koeris, the kurmis et al) have remained firmly grounded in the rural agrarian economy.

Indebtedness in the rural areas: the profile of population and the causes

The social profile of indebted households in the rural areas shows that per thousand of indebted households, the SCs with 327 indebted households top the charts, with OBCs coming second with 290 indebted households, STs having a share of 262 households. But a look at the purpose of loan and the source of income of indebted households has very different stories to tell in each case. While the OBC households in cultivation take loan, 440 households out of 1000, mainly for the purpose of capital expenditure in farm business; the households(OBC hhds.) engaged in other agricultural activity again a majority of them (568/1000) take loan for capital expenditure. One another interesting feature of the households with source of income in 'other agricultural activity' is that consumption expenditure is the purpose for taking loans for quite a singnificant proportion of indebted households across all caste groups. For the indebted SC households in the the 'farming other than cultivation group', a clear majority of 537/1000 takes loans for the purpose of capital expenditure in farm business. Similarly ST indebted households are seen to be taking loans for capital expenditure in the other agricultural activities. For the cultivator households, another significant cause of indebtedness appears to loans taken for marriages and ceremonies. While OBC households are seen to be incurring debt for medical purposes across all categories of employment, the SC households engaged in farming other than cultivation take loan in significant proportions(133/1000 indebted households incur debt) for medical purposes.

Table 19 : Per 1000 distribution of outstanding loans (in Rs.) by purpose of loan for different sources of income of farmer households

Bihar social groups

Source of income			Cultivation	Farming other than cultivation	Other agricultural activity	Others	All	Estd. No. of farmer hhs (00)	Sample no. of farmerhhs..
Purpose of loan	Capital expenditure in farm business	SC	276	537	226	239	257	853	35
		ST	51	0	428	10	32	32	6
		OBC	440	190	568	174	363	2880	155
		Others	325	284	834	76	252	1219	58
		all	387	250	606	147	308	4984	254
	Current expenditure in farm business	SC	60	25	4	131	99	381	22
		ST	217	0	53	0	92	120	5
		OBC	67	11	26	26	53	1727	80
		Others	198	0	0	48	138	649	36
		all	112	12	15	51	86	2878	143
	Non-farm business	SC	131	0	0	53	77	220	16
		ST	29	0	0	123	82	34	3
		OBC	111	41	17	62	93	625	43
		Others	71	0	46	11	48	224	15
		all	98	32	24	45	76	1127	78
	Consumption expenditure	SC	83	41	268	38	64	826	56
		ST	0	0	519	287	168	159	8
		OBC	47	314	359	113	80	3096	180
		Others	18	161	8	55	31	905	49
		all	39	261	236	86	64	4986	293
	Marriages and ceremonies	SC	323	198	307	334	327	847	52
		ST	592	0	0	134	326	217	4
		OBC	124	312	20	312	178	2430	143
		Others	96	0	67	602	276	778	37
		all	133	271	72	408	229	4288	237
	Education	SC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		ST	0	0	0	310	176	46	1
		OBC	40	0	0	2	27	161	8
		Others	12	0	0	13	12	48	2
		all	28	0	0	16	23	255	11
	Medical treatement	SC	56	133	61	150	113	746	52
		ST	0	0	0	58	33	22	2
		OBC	104	107	7	184	125	2612	148
		Others	51	555	3	89	65	612	30
		all	82	144	13	142	102	3992	232
	Other expenditure	SC	70	66	135	55	64	471	41
		ST	111	0	0	78	91	62	4
		OBC	66	24	3	127	81	1655	90
		Others	228	0	41	107	179	675	31
		all	1a21	29	33	106	112	2863	166
	All	SC	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	3960	259
		ST	1000	0	1000	1000	1000	670	31
		OBC	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	13956	784
		Others	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	4756	244
		all	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	23383	1320
No. per 1000 of indebted hhs		SC	327	371	406	436	388	-	-
		ST	262	0	922	544	373	-	-
		OBC	290	321	325	381	322	-	-
		Others	266	119	588	396	311	-	-
		all	288	285	399	398	330	-	-
Estd. No. of farmer hhs(00)		SC	4209	261	669	5077	10215	-	-
		ST	950	108	50	690	1799	-	-
		OBC	26479	974	1013	14811	43277	-	-
		Others	10204	156	313	4635	15309	-	-
		all	41867	1499	2086	25352	70804	-	-
Sample no. of farmer hhs.		SC	282	39	54	363	738	-	-
		ST	49	6	6	36	97	-	-
		OBC	1282	97	65	902	2346	-	-
		Others	482	15	21	261	779	-	-
		all	2097	157	148	1568	3970	-	-

Source: nss report no. 498: indebtedness of farmer households, 2003

Thus while on one hand, there are signs of the OBCs taking up capitalist cultivation , with the SC and the STs investing their fortunes in the professions other than cultivation , which could well be their traditional trades, there are other subsegments within these sections , and others too who are faced with an almost complete credit blockade. This would in turn mean that these unfortunate sections would have to depend on their work to earn them their daily bread, failing which there could be a serious threat of starvation and death. And in such circumstances, the control over the means of realizing their labour by other well-off segments would in effect mean a crippling subjugation - economical, social and political, of this huge mass of the deprived.

A broad overview emerges from the data presented above, and from a study of various village level studies on the agrarian setup in Bihar. It is observed that castes differ as regards the ownership of land and modern agricultural machinery, the use of chemical fertilizers, buying and selling of labour power, and taking land on lease and leasing it out. The upper-castes and the upper middle castes (notably yadavs, kurmis, and koeris) own most of these forces of production. Even in terms of the percentage of households belonging to these castes and their ownership of the forces of production, they own more in percentage terms than the percentage of households they represent in the villages. These apart, these castes buy most of the labour power and sell very little labour power. Of these, the upper-caste segements rarely sell their labour power. The upper OBC segments sell much less labour power than they buy.

The other remaining castes, belongining to the backward class segment, or the SC-ST category have very little say in the ownership of the forces of agrarian production, both in absolute terms and in terms of percentage of their households. This is not to say that these castes stand on equal footing, rather a differentiation between these caste groups is brought about by village level studies. The category of backward class castes is far from homogenous. The Yadavs, Banias, Koeris and Kurmis differ a lot from other 'Backward Castes' in terms of the ownership of the forces of production. In this respect, they are nearer to the four 'Forward Castes', namely, the Brahmans, Rajputs, Kayasthas and Bhumihars.

Land reforms: impact on the agrarian structure

In Bihar, nearly 80% of operational holdings are marginal (below one hectare), but account for only 36% of total operational land area. At the other end, medium and large operational holdings of more than four hectares comprise less than 2.5% of all holdings, but constitute over 20% of operational land area. This naturally takes our attention to the issue of land reforms as the state is supposed to have addressed this crippling inequity that the masses continue to suffer. Bihar was the first state in India to have introduced the zamindari abolition bill in its legislature, but was among the last to have finally passed it. While the zamindari abolition and its concomitant land reform measures were mainly symbolic in character, even these were not honestly implemented. The zamindars and the landed segments had enough time and resources to get round this new challenge that their authority over the agrarian economy was faced with. In fact, a government working Group (Januzzi , 1974 : 82-83) set to evaluate the performance of land reforms thus noted :-

> By their abysmal failure ot implement the laws, the authorities in Bihar have reduced the whole package of land reform measures to a sour joke. This has emboldened the landowning class to treat the entire issue of agrarian reform with utter contemp. Elsewhere in the country; the law evaders have a sneaking respect for thelaw enforcing authority. Their approach is furtive - their method clandestine. In Bihar, the land owners do not care a tuppence for the administration. They take it for granted. Their approach is defiant - their modus operandi open and insolent."

Land alienation and Emergence of a new class of Bataidars:

An extensive land alienation from the occupancy tenants had taken place in the wake of land reforms because of the zamindars' precautionary moves against the consequences of the impending zamindari abolition and later on the ceiling legislation. Moreover, guided by the idea of extension of capitalist production in agriculture, all the land reform measures in the post-independence period encouraged resumption of land by proprietors for 'own cultivation '. In the six years, following the introduction of the zamindari abolition bill, such evictions occurred from no less than 1 million acres of land throughout the state, affecting 7 million people (C.P.I, 1954). In a single year, in 1962, in the year the Ceiling Act was affected, over 0.7 million transfers of raiyatwari holdings were recorded all over the state. And in this large -scale land alienation of the preceding periods only a part of the dispossessed peasantry had been made fully proletarian. The rest were deprived only of their legal rights over land and have emerged as the bataidars of today. Indeed, this class has emerged overninght after

independence: reference to them in the pre-independence period is rare. The old Bakasht movement of the occupancy tenants to assert possession of lands alienated from them was automatically transformed into the Bataidari movement of the same tenants to assert possession of the same lands, the only difference being that the old tenants were divested of their claims over occupancy rights after the old zamindars were conferred ryotwari rights with respect to those holdings. By about 1950, the AIKS was active in defending the rights of the Bataidars in Purnea, Madhubani, Bhagalpur and elsewhere.

Post -abolition status of Ex- Intermediaries:

In order to discuss the 'post - abolition' status of the ex-intermediaries, some four hundred and seventy - four thousand in number, it is necessary to emphasise differentiations that must be made among them. Some, like the maharaja of Ramgarh, had been hereditary rulers of princely estates. By their own account, they were remnants of a traditional society that preceded the British - instituted fromalisation of the 'zamindari system' by the Permanent Settlement of 1793. Other intermediaries with substantial interests in land had been equally removed from direct involvement with the cultivating peasantry and had long since established permanent homes in urban areas; these could be classified simply as 'absentee zamindars'.

Then there were 'resident zamindars' many with substantive interests in land who maintained a direct, managerial interest I their holdings. Then there were thousands of 'petty zamindars' whose pre-abolition' income from theland had been insufficient to permit them a parasitic life of leisure. They permanently lived in rural areas and supervised their interests personally, but usually at a distance from the plough.others so classified had migrated to the cities of Bihar prior to the enactment of the lad reforms act of 1950 and had acquired positions in the 'services,] frequently at clerical grades that permitted few frills and barely allowed the maintenance of an image of 'middle-class respectability'.

As mentioned above, there were intermediaries having substantial estates that had not remained apart from the land and had exercised relatively tight control over their holdings, either directly or through esate managers' inresidence in rural areas. In the post-abolition era, such intermediaries have shown an increasing propensity to take an interest in the development of their residual lands. On the other hand, the thousands of rural, petty

zamindars have hardly had to suffer any substantive economic loss in the post - reform era, by have certainly experienced diminished social status in the rural communities in which they live. In the post-reform era, the respondents in various field studies themself feel that they have less command over labour than in the past.

The gain of cultivating segments of Upper Backward Castes:

A corrolary of weakening control of the agrarian economy by the erstwhile elites feeding on land rent has been the growing clout and self assertion of cultivating segments of the rural population, which were historically cultivating castes. The inflation of the 1940s due to the Second World War considerably reduced the burden of land revenue, thus providing surplus to the land owners. The exploitative clout of the zamindars and the money lenders had already been given a body blow by the great depression of the 1920s, and given their weakened financial prowess their demand even for the genuine revenue had begun to be neglected by a section of well off peasantry. Independence in 1947 also reduced the drain of surplus from agriculture. The middle peasantry, largely belonging to the upper backward castes, began to use its newly acquired surplus for rapid expansion of its agricultural activities. It had begun to redeem its lands (which were under mortgage) as early as late 1940s. The Zamindars issued back-dated receipts (P. H. Prasad, EPW, aug 17, 1991) for monetary considerations mostly to middle caste agriculturists consequent upon the abolition of zamindari. These middle caste peasants were thus elevated from sub-tenant to tenant status. Also the sell of surplus land by the cautious among the landlords, sensing land reforms, was the gain of this very segment of agrarian population. The purchasers invariably were from the middle peasantry belonging mostly to the upper backward castes.

These upper backward caste segments not only acquired additional land during the past five decades, but also strove hard to gain maximum out of its land. With its increased economic power and advantage of numbers, it began to acquire political power which had till then been traditionally exercised by the top peasantry. And as we shall see in the next chapter, this struggle for political power came into prominence in the late 1960s.

Thus within the limitations of land reforms and development programmes, Bihar witnessed rise of a new section of rich peasants and urban bourgeoise emerged from the yadavs, kurmis and koeris. The class of capitalist landlords and rich farmers in Bihar, as a result, contains disparate elements evolving from both of what Lenin considered as two alternative historical forms of agrarian development (what he called the 'American' and the 'Prussian' paths) :

upwardly mobile peasant farmers who have had a long history of direct cultivation (often as tenants) and now expanding through buying and leasing in land from absentee or small landowners, and erstwhile non-cultivating landlords converting themselves - somewhat in the Junker style - into a group of active farmers as the new technology and pliant government policies made cultivation more profitable proposition than rack - renting. While the Yadavs, Kurmis, Koeris belong to the first group of landlords, the Bhumihars and Rajputs to the second.

Thus there is pattern of class and land relations that has emerged in agrarian Bihar in last two decades. It is found that the middle castes, particularly the three numerous dominant castes - yadav, koeri and kurmi - had signinficantly improved their economic position. The economic strengthening of these rural agrarian groups, naturally, has been largely premised on the gains that these castes have made in the changing socio-political milieu in the post-independence era, and had cornered a large proportion of the institutional credit. The changes in the pattern of land distribution in the countryside have largely been in their favour. The loss of land by big peasants and landlords, mostly belonging to uppercastes, was largely in favour of the middle castes. But one needs to be mindful of internal differentiation within the castes, reflected somewhat roughly in their subcaste groupings.

Thus, the agrarian structure has undergone a significant change. The upward mobility of the middle castes, particularly of the dominant ones, towards higher classes in the hierarchy is clearly evident. The lower backward castes (backward 1/ Annexure 1 castes) have also consolidated their position over the years and a good number of them have risen to the rank of middle peasants. Scheduled Castes on the other hand are seen to have suffered losses in their overall economic positioning; most evident being a loss in the land holding, but also evident is their increased disassociation from agriculture for their livelihoods. On the other hand, the proportion of big peasants among upper castes has declined and their proportions among landlords and non-agriculturists have increased. A small number of them have also joined the ranks of agricultural labourers. In general, the proportion of landlord households from other classes has increased, reflecting an increased tendency of leasing out of land. A significant increase in the proportion of non-agriculturist is also witnessed. The paradox of the increasing landlordism and an increase in the proportion of non-agriculturists only confirms the ***increasing tendency of 'dis-association' from agriculture in general.***

Notes :

The lower Backward Castes - the Annexure 1 castes

The upper Backward Castes - the Annexure 2 castes

OBC(the Other Backward Castes) refers to the combine of the both the lower backward and the upper backward castes

Table 20 : Caste profile of the state's population

Category	Caste/Group	Percent of total population
Forwards	Brahmans	4.7
	Bhumihars	2.9
	Rajput	4.2
	Kayastha	1.2
	Total Forwards	**13.0**
Upper Backwards (Annexure 1 castes)	Bania	0.6
	Yadav	11.0
	Kurmi	3.6
	Koiri	4.1
	(total upper backwards)	**(19.3)**
Lower Backwards (Annexure 2 castes)	Barhi	1.0
	Dhanuk	1.8
	Hajjam	1.4
	Kahar	1.7
	Kandu	1.6
	Kumhar	1.3
	Lohar	1.3
	Mallah	1.5
	Tatwa	1.6
	Teli	2.8
	Others	16.0
	(total lower Backwards)	**32.0**
	Total Backwards(OBC)	**51.3**
Muslims		**16.5**
Scheduled Castes		**17.1**
Scheduled Tribes		**9.1**
Total		**100.0**

Source : Harry W Blair, EPW - jan 12, 1980 ; Census 2001

Source of data - for specific Hindu castes, 1931 census ; for all others, 1961 census, 2001 census for Muslims and SCs.

CHAPTER 3
POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

Development and Democracy were *integral* and non-negotiable parts of the modernizing project of the Indian state at independence. As the strategy of imitatively traversing a path rehearsed and charted elsewhere, development was unproblematically assumed to encompass not only an industrial economy, but also a democratic polity, and a programme of social transformation. Thus defined, the project of development was inspired by the image of a successful transition - institutional and ideological - from tradition to modernity, eventually mirroring the western experience.

The blueprint of democracy thus adopted by the ruling coalition in India after independence was crucially determined by a certain interpretation of the history of the relation between democracy and capitalist development in Europe. Political construction was quite explicitly meant to re-enact in the different conditions in India the great trajectory of western modernity, which her ruling elite looked on with desire. The history of the relevant periods of the west was read in a specific fashion, as the historical trajectory of modernity was seen to consist of three primary processes: capitalist industrial production, political institutions of liberal democracy and the evolution of a society based on the processes of individuation ; and a gradual decline of communal forms of belonging yielding place to the modern form of interest-based voluntary associations, whose constant fission and fusion occupied the space of civil society. Advanced capitalism had showed the historical results of the eventual combination of all these processes: an individuated society, capitalist industrialization and universal suffrage democracy. Additionally, it was clear that in the stage of high capitalism of the post-war west, these processes had a mutually functional connection: one assisted the other, an impression heightened by the parallel between Schumpeterian democracy and capitalism as systems of consumer choice.

It was implicitly assumed in the literature of Indian state construction that since a functional relation could be discerned between democracy and capitalism in the developed stages of capitalist society, this functionality could be successfully stretched back towards its earlier history. The entire logic of institution-making in India showed unmistakable marks of this

historical reading of the European evidence, and it was reflected in the unworried choice of a capitalist economy accompanied by a liberal-democratic constitution with a parliamentary form of governance, modified in some small part by the requirements of India's federal state structure.

However, modern historical research along with the lived experiences of the masses in the preceding decades has cast shadows over that historical reading. Theory of democracy (and development) has been so divorced from practice, that it has led to scholars, alive to the continuing deprivation of masses within the setup, make a distinction between 'procedural democracy' and 'substantive democracy' (though it is difficult to see how democracy - if read as a government of the people, by the people and for the people - could hold its essence on any such segmentation). Besides the protest by the lived experiences of the masses, theory too has contended that there is a strictly sequential relation between the capitalist industrialization and political democracy, and that initial disciplining of the working class in a regime of capitalist production was achieved only because no democratic obstructions could be placed in its path. Universal suffrage democracy, this line of theorizing contests, emerged partly as a popular response to the suffering of an unfamiliar form of inequality imposed on the masses of common people by capitalist development.

It is generally acknowledged that there is a persistent tendency in a market system for social groups endowed with initial asset advantages to corner benefits. Democratic politics, which makes governmental decision-making permeable by popular influence, can over the historical long term enable poorer groups to use their numerical advantage strategically. The overall historical evidence of capitalist development itself appears to support this hypothesis. Capitalist societies in the nineteenth century began with a situation of great economic inequality, but as democtatic rights spread downwards in society, and poorer groups used their leverage strategically to make such inequality politically costly, class structure in advanced capitalism changed toward modification of the extremes. Democracy, on one reading, can be said to have converted the highly unequal capitalism of the late eighteenth century into the welfare societies of the modern west.

But a run of more than 50 years of a democratic polity in the country, in particular in the poorest regions such as Bihar, has only seen the inequities widening overtime. It is widely

accepted now in the economic literature (transcending ideological biases which only qualify the statement to this effect) that growth usually has an equity cost attached to it. In fact in the early planning years there was an explicit consensus among the policy makers on allowing 'the size of cake to grow' before it could be evenly distributed. This growth in size of cake was of primal importance, an article of faith for the new state given its above mentioned ideological bias/ reading of modernity.

The absence of democracy, it is argued, leads to surreptitious creation of privileged groups, initially in terms of political power and intangible goods like influence and control over others' decisions. Indeed, the case of the communist societies appears to reinforce the argument, as at the time of the revolutions these societies began with a social distribution which followed principles of economic equality to quite an unprecedented degree. But in time absence of democratic accountability of the elite, so it seems from a casual overview, resulted in the growth of more tangible privileges of a bureaucratic class. Here it is important to note that privilege - tangible or intangible - is more a matter of structuring of domination in the society, than that of accountability. To the extent it is able to hide or keep away from the public realm the institutions and structures of domination, a democratic polity is innocent of institutions of domination and privileged groups. It is innocent only to the extent that its ideology is successful in tucking away the issues of domination and privilege under the realm of 'the private'.

As Ricouer has noted that the most radical function of ideology is to justify a system of authority, ideology of our political system has played its role to perfection. The welfare capitalist society, the concomitant socio-economic structure of the modern day democratic polity, embodies at least three important principles largely absent from earlier , more laissez-faire liberal capitalism : 1. the principle that economic activity should be socially or collectively regulated for the purposes of maximizing the collective welfare; 2. the principle that citizens have a right to have some basic needs met by the society, and that where private mechanism fail the state has an obligation to institute policies directed at meeting those needs; and 3. the principle of formal equality and impersonal procedures, in contrast to more arbitrary and personalized forms of authority and more coercive forms of inducing cooperation. While these principles have faced some challenges, nevertheless at least as principles they enjoy wide acceptance.

Ideology at work - A Depoliticized Society!

The principle that economic activity should be socially or collectively regulated for the purpose of maximizing the collective welfare has largely meant state intervention for maximizing economic growth, which in turn has meant fostering of private capital accumulation by the state. Habermas has argued that, at the same time that more private economic activity comes under the purview of public policy, the public becomes increasingly depoliticized. But it is not as much as more or less of economic activity coming under the purview of public policy, as exclusivity of economic issues, or distributive issues as public issues. When social conflict and discussions come to be restricted to distributive issues, the background issues of the organization and goals of production, the positions and procedures of decisionmaking, and other such institutional issues do not come into question.

Since the very inception of the independent Indian state, as mentioned earlier, democracy and development have been an article of faith, and have been seen as aspects of the secular and ideologically neutral state. Development in turn, has largely had an economic interpretation and has for the most practical purposes been substituted by economic growth. Thus, quite in keeping with the interpretation of development as economic growth, it is economic evaluation in the choice, design and implementation of policy that has enjoyed priority over the question of policy appropriateness , which ideally should take into account cultural and social factors, provide space for debate on the normative aspects of policy and, above all, for democratic negotiation. Not surprisingly, planning for development has become the preserve of technical experts and retired civil servants, with economists (but few other social scientists!) invariably in the driver's seat.

Now, because development has acquired the status of an article of faith, rather like arguments of national interest and national security, its purposes and consequences alike are placed outside the domain of that which can be legitimately questioned or challenged. The ideological neutrality of national security is requisitioned by development projects, as both come to be seen as aspects of the paternalist-protector state. It is hardly surprising that workers demanding better working conditions and wages on the site of the Sardar Sarovar Dam have been booked on charges of sedition and anti-national activities. Social conflict henceforth gets restricted to competition over distributive shares of the total social product.

Everyone would agree that economic growth is the primary goal of government and business activity. In order to make the social pie, whose distribution they would argue about, as large as possible, government and business were to have the authority to do whatever they judged necessary to promote that growth.

According to many analysts, New Deal reforms began to institutionalize class conflict, and this process was completed by the early 1950s. In this welfare capitalist system capitalists struck a deal with workers. Business and government would accede to demands for collective bargaining rights, more leisure time, more pay, social security and unemployment benefits, and similar measures to improve the material life and security of working people. In return workers would forfeit demands to restructure production, to control the goals and direction of enterprises or the whole economy, or to have community control over administration of services.

This bargain to limit conflict to distribution, leaving production and decisionmaking structures unquestioned, occurred in both private and state sectors. In the private sector,after WW II labour unions implicitly agreed to restrict their demands to distributive issues and not to bring up issues like working conditions, control over production process, or investment priorities. State regulation of collective bargaining has reinforced this implicit arrangement, rarely allowing work process and work organization issues, for eg., onto the bargaining agenda.

This distributive focus is most apparent in federal and state governments; policy issues are restricted largely to the allocation of resources and the provision of social services, within the imperative of fostering corporate economic growth. Conflict takes place over a narrow range of distributive issues: does reducing the deficit require raising taxes? Should the rich pay a higher proportion of their income in taxes than others? Should funds be appropriated for defence spending or for social sector expenditure? Which appropriation will generate more jobs? The basic ends of government are already given, within the existing structures of power, property, and entitlements, and do not come under discussion. To quote Smith and Judd, "Policy has always been oriented to the best way to allocate the surplus for individual and collective consumption rather than the more central question of the best way to control the process to realize social needs and the full potentialities of human beings"

Restricting conflict and policy discussion to distributive issues, the citizen in a welfare capitalist society gets defined primarily as a client-consumer. Unlike earlier capitalism, which functioned on low wages and austerity for the working class, welfare state capitalism requires high levels of consumption to keep the growth machine running. Corporate advertising, popular culture media, and government policy collude to encourage people to think of themselves primarily as consumers, to focus their energies on the goods they want, and to evaluate their government's performance according to how well it provides them goods and services (Habermas, 1987, p. 350) .

With polity essentially limited to the distributive issues, focus of the masses (informed masses to be exact) falls on how well the government of the day provides them goods and services. The government provides these goods and services via the executive which is also known as the third pillar of democracy. Not only is the executive responsible for delivering to the masses (and the economy) the welfare (and the production) responsibilities of the state, it also has a very crucial regulatory function which in effect turns out to be a function of control and subjugation of the masses themselves, who drunk on the ideological dosage of the system, take it as a matter of fact. And it is here, in the daily interface of the executive and the masses, that democracy lives in any substantive form, if at all. After having exercised their voting rights once in 5 years, thereafter while polity remains largely in the 'air' , it is in their interface with the executive that the masses experience their 'own will' ,and live democracy.

As executive becomes the interface between the polity and the society, and the medium via which the democratic state makes itself present in the lives of the masses, political empowerment gets translated into the issue of easy access to the executive at the local level. Given the distributory and regulatory function of the system, any differential access to it would get translated into distributive benefits and control (in whatever limited or extensive form) for some over the others. Thus not only a monopoly of access over this machinery has a rental value but also has the significance of 'political capital' in its efficacy as a tool of control.

In this setting of a modern state, underdevelopment is considered to be a distortion resulting from intermingling of primordial institutions such as caste with the modern and secular

institutions of the system. Underdevelopment in Bihar is attributed to the play of caste in politics of the state. The argument is that because the political behaviour of the masses is determined by their caste identities, all other considerations - economic or otherwise, recede to the background of the polity and hence underdevelopment.

The above line of argument is essentially based upon two premises: 1) political process in the state - the political behaviour of the masses and the electoral outcomes are explained by caste system, and 2) caste system is an ideological construct to which the socio-economic and political realities conform. Essentially, this is taking ideology as the primary reality.

There can be no denying the strong visibility of caste in the polity of Bihar. The polity of the state has seen periods of dominance by groups whose caste composition have been more than suggestive of latter's dominance of of the polity. Right from the beginning of electoral politics in the state in 1930s upto the first half of 1960s, the political elites invariably belonged to the upper castes. Though challenge to this dominance was beginning to be posed by the upwardly mobile groups belonging to the upper backward castes, the era of upper caste dominance of state polity by the upper caste groups continues right upto 1990, when the backward castes emerged as the numerically dominant group in the state assembly for the first time. People's voting behaviour too is to some extent explained by their caste existence.

However, the point of contestation is the form in which caste is supposed to have a determining influence on polity. Does the caste identity alone determine the political behaviour of the masses or do the living conditions, the lived experience of these caste groups have a determining role to play? Acceding to the first point would be accepting ideology as the primary reality which, as argued in chapter 2, could not be farther from truth. Also if people are assumed to be making their political choices solely on their caste identities, the electoral outcomes in the state become inexplicable. For no one caste group has numerical strength to force electoral results in its own favour, and thereby needs alliance with other castes to cobble up the requisite numbers. And here if primacy is of ideology(and ideology of the caste system being that of binary opposition between purity and pollution codified in the theme of ritual distance), there is nothing to explain the alliance of the castes that the state's polity has seen over the years, in particular the post ninety period.

Caste system, as argued in chapter 2, as a system of social stratification has always had power relations codified in it which in turn were of socio-economic making. Caste system historically has had an economic and political making, its structures constructed to codify relations of exchange through which surplus was to be expropriated, and its ideology to justify this structuring of domination required for the expropriation. Any movement through the strata of the system is then most likely to have a socio-economic and material base as is evident in the interplay of caste and polity in Bihar.

Caste identities have been prominently used for politicking, in a most obvious way, by the political parties in Bihar. All the parties in the field recognize the force of the institution of caste and, at election time, put up candidates on caste calculations as a matter of course. In fact, a look at the list of candidates put up by the political parties would reveal that the candidates invariably belonged to the numerically preponderant castes of the respective assembly segments. And this trend has only got accentuated over time, any instance otherwise could only be indicative of the candidate's ability to transcend the force of numbers.

Broadly, three phases of political process and consequent character of the political regimes can be noted in the post- independence period of the state. The first phase, in effect can be dated back to 1939, when Bihar elected its first government in the modern era, with Sri Krishna Sinha as the prime minister of the state. This phase has an undeniable mark of dominance of the political space by the upper-caste elite segments of the society. The leadership constituted almost exclusively of the upper-caste groups, which frequently contested for power by aligning and realigning among themselves. This period is also marked by an almost unquestioned dominance of the upper-caste in the agrarian society, courtesy exploitative structuring of rights in land set by the Permanent Settlement. This continued right through to the zamindari abolition in 1956, and subsequent land reform measures.

The dominance of the upper caste elites in starkly reflected in the nature of regimes led by the e Congress party, which ruled the state right from the 1937 elections to mid-sixties without any break. Before 1952, voting rights were based on property and educational qualifications, so that politics were the monopoly of a handful of rich, upper-caste people. All the Hindu members of the first Congress Ministry in Bihar, after the 1937 elections, were

Rajputs and Bhumihars. Even after 1952, the political scene was dominated by these two castes. Though constituting only about 10 percent of the total population, they dominated the state's politics through the undivided Congress. The caste composition of state assembly is a telling story of dominance by the upper caste elites, and a play of more secular forces in this dominance than caste identities.While constituting barely 13 per cent of total population, the representation of the upper castes in the state's legislative assembly was 41.8 per cent in 1967(table 21).

As has been noted, the cultivating upper backward castes were fast gaining ascendance in the rural agrarian economy which picked up greater strength in the post independence era of land reforms and green revolution. As seen earlier these were the segments which made the most in the harvest of economic opportunities that befell on the agrarian economy in the wake of independence and consequent changes in the socio-political milieu. Despite the limited character of land reforms in the state, the abolition of intermediaries, nevertheless, had the impact of releasing the vice like grip of these parasitic segments on the production process of agriculture. This was further facilitated by the green revolution policy thrust, which these segment being the cultivating segments, and based firmly in rural - agrarian setting, took full advantage of.

The rise of the political elites of Backward Castes:

Adult franchise along with land reforms made a difference in the post-independence polity of the state, by bringing backward caste, cultivating groups within the political and socio-economic ascendancy process. Consequently, the entrenched political elites of upper-castes were faced with a very serious and potent challenge from the backward caste leaders who in turn were riding on the support of their caste bretheren's economic ascendancy which was bringing them in conflict with the entrenched castes in the local polity and economy. Political parties across the spectrum too were quick to acknowledge the rising power of this caste groups within the rural-agrarian setup. These groups now had the economic motives and wherewithals to generate closure of ranks of their own caste bretheren for political mobilization. Though land reforms had failed in their own stated objectives, they had real effects in the social structure of the village, with eventually significant political consequences. The decline of the zamindar stratum in the countryside, the slow disappearance of their paternalistic prestige, created room for advance for the well-endowed,

more enterprising and often the more unscrupulous among the middle farmers. They gathered in the harvest of economic opportunities created by this opening, and by a combination of economic power and political connection with Congress functionaries, imposed themselves as new elite in the countryside. The eventual adoption of the green revolution strategy, which suggested concentration of government support on the most productive farmers and regions, simply accentuated the trend.

The rise of this group was accompanied by discernible signs of a new form of politics from the 1960s, the politics of an entrant class. This marks the second phase of the state's polity which saw a keen contest between these ascendant upper backward caste political elites and the entrenched upper castes elites. At the time of independence, the predecessors of rich farming upper backward caste groups were too weak economically and unorganized politically to secure a substantial share of the effects of inequality. The coalition of ruling groups, therefore, could be one of essentially three classess- the mixed factions of the bourgeoisie, landed interests with semi-feudal status and control, and the managerial and bureaucratic elites whom these two groups needed for the crucial function of political direction and for simply servicing the coalition itself by balancing the distribution of benefits either through sharing or through cyclical advantage. Landed elements that were truly semi-feudal were now loosing their economic strength and social eminence, and yielded power in the country side to the new stratum of rich capitalist farmers. After the mid-1960s, the most farseeing of these began to organize pressure inside the Congress itself for a restructuring of policy in favour of agricultural interests. Although their leaders got little support in the 1950s, by the next decade they had grown into a considerable force, and were in a position to demand, if not force, a renegotiation of the implicit protocol of benefits within the ruling coalition of interests.

While the elite social character of the congress leadership made for a half-hearted attempt at changing its orientation towards a more inclusive power sharing social profle, the opposition led by veteran socialist Ram Manohar Lohia cashed on the changing socio-economic scenario, with his party SSP very vocally articulating backward caste interests with explicit usage of caste identities for political mobilization. The gain was there for all to see when SSP emerged as the second largest party in the 1967 elections and again in the 1969 mid-term polls. With the SSP providing them a political front and their numerical superiority (52

percent of the total population belonging to this group), the backward caste leadership soon came into the limelight and were able to make wide political gains. Of the seven Chief Ministers of Bihar between 1967 and 1972, four were backward castes and one a harijan.

The backward castes were by the end of sixties well entrenched in the political game. The 1967 assembly elections saw 24.2% of the elected members belonging to the OBC group. This increased to 26.7% in the mid-term polls of 1969. But nevertheless, their representation in the assembly was still far below the strength of the upper-caste MLAs which though on decline was still at 41.8% in 1967 and 38.3% in the 1969 assembly. But at the local level, we find the ascendant backward caste groups closing down the gap with their upper caste counterparts in the political space, as is reflected in the social composition of the panchayati raj institution. This is reflected in upper backward caste representation (38.12%) in the Panchayati Raj institution of Mukhia being only fractionally behind the upper caste representation of (40.92%) in 1978. But here one very important pattern emerges. While all the upper caste groups had more or less proportionate share in their total representation in these institutions, a substantive chunk of the backward caste representation was cornered by the upper backward castes 38.12 per cent out of 42.06 for the backward casetes as a whole, the Yadavs alone accounting for 20.22 per cent of the total mukhias.

The limited character of Empowerment

The internal heterogeneity within the backward castes and marked differences in the degree of their political empowerment (if that can be called empowerment at all) is starkly reflected in their representation in the Panchayati Raj institutions. While the upper backward castes with a share of 19.3 per cent in total population had cornered 38.12 per cent of Mukhia seats in 1978, the lower backward castes (Annexure 1 castes) with a 32 per cent share of the population had merely 3.94 per cent share in total seats of Mukhias. Similarly the SC with a population share of 14.4 per cent had only 1.31 per cent of the mukhias belonging to their group(table 22). The story that emerges then is that of a political empowerment limited to the segments of upper backward castes within the broad category of castes belonging to backward classes. Thus a challenge to the stranglehold of upper caste elites on the rural agrarian economy and polity as well is seen to be thrown up mostly by the segments belonging to the upper backward castes.

This pattern of limited political empowerment further intensified during the following period, showing itself in the representations obtained in the Legislative Assembly and Panchayati Raj institution. A look at the social composition of Bihar legislative assembly gives us a view of the changed scenario. In the Bihar Vidhan Sabha, the political representation of upper castes decreased from 37.2 per cent in 1977 to 18.8 per cent in 1995(table 21). And with this decline there was clear trend of consolidation of political positioning of the OBCs, and in particular the upper backward castes. While the OBCs are seen to have consolidated their position in this period, their percentage in the total remained below the upper-caste MLAs in the assembly. But a period of clear dominance comes in 1995 when 45 % of the members of the assembly came from the OBC segment. A noteworthy feature is that the OBC MLAs were in sizeable proportions in 1967 itself (24.2% and 26.7% in 1969). Even here, a substantive part of the gain of the upper backward castes is seen to be cornered by the yadavs. . A significant percentage of the increase in OBC MLAs during the 1990s was actually an increase in the number of Yadav MLAs, who since 1995 constituted 27% of the state assembly . Moreover, 40% of the RJD MLAs were Yadavs as compared to only 17% from other OBCs. As the percentage of upper caste representation declined in the last decade and a half, the Yadav caste benefited most in the political arena. Most telling picture of this limited empowerment has been the lack of representation for lower backward castes. Although an estimated 32% of the population, the MLAs of this segment of the population made up less than 5% of the Bihar assembly

Table 21 : Changing Social Composition of the Bihar Vidhan Sabha, 1967- 2000(%)

Category	1967	1969	1985	1990	1995	2000
Upper Caste	41.8	38.3	26.4	32.5	17.1	29.9
OBC	24.2	26.7	24.6	29.7	45.0	36.4
Muslim	5.6	5.9	10.1	6.1	7.1	9.3
Women	3.4	1.2	4.0	4.0	2.8	7.4

Source: 1967 Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Bihar, Election Commission of India, New Delhi; 1969 Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Bihar, Election Commission of India, New Delhi; 1985, 1990, 1995 , 2000 Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Bihar, Election Commission of India, New Delhi;

The 2001 panchayat elections take further the story of decline of uppercastes hold on the rural polity and ascendance of the upper backward castes. The representation of uppercastes as per cent of total mukhias fell from 40.92 in 1978 to 34.0 per cent in these elections (table 23). This decline of almost 7 per cent was more or less evenly distributed among all the constituents of the upper castes. On the other hand, the strength of the OBCs registered an increase from 42.06 per cent in 1978 to 45.7 per cent in 2001, an increase of 3.64 per cent. As against the case of upper castes, all of whose shares declined, the increase in the OBC share was entirely grabbed by the upper OBCs. For example, they improved their tally from 38.12 per cnet in 1978 to 41.8 per cent in 2001, an improvement of 3.68 per cent. On the other hand, the strength of the lower OBC mukhias remained almost stagnant- 3.94 per cent in 1978 and 3.09 per cent in 2001. Among the upper OBCs, yadavs stood out as the principal beneficiaries, increasing their tally from 20.22 per cent in 1978 to 24.2 per cent in 2001. Other upper OBCs - Koeris and Kurmis - gained only marginally by 0.94 per cent and 0.98 per cent respectively.

However, as pointed out earlier, there is no corresponding gain made by the lower backward castes and scheduled castes in terms of their political empowerment at the village level. Their representation in the Panchayati Raj institution remains far below their share in total population, and has shown no signs of improvement over this period. While in 1978, only 3.94 per cent of the mukhias belonged to the lower backward castes"as compared to their share of around 32 per cent in total population, the share in fact declined to 3.9 per cent in 2001. Similarly for the SCs and STs, while their share in the total posts of Mukhias in 1978 was 1.31 and 0.31 respectively (compare this with their share in total population), the same fell to 1.06 and 0.31 respectively by 2001. Thus an increased marginalization, in terms of holding of substantive political power at the local level is observed for the SCs and STs and the lower backward castes over this period. And this story of limited empowerment corresponds well with the similar experience of these caste groups in terms of economic empowerment in the rural economy.

Table 22: Number and percentage of Mukhias by caste and community (1978 elections)

Castes and communities	Number	Percentage of total
Upper castes		
Brahmin	709	9.25
Rajput	1277	16.66
Bhumihar	1,038	13.54
Kayastha	101	1.31
Others	11	0.14
Total	3,136	40.92
Upper Backward Castes*		
Yadav	1,550	20.22
Koeri	410	5.35
Kurmi	370	4.82
Baniya	182	2.37
Teli	94	1.22
Nishad	0	0
Sonar	7	0.09
Others	308	4.01
Total	2,921	38.12
Lower Backward Castes**		
Kahar	26	0.33
Mehtar	0	0
Nai	3	0.03
Nonia	9	0.11
Dhanak	42	0.54
Rajvanshi	10	0.13
Kevat	25	0.32
Mallah	49	0.63
Others	138	1.80
Total	302	3.94
Scheduled Castes		
Chamars	6	0.07
Dhobi	2	0.02
Dome	0	0
Dusadh	6	0.07
Pasi	2	0.02
Others	85	1.10
Total	101	1.31
Scheduled Tribes		
Santhal	6	0.07
Others	18	0.23
Total	24	0.31
Sikh	5	0.06
Muslims	811	10.58
Christians	1	0.01
Others***	361	4.71
Total	1,178	15.37
(Total)	(7,662)	(100)

Source: Pankaj and Singh, Current Sociology, march 2005

Notes: * includes Annexure-2 castes,** includes Annexure-1 castes,***includes unidentified and vacant

Table 23: Percentage distribution of chairman and members of zilla Parishads and Mukhias by their Caste Background (2001 elections)

Caste / caste Group	Percentage of		
	Chairmen	**Members**	**Mukhias**
Upper-caste Hindus Of which	**35.2**	**25.3**	**34.0**
a) Brahmin	8.2	5.0	7.7
b) Bhumihar	13.5	9.1	12.1
c) Rajput	13.5	10.3	13.4
d) Kayastha	-	0.9	0.8
Middle -caste Hindus of which	**45.9**	**42.1**	**45.7**
a) Annexure-I castes of which	2.7	3.5	3.9
i. Dhanuk	-	0.5	0.6
ii. Mallah/Gorhi	-	1.2	2.0
iii. Others	2.7	1.8	1.3
b) Annexure-2 castes of which	43.2	39.6	41.8
i. Yadava	35.1	24.2	24.2
ii. Kurmi	2.7	4.1	5.8
iii. Koeri	-	5.2	6.3
iv.Bania/Vaishya	5.4	4.4	3.6
v. Others	-	1.7	1.9
Scheduled Castes Of which	-	**17.0**	**1.06**
i. Dusadh	-	5.6	0.7
ii. Dhobi	-	0.9	0.07
iii. passi	-	1.2	0.05
iv. Musahar	-	0.8	0.2
v.others	-	8.5	0.04
Scheduled Tribes	-	**0.6**	**0.5**
Muslims	**16.2**	**13.0**	**15.6**
Marwaris	**2.7**	**0.3**	-
Others	-	**0.8**	**2.9**
(Total)	(100)	(100)	(100)
(Number of Chairmen/Members/Mukhias)	(37)	(1,160)	(7,120)

Source: Pankaj and Singh, Current Sociology, march 2005

Changing voting pattern among different caste groups:

The political ascendancy of the OBCs in the polity of the state right from mid - sixties and its final culmination in the nineties with both the assembly and the regime dominated by the OBCs is an oft-repeated story. Recent news is that of demise of the 15 year old regime dominated by these segments, in particular the Yadavs, with the assembly elections of 2005. The process of realignment of the backward castes which had started in the mid-1970s and took full shape in the early 1990s has given way to a process of de-alignment, with the consolidated backward castes further breaking apart and a section of them aligning with the upper castes to put up a challenge to the dominance of one section of backward castes represented by the Yadavs.

The mobilization of early nineties

Chinks in the alignment had started appearing soon after the Janta Dal regime came to power, with the consequent fragmentation of the upper backward castes into two blocs, one comprising the Yadav represented by the Janta Dal and the other the Kurmis and Koeris represented by the Samta Party. But even this fragmentation could not effect the prospects of Janta Dal in the assembly elections of 1995, which saw the party return to power with an absolute majority. The success of Janta Dal and its allies was due to the fact that the alliance drew a large measure of support from the numerically strong, poor and deprived sections of the society. A survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) , reveals that there was massive support for the Janta Dal and its allies among the Dalits, the backward castes, the Muslims, the illieterate, and the landless agricultural labourers. Nearly 48.7 per cent of the Dalits, 49.8 per cent of the backward castes, and about 57.3 per cent of the Muslims voted for the Janta Dal and its allies. It remained the most popular party among the illiterate as 47.3 per cent of them voted for it; 43.8 per cent of the landless agricultural labourers also voted for it. The support base of the Congress had eroded in general, but it appeared to be a popular party among the upper castes. Of the upper caste voters, 39.1 per cent voted for the Congress while only 20.9 per cent voted for Janta Dal. The BJP, which had polled 15.9 per cent votes in the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, made heavy inroads into Bihar politics during and after the 1996 Lok Sabha elections following its alliance with the Samata Party. This alliance also made the party a popular choice of two backward castes, the Kurmis and the Koeris. The coming together of the Janta Dal and the Samta Party also led to a movement of sections of Dalits towards the BJP- JD (U) alliance in the 1999 Lok Sabha Polls.

Table 24 : Shift among upper-caste voters 1995-2000(%)

Party	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000
Congress	39.1	10.1	8.7	8.3	15.0
BJP+	28.7	59.5	77.6	76.7	60.7
JD+	20.9	29.1	11.6	-	-
RJD	-	-	Negligible	negligible	10.5

Source: Bihar Assembly Election Survey 1995; National Election Study 1996, 1998 and 1999; Assembly Election Survey 2000

The upper caste voters

The increasing presence of the BJP in Bihar can be largely attributed to its growing popularity among the upper caste voters. Traditionally Congress supporters, they have moved in a big way towards the BJP and its alliance partner, the Samta Party, since the 1996 Lok Sabha elections. A CSDS survey reveals that the BJP which got only 28.7 per cent of the upper -caste votes in 1995, got more than 75 per cent votes in the Lok Sabha elections of 1998 and 1999. But the same alliance suffered a setback among the upper - caste voters during the Assembly elections in 2000 which saw almost 17 per cent of the upper caste votes polled for it in the Parliamentary polls of 1999 moving away from it. And this fall is seen to a gain of RJD which is seen to poll around 10.5 percent of the upper caste votes in these elections. Sikmilary, Janata Dal had managed to get significant support from the upper castes till the 1996 Lok Sabha elections this despite the BJP-Samta alliance coming into existence, but after that the party's popularity among upper castes has declined enormously.

The OBC voters

OBCs, to say the least, have played a major role in the politics of the state over over the last decade and half. The Congress had never been very popular among OBC voters who have traditionally largely supported socialist formation, as it were these formations that gave a political voice to this social group's challenge to upper castes who dominated state's politics via the medium of Congress. With the formation of the Janta Dal before the 1989 Lok Sabha elections a large section of OBC voters moved towards the party. Surveys indicate that OBCs voted for the Janta Dal in large numbers in the 1995 Assembly and 1996 Lok Sabha elections. But here after an interesting pattern emerges in the voting behaviour of the OBCs. In the 1998 elections, 42.5 per cent of OBC voters voted for the BJP alliance(note that Samta leader claims to be leader to both, the Kurmis and the Koeris, two other upper Backward castes), while support for the JD alliance went down from 50.3 per cent in 1996 to 17.3 per cent in 1998. the RJD managed to poll 28 per cent of the OBC votes, but in the 1999 Lok

Sabha elections, with the merger of the Samta and the Janata Dal, OBC support for the RJD went further down to 22 per cent.

Table 25 : Shift among OBC voters 1995-2000(%)

Party	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000
Congress	21.9	23.3	14.9	33.9	6.6
BJP+	7.5	5.6	4.2	13.4	7.9
JD+	57.3	68.9	19.0	_	_
RJD	_	_	59.6	48.2	61.4

Source: Bihar Assembly Election Survey 1995; National Election Study 1996, 1998 and 1999; Assembly Election Survey 2000

Table 26 : Voting Pattern of Muslims and Different Castes among OBCs&Muslims over 1991-2000(%)

caste		Yadav	Kurmi+ Koeri	Other OBC*	Lower OBC	ST	Lower Muslilms	Upper Muslims
congress	1991	8.2	28.0	31.6	28.6	26.9	39.1	33.3
	1996	1.6	5.3	2.4	10.7	24	31.0	16.7
	1998	7.9	24.0	_	8.0	70.2	31.0	15.7
	1999	36.3	8.3	7.1	4.2	-	34.0	33.8
	2000	1.9	5.9	9.8	4.4	-	3.8	13.0
	2005	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
BJP+	1991	4.1	40.0	26.3	20.2	-	_	_
	1996	16.1	73.7	40.5	42.0	34.0	6.7	3.3
	1998	18.4	56.0	23.1	57.3	8.5	6.9	5.9
	1999	21.6	**70.8**	52.4	62.9	_	4.3	20.0
	2000	9.2	**58.3**	42.6	45.0	_	8.2	7.2
	2005	11.2	**56.5**	41.3	-	-	9.2	7.5
JD	1991	87.8	28.0	31.6	36.9	7.7	47.8	61.1
	1996	80.6	17.5	50.0	35.5	28.0	57.8	80.0
	1998	7.9	_	7.7	21.3	6.4	20.7	17.6
RJD	1998	65.8	18.0	23.1	**12.0**	_	37.9	58.8
	1999	39.2	10.4	31.0	**11.2**	_	55.3	43.1
	2000	79.6	24.5	26.5	**26.5**	_	68.6	44.9
	2005	78.0	14	21.7	**27.0**		51.7	56.8
LJP +	2005	2.6	7	10.2			15.8	14.1

Other OBC includes all backward castes except the Yadav, Kurmi, Koeri and the lower backward castes.

Source: National Election Study 1996, 1998, and 1999; Bihar Assembly Election Survey 2000, 2005

A detailed analysis of the data (that provided by the CSDS studies) reveals that unlike the four upper castes, there has been a great internal variation in the voting pattern across the castes of the OBC. The Janata Dal was very popular among the Yadavs till the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, but after the party split, it was the RJD that cornered the majority of Yadav votes. It may be noted that the Yadavs were extremely polarized in favour of the Janata Dal till the 1996 elections, but the 1998 elections also marked the split of the Yadav vote between the Janta Dal, the RJD and the BJP - Samta alliance. Interestingly, the BJP - Samata alliance got more Yadav votes than did the Janta Da in these elections (table 26).

The voting pattern of the Kurmi and Koeri was quite in contrast to that of the Yadavs. They voted in large numbers for the BJP - Samta alliance, while Janata Dal drew support from the Yadavs. But here too, surveys reveal that though the majority of the Kurmi and Koeri voted for the BJP allies, there were elections in which they had voted for other parties. The 1996 and 1999 Lok Sabha elections witnessed extreme polarization of the Kurmi and Koeri in favour of the BJP allies, but during the 2000 Vidhan Sabha elections, they voted in sizeable numbers for the RJD (table 29). Again in the elections of 2005, when the state saw BJP alliance coming to power, there is a fall in the percentage of Koeris and Kurmis voting for the alliance from 58.3 in 2000 to 56 per cent in 2005. Thus only half of the votes of the segment were channelised to the alliance whose leader claims himself to be the leader of these castes.

An interesting pattern is observed in the voting behaviour of the lower backward castes in the state. These castes except for the early nineties are never seen to be going for the RJD in the polls. But nevertheless, RJD is seen to increase its share in this group's vote from around 12 per cent in 1998 to 27 in 2005. These castes are seen to be largely voting for the BJP alliance all through the period. In the elections held between 1990 and 2000, the lower OBCs displayed a divided loyalty towards different parties. There was a clear pattern of movement of the lower OBCs towards the BJP - Samata alliance; however, only a little over 50 per cent of them voted for the alliance in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections and about 63 per cent in the 1999 elections. There was a distinct movement of the lower OBCS away from the Janata Dal, but during the Vidhan Sabha elections in 2000, a sizeable number of them voted for the RJD and the support for the BJP and its allies among these sections declined.

The Muslim voters

The decade of 1990 -2000 witnessed a movement of Muslims voters away from the Congress. This alienation of Muslims from the Congress began soon after the Babri Masjid demolition, and the Janta Dal is seen to emerge as the preferred choice of the Muslims in the early nineties. With the split in JD, this section of voters has largely gone with the splinter group of RJD, with 59.6 per cent of Muslims voting for it in 1998, as compared to only 19 per cent for JD.

During the period 1991-2005 the structure of support for political parties has been different among upper caste and lower caste Muslims (table 26). Over the years the Congress lost support among upper -caste Muslim voters, but it is important to note that the party continued to be popular among lower -caste Muslims. The support for the Congress among lower caste Muslims declined only marginally over the 1995, 1996, 1998 and 1999 election, but in the 2000 assembly elections it eroded greatly, as it contested against the RJD. The lower caste Muslims consolidated behind the RJD in the 1999 Lok Sabha and the 2000 Vidhan Sabha elections. However, while the majority of the upper-caste Muslims voted for the RJD, a section of them voted for other parties as well. However in the 2005 elections, while a consolidation of upper caste Muslims is observed towards the RJD, the lower caste Muslims are seen to be moving away from it significantly, almost 17 per cent of this segment deserting the ranks between the two Assembly election of 2000 and 2005.

The Dalit voters

There was also a considerable shift among Dalit voters in the elections held between 1990 and 2005. Traditionally Congress voters, nearly half of the Dalits voted for the Janata Dal and its allies while 23 percent voted for the Congress in the 1995 assembly elections. BJP was not the popular choice of Dalit voters in the 1995 elections. But in that election the state witnessed a slow but constant movement of Dalit voters from the Congress to other parties. The Dalit voters, as CSDS study points out, started to move away from JD, towards BJP after 1995.In the parliamentary elections of 1996, the study shows, BJP alliance saw a gain of around 10 per cent votes while the JD alliance saw around 17 per cent of dalit voters moving away from it. This move of the dalit voters seems to have been arrested in the parliamentary polls of 1998 because of the split of JD, with Laloo Yadav leading the splinter group by thename of RJD. While JD saw a further decline in its share of dalit vote to 28.4 per cent, but

the advantage did not go to the BJP alliance as RJD cornered 23.5 percent of the Dalit votes. But after 1998, one can see a decisive movement of Dalit voters towards BJP, which cornered 47.1 per cent of votes in 1999 elections. But again the assembly elections of 2000, there is a decline in the vote share of BJP in dalit votes,and the gainer emerges out to be RJD, which improved its 1999 tally of 26.0 per cent of dalit votes to 33.1 percent in 2000 . This share further declined to 24.3 per cent in 2005, and so did BJP's share of 38.9 per cent to 34.9 per cent. And this time the beneficiary emerged out to be LJP led by dalit leader Ram Vilas Paswan.

Table 27 : Shift among Dalit Voters, 1995-2000(%)

Party	1995	1996	1998	1999	2000	2005
Congress+	23.0	19.0	13.7	17.3	9.4	-
BJP+	15.0	24.8	**24.5**	**47.1**	**38.9**	**34.9**
JD+	48.7	31.4	28.4	_	_	-
RJD+	_	_	**23.5**	**26.0**	**33.1**	**24.3**
LJP +	-	-	-	-	-	14.0

Source: Bihar Assembly Election Survey 1995; National Election Study 1996, 1998 and 1999; Assembly Election Survey 2000

Table 28 : Profile of RJD voters (%)

caste	Never voted for RJD	Always voted for RJD	Voted for RJD in the 1999 lok sabha elections	Voted for RJD in the 2000 assembly elections
All	28	20	26	27
Uppercaste	45	7	9	11
Yadav	2	32	28	27
Muslim	4	26	21	23
Other OBC*	26	21	22	20
Dalit	11	13	19	18
Adivasi	12	1	1	1

- includes all backward castes except the Yadavs, source: BAES

An outstanding feature of the voting pattern that these surveys point out is that no caste group (very few showing major consolidation) shows complete consolidation for one political formation or the other, denying once the much hyped determining play of caste loyalities in

voting behaviour of the masses which should have meant otherwise. The upper caste and the upper backward castes, in particular the yadavs are the caste groups which show closure of ranks of any significant extent. Point to be noted is that these are the castes which haven had the highest stakes both in the economy and polity of the state. The weakest sections of the society, the dalits and the lower backward castes (with the exception of the lower caste muslims perhaps because of the communal character of the BJP) after the initial dalliance with Janta Dal, are seen to be moving closer to the political formations which are also the preferred formations of the upper castes - the elites which are found to be gradually receding in the background in the rural agrarian economy and polity. Here one must also locate the emerging trends in the agrarian structure of the state in nineties, which has seen the growing clout of the upper backward castes in the production process, withdrawal from this sector by the upper castes and worsening of economic parameters for the lower backward castes and dalits among whom an increased disassociation from agriculture is observed.

The coming together of the dalits and the lower backward castes which are mainly, with the upper castes in the political process is only an indicator of the conflict building up in the agrarian structure. These castes, as seen in Chapter 3, are mainly wage labour or sharecroppers with little or no land in rural Bihar. With the upper caste landed segments' weakening control over the agrarian production process, their declining economic and political clout in the rural setting, and the growing economic and political prowess of the cultivating rich landed segments of the upper backward castes, the erstwhile class conflict that had clean categorization of upper castes versus the rest, is now seeing accumulation of segments of these ascendant castes too onto the oppressor side of the boundary. But invariably the dalits and the lowest among the backward castes continue to be on the receiving side. Since surplus in any production is majorly a function of the degree of control on labour, the logic of surplus generation warrants continued and even greater degree of control on labour irrespective of the changed caste profile of the new agricultural elite. But the very changes in the socio-political milieu that faciliatated emergence of these ascendant groups has also created a greater freedom for the rural labour.

The changes in the socio-economic structure that brought about the economic and political empowerment of these cultivating castes also initiated changes in the kind of authority these castes could exercise in their immediate socio-economic and political setting. Abolition of

zamindari and independence brought about a gradual weakening of the hold of upper caste landed segments on the agrarian economy and a simultaneous rise in the upper backward castes's hold over the rural production process. While decreeing of the bonded labour and begar as illegal,over the time (not immediately) meant freeing of labour from the crutches of the erstwhile rural elite, and a freer rural labour market for this upwardly mobile cultivating caste group to build upon their prosperity, it also meant greater freedom for the labour in the rural market . And because profit in any productive enterprise has to come at the cost of labour, its maximization requires a control on the freedom of labour.

Table 29 below reveals the growing conflict between the ascendant upper backward caste landlords and the dalit labourers and sharecroppers. The class dimensions of these conflicts and atrocities are quite obvious as the primary cause of conflict emerges out to be wages, proper share of the crops, or land dispute. It is this greater freedom of the weakest in the society, who have a correspondence with the caste groups of dalits and the lower backward castes and this freedom threatening the vested interests of the new rural elites that can perhaps explain the defeat of the RJD regime in the Assembly elections of 2005.

Thus we see that despite increased participation of the backward masses in the political process, and the requisite numbers being on their side (which is however limited in effect to electoral process), the resulting empowerment has been paradoxically of the powerful. This points fingers towards the political structure itself, which as pointed out earlier in the chapter, by its very construction limits real empowerment of the masses. The idea of democracy, as Sudipta Kaviraj has noted, exerts considerable influence on thirld world politics not because it is realized in a governmental form, but through this powerful intangibility of political imagination. And it is this intangibility of political imagination, that explains the expanse of deprivations and domination in a society with an increasing participation and unwavering faith in the political process of the numerous deprived.

Table29 : Caste violence in Bihar

	Place	Aggressor		Victim		Issues
		Caste	Economic status	Caste	Economic status	
1	Bajitpur	Bhumihar	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourers and share croppers	Wage,, sharecroppers' right over land ,
2.	Belchi	Kurmi	Landlord	All castes	Poor peasants, agricultural labourers, and sharecroppers	social oppression
3.	Beniapatti	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourers	Wage
4.	Bishrampur	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijan	agricultural labourers, and sharecroppers	Wage, sharecroppers's rights
5.	Chandadano	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourer	Wage
6.	Dharampuri	Brahmin	Landlord	Harijan	agricultural labourers, and sharecroppers	Wage, sharecroppers's rights
7.	Dohija	Yadav	All class	Bhumihar	Poor peasant and one big landlord	Retaliation
8.	Gopalpur	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourer	Wage
9.	Jarpa	Bhumihar	Landlord	Yadav	Poor peasant and Sharecropper	Land dispute
10.	Kalia	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourer	Wage
11.	Khijuria	Brahmin	Landlord	Harijan	Sharecroppers	sharecroppers's rights
12.	Parasbigha	Bhumihar	Landlord	Yadav	Sharecroppers	sharecroppers's rights
13.	Pathada	Yadav	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourer	Wage
14.	Pipra	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourer	Wage
15.	Pupri	Kurmi	Landlord	Harijan	Agricultural labourer	Wage and possession over land

Source: P K Bose, table 2 - mobility and conflict, caste, conflict and reservation, 1985, New Delhi

CHAPTER 4
STATE EXPENDITURE PATTERN

Bihar's economy is in shambles, more so after the bifurcation of the state. With a debilitated minimalistic infrastructure, and a distorted production structure the state has the distinction of having the lowest per capita income in the country with the real per capita GSDP at Rs 4435 in 2004-05. The state also has the distinction of one of the highest rural povery incidences, second only to Orissa, with its masses eking out a wretched existence.

But where democracy and development have been organic to the project of building a modern state, agricultural sector in Bihar by the sheer logic of state construction should have seen substantive state intervention, both, in terms of regulation/legislation to correct the distortions in the agrarian production structure, and in terms of public expenditure to create and strengthen productive capabilities in the sector. While there was a symbolic effort by the state, as seen in the previous chapters, in the form of Land reforms to address the former issue, we take a look at the expenditure pattern of the state in this chapter.

In a democratic polity, numbers count and we see that the policy deicisions of the government of the day invariably are tempered by the considerations of continuation in power. A survey of literature on the subject, as seen in introduction of this dissertation (Chapter 1) also suggests that the nature of the regime determines public expenditure patterns. The regime of the day, it is argued, uses its distributive/allocative agencies to target the sections of the population that are its voters or prospective voters. The regimes, it is argued, may also choose to deliberately cut of certain kinds of expenditures so as to maintain their stranglehold over its current voter profile (like the argument that upper caste elite character of the regimes sees a neglect of education as that would empower the deprived sections which would threaten the control of the current regime over those illiterate segments). Expenditure decisions therefore are considered to reveal the socio-

economic priorities of the government of the day. It is in these expenditure decisions that the official objectives and stated commitments get concrete shape, and hence to understand genuinesness of government's claim, these are useful points of entry.

So even if we leave out the larger developmental orientation of the state which should have anyways given agriculture a primal status when it came to expenditure/investment decisions, on purely political grounds as the above mentioned arguments suggest, there should have been a preferential flow of funds towards the sector in particular in the post ninety periods. As seen in the earlier chapters, this period has seen domination of the state's polity by the elites belonging to the rural cultivating castes and the masses of these caste groups had direct stakes in agriculture. This chapter takes a look at the public expenditure pattern in the state in the post ninety era to see if there is any correspondence between the nature of political regime and its policy orientation.

But before we proceed any further, it would be apt to note the limitation of this exercise. Economic policy making and in India has seen dramatic changes in the very period of our consideration. The decade of nineties has been a decade of 'Economic Liberalisation' which in essence has meant retreat of the state from the economy and allowance of market forces a free play. This retreat has in effect meant a depoliticisation of an already substantially depoliticized society. Earlier issues such as production goals, organization of production, definition of property rights, public and private etc. were kept under wrap and out of purview of the public, production itself came under the purview of the state policy. Not only was the state a regulator of the economy, a faciliatotor but also an active participant in production and surplus creation. In the post reform period, even these are increasingly sought to be kept out of public purview. But without much digression, we see that this retreat of the state has meant a retreat from all kinds of intervention which have an effect on the production process, be it manufacture, agriculture or any other sector. As a corrolary public expenditure wherever it was meant to create/enable production capabilities has taken a hit, agriculture being no exception.

There has been a decline in the public expenditure in Bihar and it has undoubtedly effected growth and the state of economy. Bihar's development performance in the Eighth Plan(1990-95) which showed serious deterioration extensively, amounting to a crisis in development may have its origins in this changed policy scenario. While the Plan growth rate exceeded 6.5 percent, the average for Bihar had been hardly 0.5 percent, the lowest in the country. The collapse of growth has been a phenomenon of 1990s. The actual State Plan expenditure turned out to be less that 40 percent of the projected level during 1993-96. During these three years the State could not execute plan even of the size of the Central plan assistance. The slippage in the Eighth Plan is evident from the fact that Bihar's per-capita plan expenditure as a percentage of all state average was about 59 percent in the Sixth Plan, it improved to over 69 percent in the Seventh Plan but declined sharply to 29.5 percent in the Eighth Plan.

This decline of public expenditure, as mentioned earlier, has to be located within the context of a fiscal crisis that has affected all state governments in India since the advent of economic reforms in the country with fiscal crisis of the centre getting transferred to the states. While the Central funds constituted a little over 50% of the state government's total revenue in the late 1980s, but by 2003-04 central funds grew to 70% of the state revenue. This paper, therefore, focuses on changes in percentage of expenditure on certain developmental heads likely to affect the voter segments of the regime of the day. As the regime in the Bihar in the last 15 years had its most vociferous supporters living in rural areas and dependent on agriculture, it was expected that the sector would be beneficiary of public expenditure especially targeted at it. Similarly, this paper takes a look at the rural development expenditure as it is under this head various employment generation schemes for the rural workforce, in particular agricultural labourers are run. And the regime in question, to begin with had a substantial support base in this segment of rural population too.

The post reform period has seen a fall in the revenue generation capacity of the state, and besides its share in Central taxes all other forms of central assistance have fallen over this peiod. This has seen a rising debt burden of the state which has aggravated in the post bifurcation period.From 1991 to 2003, interest payments increased from 15.4% to 25% of the Bihar.There has been a discrete jump in the fiscal deficit since bifurcation. Relative to

GSDP, post bifurcation expenditures surged from about 20% of GSDP to 28%, while revenue rose by half this share, from 16% to 20% of GSDP. There has been a steady accumulation of debt overtime. Between 1985 and the year of bifurcation, debt rose from 30% to 42% of GSDP, and has since jumped to 61%. New state of Bihar was burdened with 75% of debt while accounting for only 60% of production, and with a much lower per-capita income than Jharkhand. Interest on debt increased from 11% of revenue expenditure in the late 80s to 26% in 2003-04, going up as a share of GSDP to nearly 6%, and accounting for nearly 40% of total increase in public expenditure.

Social Services vs Economic Services: the pattern of expenditure

As a result of increase in interest payment liabilities, non-interest expenditure has been curtailed. While core social services have been proportionally maintained, economic services have declined sharply. Since mid-1980s, social services expenditure has remained little over 30% of total spending. General services, which include debt services and pension expenditure, has grown steadily from about 25% to 43% of total spending and economic services have been cut by over half to 16%.The maintenance of public spending on social services in contrast to economic services in part reflects the difficulty of cutting salaries, which comprise 80% of social services as compared to only 16% of economic services.

Economic services which include such important heads of expenditure as agriculture, irrigation and flood control, rural development and other infrastructural spending, has fallen from a level of around 27 per cent of total spending in 1990-91 to around 17 per cent in 2003-04 (table 30). The decline was most marked in the nineties, with its share falling to around 16 per cent in 1997-98. There was a rise then to 23.99 per cent in 1999-2000, only to experience a fall from thereon to around 17 per cent in 2003-04. And this fall in the share of economic services in total expenditure is reflected in the fall in the share of expenditure on agriculture and allied services.

Agriculture and allied activities:

In the last 13-14 years, expenditure on agriculture and allied activities has fallen by nearly two thirds to less than 2 per cent. Its share in total expenditure in 1990-91 was 5.65 per cent, which fell to 1.89 per cent in 2003-04. Within the head of agriculture and allied activities,

while capital expenditure on **crop husbandry** has seen a fall from 6.04 per cent in 1990-91 to 0 per cent in 2003-04: its share in revenue expenditure on agriculture has fluctuated around 30 per cent all through the nineties, registering a fall in the second half of ninetie only to pick up by the end of the decade back to 36.02 per cent in 2003-04. While the share of **co-operation** in the revenue expenditure on agriculture has seen a fall from 12.5 percent in 1990 to 9.7 per cent in 2003-04, it share in capital expenditure has increased from less than one-fourth to 100 per cent in the same period (table 31).

The state has not seen any capital expenditure on the head of **animal husbandry** over the entire period, its share in revenue expenditure on agriculture has fluctuated around 20 per cent all through this period. From 16.24 per cent of revenue expenditure on agriculture in 1990-91, its share has fluctuated around 20 per cent (with one exception of 1995-96 when it went up to 48.74 per cent). It was 20.57 per cent in 2003-04(table 32). This is interesting as animal husbandry is an important source of livelihood for the poor masses in Bihar with the livestock generating 21 per cent of agricultural output in the state. In particular, the Yadavs who have been die-hard supporters of the Lalu Yadav regime have a substantial stake in this sector, but this sector has not seen any preferential treatment.

Similarly, **dairy development** has seen a decline in its share of revenue expenditure on agriculture from 2.38 per cent to 1.21 per cent in 2003-04. In fact, the decline was very prominent in the first half of nineties with the share falling by more than two thirds to 0.7 per cent in 1995-96, after which it began to pick up but was confined to about half of its share in the early nineties. This is also a pointer towards that there was hardly any expenditure targeting by the regime in question towards it voter segments, considering the fact that the Yadav households owe a lot of their prosperity and a substantive part of their household income to dairy farming.

Irrigation and Flood control:

Share of irrigation and flood control in total public expenditure is seen to fall in this period from 8.19 per cent in 1990-91 to a low of 3.09 per cent in 1997-98, then picking up in the late nineties but remained below its level in the early nineties, standing in 2003-04 at 6.09 per cent. This is important because by an estimate of IHD, more than 50 per cent of the flood effected people in India live in Bihar, and the agriculture, dependent mostly on rain suffers

almost every alternate year the menace of floods. And in the event of flood, besides its dependence on the mercy of nature for a good crop, it is the agricultural population, the cultivating castes with no alternative base in the urban centres or the urban economy that suffers the most. And interestingly this is the segment of population from which the previous regime of the state drew its majority support.

Rural development:

In an economy where 90 per cent of the population lives in the rural areas, and where 80 per cent of the workforce is employed on basically a subsistence agriculture, rural development expenditure assumes special significance as it not only creates rural infrastructure which aid agricultural growth as such, but also eases the employment demand on agriculture thereby tempering the prevalent underemployment scenario , besides providing employment to the rural workforce on a round the year basis. The employment generation schemes of the government come under this head. And not to mention that the beneficiaries of this expenditure, if it reaches them at all, would be the class of agricultural labourers, poor peasants, and artisans, and again previous RJD regime had significant support base in this segment. Similar to the experience of other expenditure heads, share of rural development expenditure in total public expenditure has seen a drop almost by 50 per cent. It has fallen from 11.25 per cent in 1991-92 to 6.37 per cent in 2003-04.

Education and Public Health:

A change in the nature of regime has not seen any increase in the share of education in total public spending. This observation is in contrast to the findings of some scholars who established a relationship between the nature of political regime and public spending on education. An argument was made (as quoted earlier) that dominance by upper caste elite sees ignorance of education and a fall in expenditure on this head as education among the masses would challenge their continuation in power by making the deprived sections more aware of their socio-economic and political environment. A corrolary to this line of argument would predict an increase in public expenditure on education by a regime having substantial representation of backward classes. But as the data show, this is not to be found to be the case in Bihar.

Similarly, public spending on public health has taken a dip over this period, with its share declining from 5.23 per cent of total public expenditure in 1990-91 to 3 per cent in 2003-04. and this in a state where amidst the highest level of poverty incidence in the country , the ration of private to public expenditure on health is the second highest in the country. In fact, the NSSO data reveal that loans for medical purposes form a major component of the debt on the rural population, and in particular the cultivating and the self employed sections of the rural population which again were the major support base of the erstwhile regime of the state (the weakest of the rural population hardly have any access to loans even in the informal rural credit market).

Thus we see that although the electoral strength of the JD and then the RJD regime in the state was majorly based in the rural areas and lived mostly out of agriculture, there is no preferential treatment given to the sector or rural development in the public expenditure decisions made by the regime in question. The evidence that emerges clearly doesnot support the theories of Galor and Maov, Bourguignon and Verdier linking the dominance by elite(which they associate with upper castes) with public expenditure pattern, or the theories of ethnic heterogeneity explaining poor provisioning of public goods(Goldin and Katz, Ghosh and Pal) because the clientele base of the regime is relatively narrower, therefore targeted spending/provisioning at the clientele base. Here there is no evidence of any change in the pattern of public goods provisioning or expenditure flowing towards the clientele base of the regime in question on a preferential basis. In fact, the public expenditures crucial to the living conditions of this base are seen to have been curtailed in this period. This is particularly true for agriculture and rural development expenditures over the period of nineties right through to 2003-04. This only confirms that beneficiaries of increased representation in the institutions of the polity are not the masses who vote the regime in power. Their empowerment so far has been limited in essence to exercising their right to vote.

Table 30: Pattern of public expenditure in Bihar (in percentage)

		total expenditure	development exp.	Non-develop. Exp.	Social services	economic services	education &..	med.&pub. Hlth.	agr. & allied act.	rural development	irrig.&flood ctrl.
1990-91	Rev. exp	488,771	312,867	174,787	192,329	120,538	120,922	31,039	32,953	29,210	18,183
1990-91	cap. Exp	132,876	57,138	1,338	8629	48,509	3,312	1,444	2,151	4,098	32,766
1990-91	total exp	621,647	370,005	176,125	200,958	169,047	124,234	32,483	35,104	33,308	50,949
1990-91	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**59.52**	**28.33**	**32.33**	**27.19**	**19.98**	**5.23**	**5.65**	**5.35**	**8.19**
1991-92	rev. exp	573,869	364,612	208,140	217,387	147,225	127,295	41,323	36,774	66,520	18,307
1991-92	cap. Exp	106,599	47,068	1,098	9,552	37,516	2,029	871	2,423	10,000	20,707
1991-92	total exp	680,468	411,680	209,238	226,939	184,741	129,324	42,194	39,197	76,520	39,014
1991-92	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**60.5**	**30.75**	**33.35**	**27.15**	**19**	**6.2**	**5.76**	**11.25**	**5.73**
1992-93	rev. exp	656,955	414,299	242,381	222,170	192,129	133,357	38,564	33,468	69,956	20,699
1992-93	cap. Exp	117,389	44,225	272	9,520	34,705	790	715	2,364	7,600	16,707
1992-93	total exp	774,344	458,524	242,653	231,690	226,834	134,147	39,279	35,832	77,556	37,406
1992-93	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**59.21**	**31.34**	**29.92**	**29.29**	**17.32**	**5.07**	**4.63**	**10.02**	**4.83**
1993-94	rev. exp	731,864	459,862	271,728	241,581	218,281	140,136	45,704	39,007	84,300	20,943
1993-94	cap. Exp	111,461	39,873	423	10,205	29,668	926	819	2,404	4,544	17,086
1993-94	total exp	843,325	499,735	272,151	251,786	247,949	141,062	46,523	41,411	88,844	38,029
1993-94	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**59.26**	**32.27**	**29.85**	**29.4**	**16.72**	**5.52**	**4.91**	**10.53**	**4.51**
1994-95	rev. exp	773,122	463,016	309,831	281,514	181,502	168,264	50,531	38,667	57,606	20,051
1994-95	cap. Exp	82,332	34,693	222	8,938	25,533	831	516	1,490	1,800	17,419
1994-95	total exp	855,454	497,709	310,053	290,452	207,035	169,095	51,047	40,157	59,406	37,470
1994-95	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**58.18**	**36.24**	**33.95**	**24.20176889**	**19.77**	**5.97**	**4.69**	**6.94**	**4.38**
1995-96	rev. exp	845,617	501,972	343,455	325,108	176,864	201,326	33,846	46,967	41,919	23,181
1995-96	cap. Exp	96,078	37,605	314	8,330	29,275	1,306	0	956	1,500	22,062
1995-96	total exp	941,695	539,577	343,769	333,438	206,139	202,632	33,846	47,923	43,419	45,243
1995-96	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**57.3**	**36.51**	**35.41**	**21.89**	**21.52**	**3.6**	**5.1**	**4.61**	**4.8**
1996-97	rev. exp	825,386	478,976	346,088	322,185	156,791	220,686	39,231	36,755	63,244	28,454
1996-97	cap. Exp	115,290	44,437	579	7,544	36,893	2,403	0	438	2,231	25,516
1996-97	total exp	940,676	523,413	346,667	329,729	193,684	223,089	39,231	37,193	65,475	53,970
1996-97	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**55.64**	**36.85**	**35.05**	**20.59**	**23.72**	**4.17**	**3.95**	**6.96**	**5.74**
1997-98	rev. exp	895,646	515,148	380,305	359,493	155,655	250,700	40,714	27,999	63,859	20,984
1997-98	cap. Exp	125,936	21,825	830	9,721	12,104	1,498	0	0	1,326	10,228
1997-98	total exp	1,021,582	536,973	381,135	369,214	167,759	252,198	40,714	27,999	65,185	31,212
1997-98	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**52.56**	**37.31**	**36.14**	**16.42**	**24.69**	**3.99**	**2.74**	**6.38**	**3.06**

		total expenditure	development exp.	Non-develop. Exp.	Social services	economic services	education & ..	med.&pub. Hlth.	agr. & allied act.	rural development	irrig.&flood ctrl.
1998-99	rev. exp	1,062,254	600,104	461,929	382,441	217,663	256,280	47,185	37,176	124,784	27,380
1998-99	cap. Exp	154,857	69,468	479	15,227	54,241	1,241	0	318	11,171	24,274
1998-99	total exp	1,217,111	669,572	462,408	397,668	271,904	257,521	47,185	37,494	135,955	51,654
1998-99	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**55.01**	**37.99**	**32.67**	**22.34**	**21.16**	**3.88**	**3.08**	**11.17**	**4.24**
1999-00	rev. exp	1,612,832	929,984	682,594	622,767	307,217	420,508	76,291	59,467	148,275	45,899
1999-00	cap. Exp	341,987	185,661	4,621	24,005	161,656	540	0	2,160	34,200	86,113
1999-00	total exp	1,954,819	1,115,645	687,215	646,772	468,873	421,048	76,291	61,627	182,475	132,012
1999-00	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**57.07**	**35.15**	**33.09**	**23.99**	**21.54**	**3.9**	**3.15**	**9.33**	**6.75**
2000-01	rev. exp	1,434,543	812,683	621,641	582,794	229,889	400,688	71,426	45,638	89,292	49,887
2000-01	cap. Exp	260,061	111,165	2,265	23,397	87,768	539	0	1,873	36,565	36,612
2000-01	total exp	1,694,604	923,848	623,906	606,191	317,657	401,227	71,426	47,511	125,857	86,499
2000-01	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**54.52**	**36.82**	**35.77**	**18.75**	**23.68**	**4.21**	**2.8**	**7.43**	**5.1**
2001-02	rev. exp	1,256,036	620,044	635,768	442,785	177,259	303,340	52,757	35,082	69,922	37,808
2001-02	cap. Exp	230,893	111,172	610	13,197	97,975	4,282	1,357	15	49,073	42,187
2001-02	total exp	1,486,929	731,216	636,378	455,982	275,234	307,622	54,114	35,097	118,995	79,995
2001-02	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**49.18**	**42.8**	**30.67**	**18.51**	**20.69**	**3.64**	**2.36**	**8**	**5.38**
2002-03	rev. exp	1,402,535	688,877	713,433	470,387	218,490	318,100	56,447	37,881	94,113	39,396
2002-03	cap. Exp	372,707	156,957	8,563	21,282	135,675	7,898	409	3,778	56,800	65,233
2002-03	total exp	1,775,242	845,834	721,996	491,669	354,165	325,998	56,856	41,659	150,913	104,629
2002-03	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**47.65**	**40.67**	**27.7**	**19.95**	**18.36**	**3.2**	**2.34**	**8.5**	**5.89**
2003-04	rev. exp	1,448,369	704,121	743,842	516,227	187,894	353,567	53,917	33,376	77,422	39,457
2003-04	cap. Exp	425,147	158,512	15,771	27,119	131,393	6,043	2,880	2,115	41,843	74,636
2003-04	total exp	1,873,516	862,633	759,613	543,346	319,287	359,610	56,797	35,491	119,265	114,093
2003-04	**% of total expd.**	**100**	**46.04**	**40.55**	**29**	**17.04**	**19.19**	**30.03**	**1.89**	**6.37**	**6.09**

Primary Source: RBI report on state government finances 2005.

Table 31: Pattern of capital expenditure in agriculture in Bihar (in percentage)

	Agriculture & Allied Act.			Crop Husbandry				Animal Husbandry				Dairy Development				Co-Operation			
	plan	non plan	total	plan	non plan	total	% of total exp on agr.	plan	non plan	total	% of total	plan	non plan	total	%of total exp on agr.	plan	non plan	total	% of total exp. On agr.
1990-91	2,151	-	2,151	130	0	130	6.04	0	0	0	0	38	0	38	1.77	546	0	546	25.38
1991-92	2,423	0	2,423	336	0	336	13.87	0	0	0	0	30	0	30	0.12	1,360	0	1,360	56.13
1992-93	2,364	0	2,364	73	0	73	3.09	0	0	0	0	8	0	8	0.34	1,128	0	1,128	47.72
1993-94	2,404	0	2,404	72	0	72	3.00	0	0	0	0	38	0	38	1.58	1,473	0	1,473	61.27
1994-95	1,490	0	1,490	64	0	64	4.30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	1,014	0	1,014	68.05
1995-96	956	0	956	1	0	1	0.10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	729	0	729	76.26
1996-97	438	0	438	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	94	0	94	21.46
1997-98	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00
1998-99	318	0	318	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	318	0	318	100.00
1999-2000	2,160	0	2,160	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	14	0	14	1.00	2,146	0	2,146	99.35
2000-01	1,873	0	1,873	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	1,473	0	1,473	78.64
2001-02	15	0	15	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	15	0	15	100.00
2002-03	528	0	528	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	528	0	528	100.00
2003-04	2,055	60	2,115	0	0	0	0.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	2,055	0	2,055	100.00

Primary Source: RBI report on state government finances 2005.

Table 32: Pattern of revenue expenditure in agriculture in Bihar (in percentage)

	Agriculture & Allied Act.			Crop Husbandry				Animal Husbandry				dairy development					co-operation		
	plan	non plan	total	plan	non plan	total	% of total exp. On agr.	plan	non plan	total	% of total exp. On agr.	plan	non plan	total	% of total exp. On agr.	plan	non plan	total	% of total exp. On agr.
1990-91	14,668	18,285	32,953	6,650	6,487	13,137	39.86	1,006	4,348	5,354	16.24	533	254	787	2.38	1,484	2,627	4,111	12.47
1991-92	16,818	19,956	36,774	9,391	7,374	16,765	45.58	675	4,624	5,299	14.40	515	0	515	1.40	1,726	2,884	4,610	12.53
1992-93	9,968	23,500	33,468	3,629	8,546	12,175	36.37	650	5,373	6,023	17.99	387	280	667	1.99	941	3,105	4,046	12.08
1993-94	14,101	24,906	39,007	6,562	8,648	15,210	38.99	265	6,243	6,508	16.68	212	287	499	1.27	1,218	3,359	4,577	11.73
1994-95	13,103	25,564	38,667	6,090	8,559	14,649	37.88	460	6,547	7,007	18.12	17	361	378	0.97	1,179	3,476	4,655	12.03
1995-96	7,109	39,858	46,967	3,115	6,427	9,542	20.31	632	22,260	22,892	48.74	362	0	362	0.77	882	3,515	4,397	9.36
1996-97	16,800	19,955	36,755	4,723	5,968	10,691	29.08	332	6,148	6,480	17.63	129	234	363	0.98	1,231	3,598	4,829	13.13
1997-98	5,308	22,691	27,999	3,105	6,088	9,193	32.83	269	3,180	3,449	12.31	146	290	436	1.55	213	3,759	3,972	14.18
1998-99	4,576	32,600	37,176	922	7,036	7,958	21.41	894	5,666	6,560	17.64	30	0	30	0.08	5	4,214	4,219	11.34
1999-2000	15,063	44,404	59,467	3,392	9,514	12,906	21.70	324	12,329	12,653	21.27	65	576	641	1.07	1,539	6,271	7,810	13.13
2000-01	11,392	34,246	45,638	2,444	8,927	11,371	24.915	1,035	9,293	10,328	22.63	82	494	576	1.26	1,839	4,770	6,609	14.48
2001-02	6,989	28,093	35,082	4,493	8,021	12,514	35.67	368	8,186	8,554	24.38	51	305	356	1.01	438	3,578	4,016	11.44
2002-03	13,713	24,168	37,881	7,003	7,173	14,176	37.42	511	6,287	6,798	17.94	1,112	297	1,409	3.71	835	2,764	3,599	9.50
2003-04	8,990	24,386	33,376	5,340	6,685	12,025	36.02	512	6,390	6,902	20.67	107	303	410	1.22	384	2,880	3,264	9.77

Primary Source: RBI report on state government finances 2005.

Table 33: Fiscal summary of the state (1985-86 to 2003-04 - as % of GSDP)

	1985-1990	1990-1995	1995-2000		200 1/02	2002/03	2003/04
						(RE)	(BE)
Total Revenue	15.62	16.29	15.75	18.94	19.3	20.54	21.80
Own revenue	**7.27**	**6.54**	**6.28**	**6.22**	**5.1**	**5.51**	**6.45**
Tax	3.91	4.34	4.34	4.88	4.6	4.93	5.71
Non-tax	3.36	2.20	1.95	1.34	0.9	0.57	0.75
From center	**8.35**	**9.75**	**9.46**	**12.72**	**14.2**	**15.03**	**15.35**
Shared	5.76	6.61	6.82	10.94	12.1	11.91	12.37
Grants	2.59	3.13	2.64	1.78	2.1	3.12	2.98
Total Expenditure	**19.40**	**20.27**	**19.79**	**27.07**	**24.4**	**29.26**	**28.92**
Revenue	15.21	18.44	17.89	23.87	21.9	24.90	24.24
Capital	4.19	1.83	1.90	3.20	2.5	4.36	4.68
Capital outlays	2.70	1.20	1.25	1.89	1.5	2.94	2.92
Revenue deficit	**0.41**	**-2.16**	**-2.14**	**-4.93**	**-2.6**	**-4.36**	**-2.44**
Fiscal deficit	**-3.78**	**-3.98**	**-4.05**	**-8.13**	**-5.1**	**-8.72**	**-7.12**
Interestpayments	**2.05**	**3.43**	**3.56**	**4.43**	**5.2**	**5.71**	**5.72**
Primary deficit	**-1.74**	**-0.55**	**-0.48**	**-3.70**	**0.1**	**-3.01**	**-0.41**
					19.3		
T ota! deficit	**31.26**	**35.57**	**37.96**	**43.0**	**5.1**	**60.4**	**n/a**

Note: Capital expenditures include capital oudays and net lending for PSUs .. The debt figure for 200 1/02 is RE and for 2002/03 Is BE.

Source: RBI for 1985-1998; GoB for 1998/99 - 2003/04.

CONCLUSION

Bihar continues to be in a state of underdevelopment, eking out subsistence from a distorted production structure which does not show any signs of positive change. With no signs of growth in the modern industrial structure (the secondary sector growth in the second half of nineties is largely a growth in the informal sector, as there have been few investments in the industrial sector in the period), a subsistence agriculture continues to support more than three-fourth of the state's population while accounting for hardly about 40 per cent of the states's income. The state having the distinction of lowest per capita income in the country, lowest literacy rates and one of the highest rural poverty ratios and where around 90 per cent of the population lives in the rural areas, continues to be home to deprivations of the worst kind.

A change of the political regime in the state in 1990, with Janata Dal displacing the Congress from the seat of power was seen by many, and claimed by the protagonists of this political play as an act of redemption for the hitherto subjugated and deprived masses. In fact, the new regime had anointed itself as the regime of 'social justice' which largely meant that the regime was elected to power by the weaker sections/ backward castes and dalits , and as a corrolary the latter's deprivations which had been beset upon them by a tradition of social injustice would be addressed by this regime. This regime was potrayed and taken to be symbolic of political empowerment of the weaker sections of the society, backward castes and the dalits. In the modern day polity, where the state is all pervasive (the limits set by the vested interests of the elites in power and justified by a suitable ideological construct), and where the regime of day owes its seat to the count of numbers, the voice of those numbers are expected to be heard and acted upon. Bihar, going by this logic should have seen an alleviation of the miseries of its deprived masses, and in the process some development should have been visible in the long tenure of 15 years of this social justice regime.

But as noted in this paper, this was not to be. The state continued to drift towards a worsening of the state of underdevelopment, while its masses continued to suffer in their destitution and deprivations. This implies that either: 1) the empowerment that was claimed to have fallen on the weaker sections was quite limited both in its expanse and its content, or 2) that the system failed to deliver on the demands of the empowered masses - which would then only

substantiate the first point that the empowerment was very limited, but with the qualification that this limit on empowerment of the masses was rather insititutional / structural.

The course of events in Bihar, in particular in the last 15 years, testifies to both the points mentioned above. There is evidence that the empowerment that the weaker sections, backward castes and dalits were assumed to have experienced in the period was not only very limited in its content but also had a very limited expanse, covering only a minority of elites within these weaker sections. While within the backward castes, it was the upper backward caste elites who made significant political gains in the period, reflected in their representation in state's Legislative Assembly and in the Council of Ministers over this period, differential gains were made by different sections of this upper backward caste segments itself, generating a process of dealignment of the group which had joined ranks right from the pre-independence era (the Triveni Sangh - alliance of the yadavs, kurmis and koeris was formed way back in 1920s) to challenge the upper caste dominance in the society - polity and economy. A significant percentage of the increase in OBC MLAs during the 1990s was actually an increase in the number of Yadav MLAs, who since 1995 constituted 27% of the state assembly. Moreover, 40% of the RJD MLAs were Yadavs as compared to only 17% from other OBCs. As the percentage of upper caste representation declined in the last decade and a half, the Yadav caste benefited most in the political arena.

On the other side, the lower backward castes' empowerment, if that means representation in the legislature, has been conspicuous by its absence. Although an estimated 32 % of the population, EBC MLAs made up less than 5% of the Bihar assembly in this period. Significantly, their representation in the council of ministers in the Rabri Devi regime fell from 9% to 0 (Chaudhury and Srikant; Bihar mein Samajik Parivartan, 2005). Similarly, the dalits see no significant political advancements in the period with their representation in the Assembly remaining largely proportional to their share in total population, and this proportionality can be attributed largely to the reservation of seats in the assembly for this segment of the population.

The representation in the assembly was in effect a reflection (or vice versa) of the ascendancy of these elite in the village level polity as well, where the upper OBCs and in particular the Yadavs have had a dominating presence in the Panchayati Raj institutions right from the decade of seventies, with the upper castes slowly loosing their position of primacy (but this loss at local level polity has been more gradual , and tempered than compared to the loss at

the state level). Here too, the lower back ward castes are seen to have only a minimalistic representation (3.9% of total Mukhias) insignificant in comparison to their share of the population (32%). In fact their representation in the Panchayati Raj institutions has taken a dip from having 3.94% of total Mukhia posts in 1978 to 3.9% in 2001. The scheduled castes too are seen to be loosing their representation in the village level polity as their share in total Mukhia posts declineg from 1.31% to 1.06% in this period. The upper castes are seen to be loosing ground to the upper backward castes which see their share increase from around 38% to around 42% in 2001. Here too, this increase is is almost entirely cornered by the yadavs, who see an increase in their share by almost 4%.

The increased political representation, and hence assumed empowerment of these backward castes has been associated with castiesation of politics (and this assumption has been lent powerful voice by explicit political exhortations along caste lines by the political leaders), which in turn has been linked to the backwardness of the state. Underdevelopment in the state has been largely explained by the scholars as the distortion arising out of interplay of such primordial institution as caste with the modern institutions of democratic polity and capitalist industrial society with their concomitant set of supposedly 'value neutral' and 'impersonal' institutions delivering the goods to the society.

But as scholars have contested, caste was never a primordial entity. As Dirks has argued, caste had always been political - it had been shaped in fundamental ways by political struggles and processes'. McKim Marriot's observation that it is to the landlord and not to the Brahman that maximum services are rendered in village in India, brings home the point very forcefully. Dipankar Gupta and others have convincingly contested Dumontian depiction of caste as a matter of ideological construct, based on the opposition of purity and pollution. It has been shown that historically, caste system has always functioned to codify and legitimize systems of surplus expropriation, of exploitation.

The differentiation of the Varna scheme into four broad categories was a reflection of the socio-economic formation of that period, namely, small peasant predominated villages which used pre-iron agricultural equipment and gave up the surplus to the Brahman-Kshatriya combine. The latter directly collected the surplus from the peasantry and took advantage of the artisans' rudimentary skills. The principal aim in the later Vedas is to sanction this exploitation. It is made clear that man is born with certain 'rinas'(debts) and that he can overcome these rinas by following the injunctions laid down in the Vedic scriptures, by

paying homage to the gods and the Brahman rishis, and by swearing allegiance solely to the lawmakers and the law-enforcers(Apte 1951:445).

Similarly, it was the progressive development of the economic structure of localized exploitation, characterstic of a feudal economy, within the village nexus which bought about the elaboration of the jati, or what is popularly known as the Indian caste system. The dependence of the lower exploited classes on each other and on their masters in a closed society necessitated greater elaboration of the rules of exchange and intercourse. The general exploitation of the Asiatic mode of production of the previous epoch, whereby the obligations and duties of the artisans and peasants vis-à-vis each other had not been elaborated, now gave way to more clearly specified patterns of interaction due to the exigencies of localized feudal exploitation.

There was a break in the early periods of Mughal Empire, when there was a proliferation of economic activity, trade and manufacture, and which saw Patna emerge as the third largest city in India. Significantly enough, this period was also a period of Bhakti and Sufi movement, which challenged the 'other', created by the caste boundaries? However, in the later Mughal period and with the advent of colonial system, the localised exploitation again set in represented during the colonial rule by the zamindari system.

In the post - independence era, with the abolition of zamindari, the stage was set for the authority of the erstwhile ruling oligarchy consisting majorly of upper caste landed elite to be decisively challenged by the backward cultivating castes (the upper backward castes, the yadavs, the kurmis, the koeris etc.) which had been gathering economic force and reason over the last few decades to bring forth this challenge. The grip of these upper castes landed segments on the rural agrarian economy had weakened now, and with the legal authority bolstering that emasculated strength gone, one very major impact was freeing of rural labour market (though it was not immediate and took several legislations and years to come into play). The increased participation of the upper backward caste landed elites in the massacres of harijan agricultural labourers and sharecroppers is only an assertion of this freedom which the landed class vested interests cannot suffer, notwithstanding the caste identity.

The political ascendancy of upper backward caste elites in the post-independence period to the point of clear domination of the state polity in the nineties was thus built upon the economic gains that these caste groups had been making in the rural agrarian setup where an

overwhelming majority continue to live a wretched existence. The empowerment that is claimed to have fallen upon the backward castes and the weaker sections in the nineties was essentially empowerment of the 'powerful'. In this period we see a worsening of the economic positioning of the dalits and the lower backward castes in the agrarian production process, which has manifested in their growing disassociation from agriculture. In terms of education and other social indicators too, these sections which also the majority, are seen to be far behind the privileged sections of upper castes and the upper backward castes.

This is reflected in their political positioning too, which hardly sees any increase in their representation in the institutions of polity. Their representation in Legislative assembly and the Panchayati Raj institutions remain far behind (have fallen at the local level) their share in the total population. If caste identity alone was the theme that determined people's voting/political behaviour, the representation of these caste groups should have been at least proportionate to their share in total population. This is not to deny play of caste identity in the political choices made by the people, but only to qualify that the former has an effect as the "common lived experiences' of the masses.

At the local level, at the level of 'Muhallahs' in a village which are inhabited by households belonging mainly to one caste group or the other, the life experiences of these caste grouping are similar. Within castes, subcastes mainly based on occupational profile have a lesser degree of heterogeneity in terms of economic and material positioning in a limited geographical locality. The muhallahs are mostly settled by households belonging to particular sub caste groups. This in turn results in their having an almost shared life experiences with the world outside. When put in a position to make a choice with regard to the outside world, their decisions are likely (and justifiably so) to be effected by by their lived experiences and hence the play of caste identity. Also the caste elites within their locality with their privileged positioning with regard to political or economic power are seen to have a powerful control over their caste bretheren. They often chip-in with their resources - economic or political in times of need (such as medical emergency) of their caste bretheren or others too living in their locality. This gradually evolves into a patron client relationship between the elite and the masses, latter more often than not guided by the politically suggestive advices of the former.

While a modern democratic State with it centralized system of authority is all pervasive, the substantive content of democracy is equally limited. The state reaches out to masses in its

regulatory and development functions (which are rather distributive functions) via the Executive. It is in their daily interface with these supposedly 'impersonal' and 'value neutral' institutions of the state that the masses live democracy These institutions with their widespread reach and regulatory and distributory functions are in turn instruments of authority and control access to which yields a rental value - both economical and political. The assumed air of 'impersonality' and 'value neutrality' of these institutions is good enough to abort any questioning of such an authority and contol in its very conception.

Thus when the state in its majorly distributive construct reaches out to the weaker sections of the society via its various 'impersonal' and 'value neutral ' institutions (with the substantive issues regarding the source of the 'weakness' of the masses put under the carpet by its distributive focus), access to these institutions became a profitable proposition. A monopoly or oligarchy over the access to these institutions carries more lucrative rental value now than did the monopoly over land in the zamindari period. And as weaker sections were identified by their caste origins, the elites and the capable within each caste had a natural advantage in reaching out to the aristocratic bureaucracy and potraying themselves as facilitator of development of their caste bretheren. On many occasions even this portrayal is not necessary, and a mere political connection to flout or establishment of a symbiotic relationship of exchange would give them the access to funds meant for development of their caste bretheren, or other developmental works. Proliferation of 'Contractor Raj' in Bihar and numerous scams are only a testimony to this process of surplus appropriation by the elites of different caste gathering in the harvest of free play of numbers which are drowned in every day living miseries. This access also comes in handy in establishment of a patron-client relationship between the elites at various points of power hierarchy and between elites at the local level and their not so fortunate caste bretheren, which then plays a very efficacious role in management of numbers in quest for political power.

The effort and the resources of the new landed elites generating their surplus in agriculture were, thus, directed towards these institutions of modern state for investment. The prosperity of the new elites in Bihar can be invariably traced to this investment pattern. Because Bihar did not see emergence of a native urban industrial bourgeoise in the post independence period, the prosperity of these new rural elites did not find the usual industrial multiplier (the industrial market for their produce). As a result , while these segments were producing surplus, this surplus was largely meant for consumption in the local market, and hence the pre-ponderance of food grain production in the state which has shown little signs of

changing over the entire period. The profit thus generated in the local market, however, found avenues for profitable investment in the services sector, in particular transport and real estate, or even the new milching cow - the state's development /regulatory machinery. Industrial development was thus thwarted in the state by the availability of avenues of accumulation provided by the structure of the state itself in its institutions.

While the distributive values of the state have kept the real issues of domination and hence deprivation of the masses under cover, use of caste categories to its distributive ends have had similar fallouts as during the colonial rule, only that the contending castes were different. And today, institutions of the modern state with their distributive designs have replaced 'land' as the fertile ground on which the supreme proprietor's (the state) surplus, expropriated from unsuspecting toiling mass of labourers and peasantry get channelised to the various stake holders. And this explains the institutional constraint on the real empowerment of the masses. With voting rights and play of numbers on their side, while different sections categorized by caste or class may get a dominant role to play in the polity, but this would not lead to an empowerment in their daily lives too. The construct of the polity itself where decisions which effect many are taken by few, where resources are channelised and allocated not by people themselves but by some value neutral agencies, where the conception of justice is distributive in its perception and where the government of the day in its effort to bring greater justice to play in the society sets out distributing and redistributing what is there to be distributed, the polity and the public in essence gets limited. Democracy by construction is limited, and so is empowerment that emerges out of any participation in its process. The underdevelopment in the state is merely a substantive reflection of the limted empowerment of the masses that has been possible / allowed in the modern democratic state.

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