

# CLASS AND CASTE DYNAMICS OF RURAL VIOLENCE IN BIHAR, INDIA: AN ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** Bihar is the birth place of Buddhism and Jainism; both of them preach non-violence and tolerance. However, in the modern times the cases of violence have increased and intensified. Various dimensions of violence like caste-wars, insurgency, riots etc. have been seen in recent times in the state of Bihar. Religious, secular and political violence have shown a sharp rise. Poverty and backwardness are the by-products of a society struck by violence. Caste dynamics and economic exploitation also contribute to perpetuation of violence and its normalization.

**Index Terms - Violence, Structural functional, Social pattern of exploitation, Naxalite movement, Land reforms.**

India, since her historical advent, has been a land of tolerance and non-violence as witnessed in its freedom struggle. J. & K and Bihar are the worst affected states in this regard. Retaliation seems to be a common agenda of some sections of the society. It is cold as well as calculated. In India, social violence has been erupting occasionally and in a scattered manner, but the last two decades have experienced a new intensity and different dimensions.<sup>1</sup>

Bihar, the land of compassion and non-violence, inspite of being at the bottom of every index of social and economic development in India, is ahead of all the states in number and cruelty of incidents of savage violence.

Generally, 'violence' means to carry force towards someone or something. According to the Oxford Dictionary, violence is injury, outrage or act contrary to one's feelings or principles. In other words, it is an unlawful exercise of the force. The Webster's Dictionary lists it as physical force used to deprivation of rights, injure or damage and unjust use of force or power.

There are widely three approaches to violence, those are- Marxian, Structural-functional and Relative deprivation. According to Marx, society moves ahead because of contradictions inherent in it. The society is divided into two classes, the bourgeois and the proletariat, meaning thereby the exploiters and the exploited respectively.<sup>2</sup>

Structural functional theory states the society as an organism with various sub-structures incompatible with each other. These are norms, values, roles and collectivity (sub-group). So long as these are intact or balanced, society is stable. Further, theory states that society is never stable in condition.<sup>3</sup> There are always one or different kind of strain working upon the social-system. It works either externally or internally leading to change in the prevalent values or structure of society. New concept may arise that replaces old one or old concept may acquire new roles. Sometimes, the system develops a certain kind of mechanism to cope up with the strains. Whenever, system fails to adjust or cope up with its, disturbances violence takes place. Thus, violence is one of indicators of social change.

The third one, Relative Deprivation theory is psychological theory of violence. If deprivation is equated with inequality, the reasons for violence are attributed to the persistence of inequality in the society. Aristotle has said that 'the cause of sedition is always to be found in inequality.' Thus, violence is the culmination of a process of perception by an individual or a group because of frustrated desire to attain a value or maintain a value that they should have or have attained so far.<sup>4</sup>

Violence can be of three types-viz-religious violence, secular violence and political violence. Bihar, the land of Janak, Buddha, Chanakya, Ashoka and Gupta emperors has been a symbol of culture and civilized life. Once it was one of the best administered Indian states, for centuries the history of India was the history of Bihar, these days the state has touched a nadir on almost all counts. It stands at the bottom of the infrastructure development and economic and social progress among the Indian states. During the last two decades the society is on the move and there is a powerful peasant movement in central Bihar. Taking advantage of this situation, Naxalite movement has taken roots in this region. It has been observed that the state is passing through the transitional phase, where modern system is yet to be built up while the traditional system is crumbling. Indeed, land reforms have failed due to their inherent weaknesses and biased implementation. Heavy investment in public sector also did not bring about structural changes in the state's economy. In a densely populated state with a surplus of labour, such as Bihar, the focus on basic and heavy industries development has proven to be strategically inadequate.<sup>5</sup>

A remarkable phenomenon is the land-man ratio in agriculture in the state, which is the lowest in the country. Since the sizeable bulk of the household is able to operate only small plot, therefore around 50% - 60% of the population live below the poverty line. The increasing pressure of population on land growth in the supply of agricultural labour has led to decline in rural wages as well as the availability of employment in terms of number of man days. Various poverty alleviation programmes have failed to make a dent on poverty because of vested interest of the officials and local elite, absence of linkages with other development programmes, co-coupled with ubiquitous and exploitative agrarian structure is paving the way towards defiance against the system itself. The deprived sections are becoming asserting their rights. This situation has led to instances of tension and violence, among the poverty ridden populace of the region.

The social structure of the state is characterized by inequalities of various kinds. Earlier, it was a convergence of class and caste which means those who belonged to higher caste also belonged to the highest economic class. But, in recent times, due to spread of education and political awakening, this situation has changed and the deprived lower class is being influenced by the presence of extremist politics bridging the gap between haves and have-nots.

The power equation of the state has changed now. The upper castes who lorded over the state for many years now find that their power is being challenged. In fact, this power has already been passed on to the lower and middle castes. As both the castes want to capture political and social power which lead to frequent outburst of violence.<sup>6</sup>

The left-oriented parties in Bihar have failed to organize rural poor on a class basis on the issue of land-reforms and minimum wages. Party infighting has also taken the deprived people away from them as they failed to change the social pattern of exploitation. This failure of both CPI and CPM has also paved the way for the emergence of Naxalites. Naxalite movement mostly involved promising and intelligent students and youth of the best academic institutions of Bihar. They tried to liberate the rural oppressed poor from the shackles of the landlord, moneylenders and corrupt official. The most areas of the central and south-Bihar (now in Jharkhand) specially the districts of Jehanabad, Gaya, Rohtas, Bhojpur, Dhanbad, Giridih, Patna, Palamu, Hazaribagh, Aurangabad, Nalanda, Nawadah are in the Naxalite grip. They are running a parallel government and collect revenue in some of these districts. In 1978-88, the Bihar Govt. had started a socio-economic development project in the Magadha division with an estimated cost of Rs. 31.10 Crore to minimize the impact of Naxalism. It was a pioneering effort of integrated development approach. However, the programme failed to make such impact in the condition of rural poor due to corrupt officials and local leader's apathy.<sup>7</sup>

In the of liberalization policy and emphasis on export promotion politics, traditional fishing communities all over the country have been under going enormous difficulties related to sustainability and livelihood question is generating tensions and seeking resolution in the adjoining agricultural areas because of its negative fallouts. There is a growing sense of insecurity over the issue of access to natural resources too. Privatization of water resources is likely to generate the worst type of social tension and conflict. Already in lots of contexts, overuse of ground water resources by the well-off farmers is pushing other in difficulty as a result of depleting water resources. The sharing of river water, as in case of Kaveri water is currently a source of tension in both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu as farmers are confronted with growing water needs for commercial agriculture but they are faced with shrinking availability. Disputes like these can impact Bihar too.

Another reason for the prevailing social tension is that we focus on those people who are failure. This may be justified on humanitarian grounds but perpetuates a vested interest in poverty and the weakness and backwardness. They policy of reservation and the policy adopted for small scale industries have led to a situation where people developed vested interests in inefficiency. In the United States, an enterprise may start in a garage and can become a multibillion dollar industry within a decade. Such a phenomenon can't take place in India, much less in a state like Bihar. The small scale industries always blame the large industries for not honouring their commitments etc. We have focused on distributing the economic cake instead of making the cake larger. We focused on removal of poverty instead of creating prosperity.<sup>8</sup>

The society or Bihar can't flourish if it follows politics without principles, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity and worship without sacrifice. Bold measures and a strong political will are needed to tackle the above evils.

The crux of any improvement, in the present situation is, therefore, the individual citizen's commitment, initiative and action without waiting for strong groups to emerge or new procedures to be evolved. Every citizen must become a one-man sand bag against the tide, a sort of Peter the Brave who will hold on till more help comes.

Unless the agrarian structure is changed in the state, agrarian violence can't be controlled. Involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions and / or Independent organizations in land reform measures can be of great help. It is also suggested that by minimizing the population pressure on land, cottage and village industries based on local raw materials should be developed. It ultimately will eliminate the cases of violence that arise out of despair and land disputes.

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